



**On the Way Home:
Christian Migrants and the Liturgical Self**

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Abstract

This thesis tells the stories of Christian migrants who all go to church in the same suburb in the north of Melbourne. It explores the ways in which their faith journey and migration story are intertwined and seeks to show how the stories they tell echo the themes Christians rehearse when they remember, re-enact, and re-tell key biblical narratives.

Using Pierre Bourdieu's concept of *habitus* and the work of theologian James K. A. Smith, I frame this remembering, re-enacting, and re-telling as 'liturgical practice'. This liturgical practice is not limited to the formal wording of the church service but includes the habits of everyday church life and the faithful practices of Christians in their everyday lives. Smith's articulation of liturgical practice owes much to Bourdieu's conception of *habitus*, and I seek to draw the two concepts into conversation as I reflect on the migration stories my participants told me. The liturgical frame adds two facets to *habitus*; first, it is explicitly tied to a sacred text, and second, it is used to decode what people love and value rather than decoding power relations. I hope that this reading of the lives of migrant Christians contributes to re-shaping the way we talk about and ascribe value to the lived experience and emotional expressions of migrants in Australia.

This thesis shows how the stories Christian migrants tell about their journeys reflect the stories they know from faithful practice: for example, that they learn how to wait through stories of waiting for Jesus' birth and second coming, that they learn about the significance of the body through the story of the incarnation, or that they learn about valuing suffering through the stories of wilderness experiences. Using this native framework to interpret the everyday practices of church life and the life stories of migrants helps identify the differences and draw attention to the continuities between three very different congregations. It shows how Australia is not the final end point or resolution of these journeys, but that waiting, suffering, and joy continue. Every Christian, but perhaps most especially the Christian migrant is always on the way home.



Declaration

I declare that the following document meets all the necessary criteria to be assessed as a PhD Thesis undertaken in the School of Social and Political Sciences at the University of Melbourne.

This is to certify that:

- i) The thesis comprises only my original work towards the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.
- ii) Due acknowledgement has been made in the text to all other material used.
- iii) The thesis is fewer than 100,000 words in length, exclusive of the table of contents and figures, footnotes and references.

Signature:

Natalie Swann

Date: 4/07/2019

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Preface

I wish to acknowledge the traditional custodians of the lands mentioned in this Preface; specifically, I acknowledge the Jardwadjali people who are the traditional custodians of the land where the town of Minyip now stands and the Bediagal people and the Gadigal people of the Eora nation who are the traditional custodians of the land where Mascot and surrounding suburbs now stand. I wish to pay respect to Elders both past and present of the Jardwadjali, Bediagal, Gadigal and all Australian Indigenous peoples. I acknowledge that their spiritual connection to this land is far more ancient and profound than my own.

A couple of years back, my mum told me that when she died she wanted to be buried in a hessian sack on Kirchheim, her body recycled in the service of a tree. Kirchheim is an unremarkable little pimple of a hill in the vast, monotonous flatness of the western Victorian wheatbelt. It used to be wheat and sheep as far as the eye could see, although these days the fragile ancient soils are used to grow crops like canola, chickpeas, French lentils,¹ and fenugreek as well as wheat. The farm this little ‘church hill’ lies on has been in my mum’s family for a few generations. They were quite possibly the first people to own the land after its Indigenous inhabitants were dispossessed. But to be honest, I am not entirely certain. When my mother received the newspaper clippings from the Wimmera Mail Times reporting on the house-fire that destroyed the farmhouse of her childhood, she wept.

Kirchheim is so called for the little Lutheran church that was built on this hill in 1889. It does not stand there anymore; in 1935 it was lifted up in its entirety and pulled by a steam traction engine into the township of Minyip six kilometres away. If you make the four-hour drive from Melbourne to Minyip, you can still visit this little piece of Germany in the Australian outback. I suspect it will outlast the worshippers; the younger ones, like my mum, have long since moved to the city and my grandparents’ generation are almost all gone. But despite being absent since the age of seventeen, and despite having no intention of ever returning to live there in her lifetime, my mother wants to return to Minyip in death. She wants to dissolve into the landscape.

¹ The black ones that would be called Puy if they had actually been grown in France.

My dad, on the other hand, does not care where he rests so much as how we remember him. His was a more mobile childhood through the working-class neighbourhoods around Sydney's airport and the Blue Mountains. He is a bit of a mongrel: mostly Irish Catholic, with a dash of English and Germanic blood, and who knows what else thrown in. My dad will occasionally point out the window on the way to the airport with vague reminiscences of the vacant lots through which he and his brother would roam hunting rats with knives. He feels no need to return there in death. Instead, we can put him wherever we want as long as, when we do, we wear bright clothes and play a good dose of rock 'n' roll to celebrate his life. So, when the two of them asked me a few years ago, what I would do if they died together in a plane crash, I mused that I would throw them a garden party. They laughed.

I do not know what it is that has meant my mother's German Lutheran family feels so strongly bound both to Germany and to the wheat plains of the Wimmera while my father's family live their lives linked only loosely to the places they have inhabited. It is, of course, an intersection of differently prioritised loves.

There is no legend in my father's family as to whether they first came here freely, or in chains, or desperate with hunger. There are stories, loose in specificity, about great-grandparents who would leave out parcels of meat for the Kelly boys² or tend their horses. Like those infamous bandits, they do seem to have always held authority in some contempt. Perhaps that is the root of the uncomfortable relationship they have with the Catholic Church. My dad's family moved around a lot; the last couple of generations have moved from the Riverina to the city and then the Blue Mountains, back to the city and then to the coast. I am disinclined to suggest that this mobility means place is any less significant to them—in the same way that having many children does not make you less inclined to love each of them less than if you had fewer. Collectively, there is no anxiety about whether they 'belong' here, in Australia, and I suspect this is what liberates them to relocate as often as they do; there is a confidence that all these places are equally available to them.

I am also conscious of the fact that the urban (or urban-fringe) environments they have occupied have changed rapidly. When I drive with my father through the

²That is, the lads who bound their fate to Ned Kelly, Australia's most (in)famous bushranger, a much beloved outlaw. Some have argued that his banditry was a response to discrimination against the Irish by the predominantly English governing class.

streets of Mascot on the way to Sydney airport, the buildings springing up on those once-vacant lots trouble him less than the way he can navigate those streets. What occupies the blocks is less permanent than the routes you can navigate through them: when travelling through these neighbourhoods of past occupation, my dad is more frustrated to discover that a road he wishes to travel down has been turned into a one-way street than he is to discover that some building from his childhood has been replaced. To co-opt that anthropological classic, his routes are more important than his roots (Clifford, 1997).

Not so my mother's family. They depended on the land, turned it over in their hands, knelt on it to pray for rain. Australia was a second chance for them but also, in some ways, second best; harsh labour in an unforgiving climate was the price they paid for religious freedom. They had loved the land they came from, leaving Germany under duress. My grandmother, daughter of a Lutheran pastor, was third generation Australian, born in 1918 at the close of World War I, but still her first language was German. My mother, however, born on the other side of World War II, speaks only English. I do not know much about the specifics of the pressures placed on my family—what the balance was between external persecution for their German-ness and an internal desire to prove themselves Australian³—but everything, except for a few recipes, nursery rhymes, and a commitment to Lutheranism was absent from my upbringing. At least once a year, however, we would make the pilgrimage to Minyip. My mum, who chose to raise us in the city, would give us instruction about water conservation, cropping cycles, and yabbing,⁴ we would play in the grain and the hay and go for gentle rides with Grandpa on the back of his motorbike without helmets. And we put on our best clothes and our best manners and went to church in that same little Gothic kirche that once sat on the hill.

Lutherans are not all that common in Australia. People who identify as Lutherans represent less than two per cent of people that identify as Christians, and only 1% of the total population (Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), 2011a). Most of them live in South Australia or Victoria, descended from free migrants who were fleeing religious

³ Or perhaps British. In their later years, my grandparents looked almost identical to Queen Elizabeth and Prince Philip.

⁴ Yabbies are a freshwater crayfish that flourish in the muddy dams of south-eastern Australian farms.

persecution and arrived in the mid- to late 19th century. Many arrived in Portland, Victoria, and adopted a rural existence like they had known in Germany, spreading out in a fan from Adelaide to Melbourne. A few travelled all the way to the centre and established some of the most famous Aboriginal Missions where they did both harm and good.⁵ Not all Lutherans in Australia have German heritage, of course; post-war migration in particular brought many more European Lutherans to Australia and their settlement patterns were different from those early arrivals. Despite the internal diversity, it is a pretty tight knit community; if you meet another Lutheran in Australia you will invariably encounter questions about your mother's maiden name.

But I grew up in Sydney, a city of 3.9 million (ABS, 2011b) with only seven Lutheran churches. Do not get me wrong, there is no shortage of churches in Sydney, it is just they are mostly Roman Catholic, or Anglican,⁶ or Uniting.⁷ Most Australians do not get jokes about Springfield's Presby-Lutherans in *The Simpsons*. So rare were we in Sydney that my classmates would look at me askance when I told them I was Lutheran, wondering, perhaps, if I was in some sort of cult. So, I developed a spiel that compressed the history of the Reformation, world migration patterns, and the etymology of the word Protestant into 30 seconds; "Have you heard of Martin Luther? So, he, like, kickstarted the Reformation in Germany. German Protestants—the Reformation was a *protest* against the Catholic church, right?—are mostly *Luther*-ans. English Protestants are Anglicans, Scottish Protestants are Presbyterians. They believe pretty much the same thing, but when they came to Australia they all set up their own churches." Crude, perhaps, but not too far from the truth.

Irish Catholics, on the other hand, are a dime a dozen in Australia. From Australia's settlement by Europeans in 1788, the Irish arrived as both convicts and free settlers. According to the Australian Department of Immigration, the Irish-born were the second largest immigrant population (after the English) up until World War I (DIMA 2001). After World War I, the Scottish exceeded the Irish in number and in the wake of World War II, migration from outside the UK and Ireland increased dramatically. While

⁵ For example, Carl Freidrich Theodor (Ted) Strehlow was both a Lutheran missionary and an anthropologist of some renown.

⁶ Part of the global Anglican communion that includes the Church of England in the UK and the Episcopal church in the USA.

⁷ A 1970s marriage of Presbyterian and Methodist churches.

European Protestants and the Orthodox tended to establish new congregations, those of the Catholic faith joined already established Catholic churches. This brought with it its own share of tensions but the theological commitment to the universality of Roman Catholic practice was powerful.

My father then, is part of a much larger community, one that might have been able to create a certain collective imagination but not one in which it was possible to be known in quite the same way as my mother's tight-knit Lutheran community. I find it impossible to disentangle the combination of forces that permitted a greater diversity of marriages in my father's family than in my mother's family. I know they lived in more densely populated and cosmopolitan urban environments than did my mum's family. Was this implicated in having looser connections to specific local or faith communities? Was it related to being part of an Irish Catholic multitude? Did this intersect with a looser commitment to church authority? Whatever it was, the end result of these entanglements is that his family is hybrid in comparison to my maternal pedigree: my dad's family's propensity to marry within the fold waned a generation or two before my mum's.

When I was to be married, our Anglican minister listened to my story of the Lutheran migrant farming girl and working-class Catholic butcher's son who met at University and flourished professionally and he called me 'the Australian dream'. I am in so many ways completely typical of what you will often hear called 'Anglo' Australia. I speak English (and only English). I am pale skinned. I had a comfortable upbringing. I am well educated, well fed, and (mostly) well spoken. I have never experienced racism directed at me. But all this acquired whiteness is not *my* dream. When I examine my privilege, my seemingly inevitable slip into the dominant Protestant denomination, I cannot help but also feel a sense of profound loss. Because between my German and Celtic heritage, I have very little connection to England by blood. I am the product of five generations of effective assimilation in which my non-Anglo heritage has slowly been abandoned. I feel like I must keep looking for something; for an explanation for how I got to be here, a fifth generation German-Irish-Australian, who feels more at home reading Austen or Shakespeare than Goethe or Joyce. I fell in love with and married an Anglican. We have baptised our children in the Anglican church. But I resist formalising my own 'conversion' to Anglicanism, holding onto my Lutheran membership in a last-ditch attempt to keep listening to the echoes of distant generations and faraway places.

My mum has recently changed her mind about where she wants to be buried. The balance of her commitments has shifted from the landscape to blood. No longer does she wish to rest alone under a tree on Kirchheim. Rather she has told me she now wishes to be buried alongside her family in the little Minyip cemetery, encircled by fields of wheat. And yet, it is not only the pull of ancient blood that drives her to this decision. Rather, it is her hopeful expectation that *future* generations will make pilgrimage to Minyip to visit their family, long dead though they may be, to see these connections of love and blood mapped out in geometric plots like paddocks viewed from a 747. I can fulfil her wishes about where she will rest but I fear that no such pilgrimages will be made.

1. An Ordinary Sunday

1.1. Introduction

This thesis tells the stories of Christian migrants who all go to church in the same suburb in the north of Melbourne. It explores the ways in which their faith and migration journeys are intertwined and seeks to show how the stories they tell echo the themes Christians rehearse when they remember, re-enact, and re-tell key biblical narratives. Following the theologian James K. A. Smith, I frame this remembering, re-enacting, and re-telling as 'liturgical practice'. This liturgical practice is not limited to the formal wording of the church service but includes the habits of everyday church life and the faithful practices of Christians in their everyday lives. Smith's articulation of liturgical practice owes much to Pierre Bourdieu's conception of *habitus*, and I seek to draw the two concepts into conversation as I reflect on the migration stories my participants told me. The liturgical frame adds to two facets to *habitus*: first, it is explicitly tied to a sacred text, and second, it is used to decode what people love and value rather than decoding power relations. I hope that this reading of the lives of migrant Christians contributes to re-shaping the way we talk about and ascribe value to the lived experience and emotional expressions of migrants in Australia.

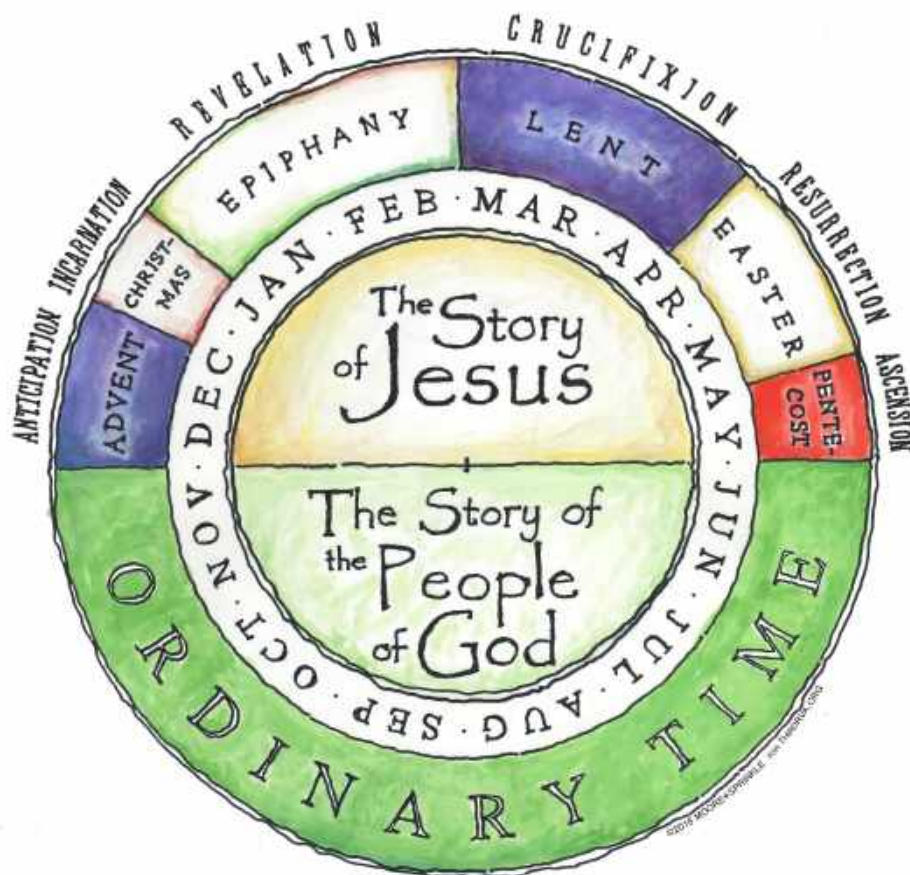
Over the ten years since I started imagining this thesis, an exciting and productive conversation has developed between anthropology and theology. Anthropologists have increasingly started taking religion on its own terms rather than treating it as an epiphenomenon useful for explaining other aspects of sociality, and theologians have been embracing ethnographic methods for the study of church life. Together they have started asking questions about what faith traditions might be able to contribute to the discipline of anthropology, and what a decidedly faithful ethnography might look like. As a social scientist who is also a believing Christian, it is my hope that this project is one of a small but growing body of work experimenting with that challenge.

This project uses the church calendar as an historically meaningful way to focus on narratives that form the basis of a Christian understanding of the life-course and its challenges, and the moral character that needs to be cultivated to live well. According to the American Anglican writer, Rev. Tish Harrison Warren: "In the church calendar we

learn the rhythm of life through narrative” (2016, p. 106). In the older church traditions of Orthodoxy and Catholicism—and in some Protestant churches like Lutheranism and Anglicanism—the calendar year is divided into seasons for remembering particular moments in the biblical story (see Image 1). Interestingly, some Protestant denominations that do not reference the liturgical calendar in their church practice nevertheless adopt an identity that ties them closely to a particular season. For example, the collective ‘Pentecostal’ identity draws heavily on the gifting of the Spirit remembered at Pentecost, and Seventh-day Adventists identify with the sense of waiting for the arrival of Jesus that is intrinsic to the season of Advent. Although they might shun the tradition and ritual of liturgical practice in the older rites, their affinity with the narratives those seasons represent is right there in their denominational name and identity. The chapters in this thesis reflect on these seasons in turn.

Image 1: The Liturgical Calendar

Source: © Andrew Moore and Mark Sprinkle for Third Church (www.thirdrva.org) used with permission.



The remainder of this introduction will describe the relationship between Christianity and anthropology, explore the contrast between ancient and modern migration with respect to Christianity, discuss the history of Christianity and migration in Australia, and introduce the field site.

1.2. Anthropology and Christianity

Anthropology has a history of focussing on the exotic and, for many decades after the establishment of the discipline, this meant exploring religions and cosmologies that were *other than* the Christianity that shaped the West. Understanding and explaining others and their ontologies was the primary task of the anthropologist. While some significant anthropologists have been practising Christians (e.g., E. E. Evans-Pritchard, Mary Douglas; cf. Larsen, 2014) and data collected by missionaries were used by anthropologists in Europe (e.g., Levi-Strauss used data collected by Carl Strehlow, a missionary to the Arrernte in central Australia), the relationship between anthropology and Christianity quickly became antagonistic.

This is evidenced in the turn among some anthropologists towards concern about the missionary activity that went hand-in-hand with colonialism, and studies of people converting to Christianity. In the 1980s and 1990s, anthropology turned towards history and colonialism and studies of religion focussed on its relation to state power and colonial domination (e.g., Hefner, 1993). Exemplary of this scholarship are Jean and John Comaroff (e.g., Comaroff & Comaroff, 1991), whose work argued that:

Western missionaries in the northern Cape 'colonised the consciousness' of Tswana people, which enjoined a cognitive reflexivity, by virtue of which some Tswana began eventually to understand their objective class position and to resist their oppression. The colonised's self was infiltrated, alienated, remade, and then redeployed, a process of paramount importance in creating the political economy of South Africa. (Landau, 2000, p. 503)

Studies such as those by the Comaroffs often sought to show how converting to Christianity often had political and economic drivers and implications.

But recently, the ontological turn has perhaps opened up new ways of talking about and validating religious experience (Willerselv & Suhr, 2018). Holbraad et al. define the “anthropological concept of ontology as the multiplicity of forms of existence enacted in concrete practices” and suggest that ontology “is the comparative, ethnographically-grounded transcendental deduction of Being (the oxymoron is deliberate) as that which differs from itself (ditto)—being-as-other as immanent to being-as-such” (Holbraad, Pederson, & Vivieros Di Castro, 2014, Jan 13). By this, I think they mean that there are different ways of being and living in the world—ways of living and understanding the world that are so different as to be “alternate realities” (Bialecki, 2017a). This means that when anthropologists present their ethnographies, “ethnographic subjects of the ontological turn are not depicted as ‘believing’ in supernatural actors or magical processes; rather, these actors and processes are described as if they are both factual and present for the anthropologist’s informants” (Bialecki, 2017a). As Bialecki notes, not all anthropologists are convinced by the ‘ontological turn’—on the one hand as necessary, or on the other as radically new—but it is indicative of a shift in the mood of the discipline that perhaps believers are to be believed.

This trajectory—from overlapping beginnings, through an antagonistic period of modern secularism in anthropology, and a return to the possibility of enchantment—is the dominant narrative about the history of the discipline within the discipline (e.g., Fountain, 2013). Yet many scholars question whether anthropology was ever really secular. Scholars like Talal Asad point out that theology has always played a key role the development of the discipline. For example, Asad’s blistering and persuasive critique of the way in which Christianity has seeped into the core of anthropology through concepts such as faith, belief and sacrifice (1993) and John Milbank’s (2006 [1990]) critique of the social sciences as an ‘anti-theology’ have both been significant to anthropologists of Christianity (and more broadly). According to Asad:

Thus, what appears to anthropologists today to be self-evident, namely that religion is essentially a matter of symbolic meanings linked to ideas of general order (expressed through either or both rite and doctrine), that it has generic functions/features, and that it must not be confused with

any of its particular historical or cultural forms, is in fact a view that has a specific Christian history. (Asad, 1993, p. 42)

More recently, Willerslev and Suhr (2018) have proposed that anthropology has a deeply paradoxical mode of knowing that may be better characterised as a theology than a social science.

In her 2004 Malinowski lecture, Fenella Cannell contended that, in the anthropology of Christianity, the straw man of Christianity that has often been held up and critiqued by the discipline doesn't really exist:

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

Cannell suggests that when Christianity was theorised in anthropology it "tended to stress its ascetic components above all else and to assume that it would be premised on an antagonism between body and spirit" and that it was "important mainly or only as a harbinger of secular modernity" (2005, p. 340). Cannell's own work with Mormon believers shows the ways in which the body and spirit, the present and the future in the Celestial Kingdom, are bound closely together in Mormon belief and practice. She calls on anthropologists to see Christianities which are different from the stereotypically ascetic Christianity of anthropology "not just as local 'resistance', or as peripheral parts of 'real Christianity', but as alternative Christianities deeply rooted in the highly unstable syntheses which Christian orthodoxies themselves represent" (2005, p. 352).

Two important collections of essays in the anthropology of Christianity were published shortly after Cannell's lecture: Engelke and Tomlinson's *The Limits of Meaning* (2006) and Cannell's *The Anthropology of Christianity* (2006). These volumes illustrated the breadth of work underway, from Asia and the Pacific, to Africa, Europe and the Americas, and including studies of Protestant, Catholic, Orthodox and Pentecostal communities. The editors and authors of the essays contested how to define Christianity, or what made a person or community Christian. McDougall suggests that "Robbins and Keane, as well as Engelke and Tomlinson, are more convinced than Cannell of the importance of meaning, rupture and transcendence in Christianity"

(2009, p. 192–3). Religion, according to Coleman and Collins (2004), is “a comment on, and analysis of culture ... as well as being part of culture” (p. 7); Christian discourse is capable of self-critique, and contemporary Christian faith and action is unlikely to be the same as that which shaped modern assumptions decades or even centuries ago.

Engelke and Tomlinson’s focus on transcendence provides an added dimension to that well-known anthropological definition of religion provided by Clifford Geertz, which he suggests is:

(1) a system of symbols which act to (2) establish powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting moods and motivations in men by (3) formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and (4) clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that (5) the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic. (Geertz, 1973, p. 90)

This definition interestingly contains no reference to the supernatural or transcendent: it could as well apply to Dawkins-esque science as Christianity. This flexibility can be both strength and weakness. Similarly, this definition from Linda Woodhead and Rebecca Catto for the UK Equality and Human Rights Commission, also provides no reference to a supernatural being or beings:

By means of a range of different dimensions (including symbols, rituals, practices and forms of community), religions promise to bring people into relation with a dimension of life which is portrayed and perceived as more real, more powerful and more meaningful than everyday experience, and which provides a template for interpreting that experience and providing orientation within it. (Woodhead and Catto, 2009, p. iii)

Perhaps as a result of the emphasis placed in definitions like these on symbols and rituals, the anthropology of Christianity is characterized by a focus on public performances such as preaching (e.g., Tomlinson, 2006), public worship meetings (e.g., Connell, 2005), and public prayer (e.g., Shoaps, 2002).

While early anthropologists often sought out grand explanatory theories, it did not take long for anthropologists to advocate for historical particularism, which in turn contributed to the rise of cultural relativism and post-modernism. While the Christian

circles I was raised in often seemed fearful of post-modernism as some kind of destabiliser of truth claims, in many ways this shift levelled the playing field in the humanities and has allowed believers to talk about God in a way that had been previously off limits. Anthropology seems to have trailed behind philosophy to some extent, in opening itself up to believing voices, but Nicholas Wolterstorff's description of what happened in philosophy from the 1960s onwards resonates with my experience in anthropology. In an interview with James KA Smith, he says with regards to positivism and ordinary language philosophy:

[They] collapsed ... there was no longer any big program in philosophy; none; and there still isn't. ... The collapse of the big gatekeeper programs meant that there was nobody around anymore who was saying, not with any plausibility, anyway, that it's impossible to make judgments about God, impossible to talk about God, etc. All of those programs collapsed. They did not collapse because of what they said about the impossibility of religious/theological language; they collapsed for other reasons.

What this collapse meant was that religious/theological discourse was now open. People would disagree with it; but they could no longer say, "You're talking nonsense," or "That's not what one would say if one were speaking proper English," or "What you are trying to say is beyond the bounds of the sayable," or anything else of that sort. (Wolterstorff, 2013)

Religion, theology, and matters of faith could no longer be excluded from the realms of legitimate discourse.

Furthermore, two shifts have taken place in recent decades. The first is the acknowledgement from anthropologists studying converted people groups that those people's faith commitments ought not to be explained away as an epiphenomenon and that they need to be able to account for multiple 'Christianities' (e.g., Engelke and Tomlinson, 2006; Bialecki 2014). The second shift is that the anthropological lens has turned back to the developed world (see for example, Cole, 1977) and there are anthropologists studying Christian communities in the US and Europe, such as Simon Coleman (1993) on Swedish Pentecostalism or Susan Harding's (2001) marvellous account of language in fundamentalism in her *The Book of Jerry Falwell*. There is a sense

in which, as anthropologists and academia in general became more and more secular, fundamentalist and Pentecostal Christianities in the West took on a flavour of the exotic—to the extent that Harding called out the discipline in 1991, publishing an article on Christian fundamentalism in which she identified it as anthropology’s ‘repugnant other’. There seems now to be consensus that individual Christian communities are more complicated and that theology is more nuanced than we have previously allowed.

Meanwhile, theologians and pastors are starting to adopt ethnographic methods as a tool for research, a pastoral tool, and as a way to understanding church life and Christian community (e.g., Cameron et al., 2005; Coakley, 2013; Guest et al., 2004; Scharen and Vigen 2011). Christian Scharen and Pete Ward have developed an *Ecclesiology and Ethnography* network and published two academic collections on the topic (Scharen, 2012; Ward, 2012). Christian theologians are seeking to do, in academically rigorous ways, what they have always done as pastors: cultural critique.

That narrative feeds the imagination of a society is rather well accepted in anthropology in particular and the social sciences more generally (e.g., Anderson, 1983; Bhabha, 1990). The last couple of decades have, however, witnessed a “narrative turn” in literary criticism and theology. Daniely Punday suggests that “literary and cultural critics have increasingly turned toward the language of narrative and storytelling to describe the act of assigning meaning to some object or textual feature” (2003, p. 1). In theology, the narrative turn, triggered by Niebuhr (1941), has had wide reaching impacts in the discipline (e.g., Frei, 1974; Hauerwas, 1977; Loughlin, 1999; MacIntyre, 2003[1981])⁸. Czarniawska (2004) suggests that one of the key moments in the ‘narrative turn’ was Alasdair MacIntyre’s *After Virtue* (2003 [1981]), in which MacIntyre suggests that social structure is enacted narrative. But Czarniawska talks about narrative as a way of knowing and as a mode of communication—it remains in the realm of cognition. It is my contention (via Bourdieu and Smith) that we do not only rehearse narrative through telling stories, but through a myriad of habits, that are physical as well as cognitive, bodily as well as of the mind. While this project is not a work of theology or literary criticism, the influence of this turn in bringing theology into conversation with anthropology is of interest.

⁸ More recently, Francesca Aran Murphy (2007) has critiqued this turn as drawing attention away from the person of God and focusing on the stories about Him.

In 2006, one of the most influential scholars in the anthropology of Christianity, Joel Robbins published a brief article drawing attention to the relationship between anthropology and theology (Robbins, 2006). He noted that while the discipline had been studying Christianity for at least a decade, there was, as yet, “little explicit reflection on how we should approach theological thinking” (2006, p. 285). Robbins suggests that the first way anthropology could engage with theology is to examine theology’s role in its own formation. The second way could be to engage with works of theology as “data that can inform us about the particular Christian culture that produced it” (2006, p. 286). He characterises works such as *The Book of Jerry Falwell* (Harding, 2000) as this type of work. The third and final way that Robbins saw the encounter between anthropology and theology as productive was by allowing theological ideas to transform anthropological projects. Robbins was deliberate to point out that anthropology “need not adopt the Christian mythos” (2006, p. 292), but he saw the opportunity theology still holds to call people to live in better ways, to provide hope, as something that anthropology has lost as a discipline and called for his colleagues to “show the world how to find hope for real change without him [God]” (2006, p. 293).

In 2014, a group of theologians led by Eloise Meneses published a provocation in *Current Anthropology* entitled “Engaging the Religiously Committed Other” in which they argue that secularism limits anthropology’s potential and they call out liberalism as hegemonic rather than liberating or inclusive (Meneses et al., 2014). They propose a Christian epistemology which is compatible with the general anthropological pursuit of knowing and responding to the world. And they provide a (theoretical) engagement with violence as an example of how this Christian epistemology can contribute to anthropological discourse. The discussion that follows from ten fellow anthropologists is critical, but generous: Simon Coleman (2014) points out that theology is not the same as the lived practice of Christianity and asks how anthropology ought to deal with that challenge, Brian Howell (2014) acknowledges the value in arguing for morality from particular moral traditions, and Glenn Hinson (2014) asks what a Christian ethnography would look like. The conversation that is now underway with respect to ‘theologically engaged anthropology’ is flourishing (Meneses & Bronkema, 2017;

Lemons, 2018).⁹ It is this encounter, between anthropology and theology, that the parallel projects *On Knowing Humanity* and *Theologically Engaged Anthropology* are carrying forward. And it is in this context that this project finds its place. This thesis does not provide conclusive answers to these questions, but it is an attempt to provide a practical example of one possible way forward.

1.3. Migration: Ancient and Modern

Clifford Geertz characterizes the contemporary global religious landscape by two features that he says are simultaneously “something rather new under the sun and logical extensions of settled trends”:

(1) the progressive disentanglement, for want of a better word, of the major religions (and some of the minor ones Mormonism, Cao Dai, Bahai) from the places, peoples, and social formations, the sites and civilizations, within which and in terms of which they were historically formed: Hinduism and Buddhism from the deep particularities of Southern and Eastern Asia, Christianity from those of Europe and the United States, Islam from those of the New East and North Africa; and (2) the emergence of religious persuasion, inherited or self-ascribed, thinned-out or reinforced, as a broadly negotiable, mobile and fungible, instrument of public identity—a portable persona, a movable subject position. (Geertz, 2005, p. 11)

This reflects a widespread assumption: that Christianity is a white, European (and in the quote above North American) phenomenon. While I understand the vast impact the missionary movement of the modern era has had on the developing world, to nominate Europe and the United States as the “places, peoples, and social formations, the sites and civilizations, within which and in terms of which” Christianity “was historically formed” takes a somewhat limited look at history. It privileges the history of the last 400 years over the 1600 that preceded it.

⁹ See also the associated websites for the On Knowing Humanity Research Center (<https://www.eastern.edu/on-knowing-humanity-research-center>) and The Center for Theologically Engaged Anthropology (<http://research.franklin.uga.edu/tea/content/center-theologically-engaged-anthropology>)

It is, therefore, ironic that Geertz suggests that the displacement of the major religions from “the places, peoples, and social formations, the sites and civilizations, within which and in terms of which they were historically formed” is “something rather new under the sun”. For it was no European writer, but the ancient Israelite author of the Book of Ecclesiastes that he is quoting indirectly:

All things are wearisome; more than one can express; the eye is not satisfied with seeing, or the ear filled with hearing. What has been is what will be, and what has been done is what will be done; there is nothing new under the sun. Is there a thing of which it is said, ‘See, this is new’? It has already been, in the ages before us. (Ecclesiastes 1:8–10, NRSV)

Everything new, the writer says, has been seen before. This displacement of Christianity has happened before. And the same is true of migration.

Migration is not a new phenomenon. People are, and always have been, mobile for many reasons—leisure, curiosity, maintaining friendship, conducting business, fleeing oppression, or deportation. Peggy Levitt lightheartedly suggests that ‘Abraham really was the first migrant’:

the relationship between religion and migration has a long history. Abraham began a journey, guided by his faith, that millions have followed. The intensification of life across borders will only increase the numbers for whom social, political, and religious membership is decoupled from residence. It is time we put religion front and center in our attempts to understand how identity and belonging are redefined in this increasingly global world. (Levitt, 2003, p. 870)

There is, however, an even earlier moment in which migration is described in Scripture: the forced expulsion of Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3). The story of the Fall illustrates that the interplay between faith and movement does not have to be causal, positive or freely chosen. Rather, Adam and Eve were the first forced migrants. Both these stories demonstrate that the experience of migration is not new, but ancient. The migration of the faithful (or perhaps, as in the case of Adam and Eve, the doubtful) has long precedent.

While the phenomenon of human movement is in no way new, the speed and volume of human movement, and the diversity of sites of origin and destination have radically changed over the course of the last century (Castles & Miller, 2003). The speed with which long-distance travel can be achieved and the number of persons that can be transported, together with the development of low-cost telecommunications information and communication technologies has revolutionised the mobility experience. Harvey (1989) described these developments as having the effect of time-space compression—a phenomenon that, while always occurring, has accelerated dramatically since the 1960s.

Castles and Miller (2003) suggest that there are six general trends playing a role in contemporary international migration: the globalization of migration; the acceleration of migration; the differentiation of migration; the feminization of migration; and the growing politicization of migration. But perhaps the most significant trend is the growing impermanence of migratory movement. Traditional definitions of migration as a one-way residential movement across national borders fail to capture the complexity of global circulation in the contemporary world (Ley & Kobayashi, 2005). The close-ended assumptions of narratives of immigration as a completed act, even if they were once valid, are increasingly shown to be inadequate. Some scholars are turning away from theorizing ‘migration’ to thinking through movement (e.g., Rapport and Dawson, 1998) and various forms of mobilities (e.g., Sheller and Urry, 2006).

Migration is typically characterized by a feeling of disconnection, of engagement in “multiple cultural worlds that are dynamically intertwined” (Coleman & Collins, 2006 p. 5). It is in many ways an experience of liminality. Unlike ritual experiences of liminality, however, there is no promise of future reconciliation, no easily identifiable moment at which the migrant returns to a defined role in the social structure. In many ways this is an experience that Christians are already trained to embody. Victor Turner describes Christianity as a perpetual state of liminality:

But traces of the *passage* quality of religious life remain in such formulations as: “The Christian is a stranger in the world, a pilgrim, a traveler, with no place to lay his head.” Transition has here become a permanent condition. Nowhere has this institutionalization of liminality been more clearly marked and defined than in the monastic and

mendicant states in the great world religions. (Turner, 2002 [1969], p. 367)

Or as the recent Anglican Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams, puts it: “the Church is nothing if not an assembly of migrants, answerable finally to the law of another city” (2005, p. 41).

The migrant community is not the traditional site of anthropological study, but it has become an increasingly significant focus for attention in recent years (e.g., Baldassar, 2001; Glick Schiller et al., 1992; Ong, 1999); “The ethnographer is no longer a (worldly) traveler visiting (local) natives ... instead, his ‘ancient and settled’ fieldsite opens onto complex histories of dwelling and traveling, cosmopolitan experiences” (Clifford, 1997, p. 2). In many of these studies, the focus is on transnational (or translocal e.g., Portes et al., 1999) migrant communities, especially those of migrants from less-developed countries settling or circulating within more developed countries. Often adopting multi-sited techniques, such studies explore the material, social, and even imagined linkages of people originating in a particular national community (e.g., Marcus, 1995).

Two key forms of religiously motivated movement captivate the anthropological imagination, that of pilgrimage (e.g., Coleman & Eade, 2004; Coleman & Elsner, 2003; Turner & Turner, 1978) and that of mission (e.g., Dow, 2005; Keane, 2007). While these two forms of movement are seen as inherently ‘spiritual’, residential migration is usually explained in the literature as being driven by economic or social factors and faith treated as an epiphenomenon (Levitt, 2003). European settlement in Australia was not primarily missionary, but Christians came with the colonial troops and convicts to minister to them and, before long, Christians were engaging in mission to Aboriginal Australians.

Christian mission and anthropology are deeply entwined, especially here in Australia. Many early anthropologists were missionaries. In Australia, missionaries to Indigenous communities were among the first to record languages, and to seek to understand Aboriginal kinship and culture on their own terms (e.g., Carl Strehlow and his son Ted, cf. Jones, 1990; Kenny, 2013; Veit, 1990). Anthropology and Christian mission share an uncomfortable implication in colonialism. They participated in or facilitated a great deal of harm to Indigenous Australians. By and large, both share a

contemporary commitment to changing ways in order to give greater honour to the people they work with.

The biblical references to land and the movement of people were part of the early imaginary of settlers to Australia. Lake (2018), in a critically well-received cultural history of the Bible in Australia, discusses the way many imagined parts of Australia as a 'new Eden' or promised land, like Canaan (cf. p. 84–85). Scripture provided a range of models for thinking about their place in Australia:

The Bible helped colonists make sense of the unfamiliar world they encountered. Was this a cursed ground to be struggled against? A promised land to be enjoyed? A wasteland of trial and testing? A wilderness to be cultivated and ultimately transformed? ... The Bible nourished notions of place and providence that went to the heart of the emotional and psychological history of white settlement in Australia.
(Lake, 2018, p. 86)

This confluence of Christian imagery with whiteness is a familiar one. Do Christian migrants from other parts of the world use Scripture in similar ways? And think about Australia, and their place in it, in similar ways? Part of the work of this project is to make visible church traditions and sacred narratives that shape the lives of migrant Christians because Australia, though steeped in Christian heritage, is remarkably secular and increasingly unfamiliar with the stories of the Bible and the practices of church life. Lake describes it this way:

During the great age of the Bible, churches and schools placed the Bible before most ordinary Australians, helping to make it widely familiar and lending weight to certain interpretations. In the early twenty-first century, these institutions are still relatively prominent in making the Bible known, but their reach is much smaller, their activity more contested, with consequences for the place of the Bible in Australian culture. (Lake, 2018, p. 347)

Hudson has also recently published an exploration of the impact of Christian religious thought on Australia since European settlement (Hudson, 2016). These two recently published histories recount the once-strong, now-declining place of Christian

thought and narrative in the Australian social imaginary, and they are persuasive. More research, however, is required to elaborate on the complexity of the present. As Stevenson et al. point out, “rather than being sites typified by the retreat from religious belief, cities are in fact where the spatial multiplicities of desecularisations are pronounced” (2010, p. 324). The post-secular city, like Melbourne and Sydney, is one in which secularization and de-secularisation are constantly intertwined and in flux. While the affluent, Australian-born population may be losing its religion, immigration is implicated in the continued ‘enchantment’ of Australian cities. That large-scale religious infrastructure is a suburban phenomenon is a world-wide experience (e.g., Dwyer et al., 2012), and this is replicated in Australia (e.g., Connell, 2005, on Australia’s own Hillsong). This study of everyday religion in a suburb of Melbourne with a rich migration history is therefore timely.

1.4. Christianity and Migration in Australia

Let’s start with the stats: on an ordinary Sunday about 1.8 million Australians (approximately 14% of the total population) will go to a Christian church (McCrindle, 2013). A slim majority of Australian residents (52%) claimed a Christian religious affiliation in the 2016 Census (ABS, 2016a) and there is a portion of the population that would claim Australia is a ‘Christian country’. It is undoubtedly the case that Christianity has played a large role in shaping this country, but Australia is a far more secular environment than the UK or the USA, with greater distrust of organised religion. Since the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) started offering ‘no religion’ as an option on the Australian Census in 1971, there has been a rapid rise in the number of people choosing this as their preferred descriptor. Thirty per cent of Australians chose ‘no religion’ on the 2016 Census (ABS, 2016a). While the Australian religious landscape has traditionally been dominated by the Roman Catholic and Anglican traditions, denominational affiliation is increasingly fragmented.

It does seem necessary to have a working definition of what a Christian is, if only to justify the scope of recruitment. The Australian Bureau of Statistics generally works on the assumption that a Christian is anyone who claims that label for themselves. I think Ruell pretty accurately captures the orthodox Christian position that Christian belief is in “a complex person-event” (2002 [1982], p. 103). That is, Christians believe in

the threefold person of God (Father, Son, Spirit) and what God has done in history. Being a Christian could therefore be described as a social relationship of trust with God rather than as a system of shared ritual, rules, or kinship. A Christian in this study will be anyone who calls Jesus “Lord” (cf. Romans 10:9).

Many years ago, my friend, Qian, and I were driving through Sydney’s inner west. She had come to Australia from mainland China to do post-graduate study at Sydney University. She knew I was a Christian and often asked me questions about Christianity. As we wiggled our way through the back streets of Newtown and Summer Hill, her question was, “Why are there so many different churches in Australia?” “Well”, I said, “I suppose it’s a reflection of Australia’s migration history” and launched into a potted history of how Christianity was brought to Australia with the arrival of European settlers and how successive waves of migrants established denominations from their country of origin; for example, the English brought Anglicanism, the Scots brought Presbyterianism, German and other continental Europeans brought Lutheranism, there are Greek Orthodox communities and Indian Mar Thoma churches. Of course, the ethnic boundaries between the long-established denominations are becoming increasingly blurry, but the fact that Australia’s religious landscape is a product of its migration history is well accepted:

All non-Aboriginal religious groups have found their way to Australia by migration either by being carried by migrating peoples or by 'migrating' as systems of belief and practice transmitted by means of teachers, publications or missionaries. The shape of Australia's religious profile is primarily a function of its migration history and only secondarily a function of conversion or changing religious identification. (Bouma, 1997, p. 1)

Australia’s religious landscape also gives us a glimpse of global missionary activity, with more recent waves of migration leading to the establishment of Chinese Methodist congregations or Sudanese Anglican churches. That is, communities that were proselytised in their countries of origin are now establishing churches in Australia, often within existing denominational structures, but with an ethnic focus. This ethno-religious pattern is the picture of Christianity most commonly represented in sociological examinations of churches in Australia (e.g., Ata, 1988; Ata, 1989; Ata, 1990;

Black, 1991; Bouma, 1997; Carey, 1996) or what Carey calls “cultural history” (1996, p. xiv). They deal in broad brush strokes with the collective experience of migrant groups, the establishment and growth of institutions, transformations of “religious culture” in Australia at large (Carey, 1996, p. xiv), and many lean heavily on discussion of statistics. These are useful studies, but they have created a monolithic discourse that binds ethnic identity with ethnic religious practice. The exception to this trend is the volume *Faith in a Hyphen* (Pearson & Havea, 2004), which seeks to focus more on “identity, faith and social formation” (p. 6) and explicitly focusses on hybridity. Ethnographies of migrant communities in Melbourne also tend to focus on particular ethnicities, e.g., Cohen (2008) on Israeli mediascapes, McMichael and Manderson (2004) on well-being among Somali women, and Mar (2005) on the significance of hope as an emotional structure shaping the migration experience of migrants from Hong Kong.

Social science more broadly often conceives research by focussing on singular ethnic communities and my fear is that, while not deliberate, this perpetuates the notion that ethnic identity is the primary organising identity for most people. There is a significant literature on migrant churches in this vein from Europe and North America (e.g. Bargár 2016; Buttici, 2016; Dolan and Hinojosa, 1994; Dwyer et al., 2016; Ebaugh and Chafez, 2000; Ebaugh and Chafez, 2002; Hagan, 2008; Levitt, 2003; Smith-Hefner, 1994). Many churches, however, have multicultural congregations and this multicultural church life is less commonly researched in Australia and abroad. The possibility that ethnic identity transcends religious identity (or vice versa) goes largely unnoticed. Ethnographic explorations of the impact of faith on the migration experience are few in comparison (for an exception, see Hagan, 2008). This project is motivated by curiosity about how people from different backgrounds come to share the space of church life together across or despite ethnic difference. Instead of taking country of origin as its key point of reference, it is focussed on three churches within a single Australian suburb and the migrants who worship in those churches. In this sense, it is an *Australian* ethnography rather than an ethnic study; it is about people who live and worship alongside each other in a typical Australian urban setting.

When I started imagining this thesis, I was working with church organisations in a research capacity. Most of them desired to connect migrants with their churches, but many of them thought about this process as one of outreach to non-Christians and therefore an evangelistic task. There seemed to be limited concern for connecting with

and supporting Christian migrants who came to Australia from overseas. Perhaps this was born of the assumption that they would want to 'do their own thing' or would be supported by their own. But I suspect there was also an element of ignorance about how many migrants who come to Australia consider themselves to be Christians already. While it won't surprise many readers to discover that 81% of migrants to Australia from Southern and Eastern Europe self-identified as Christian in the 2016 Census, given media representations of migrants and their otherness, it may be more surprising to discover that so did 42% of migrants from the Middle East and North Africa, and 49% of migrants from South East Asia (ABS, 2016b). Migrants from these latter regions are exoticised by the Australian media and their other religions are one of the features of their difference. So many of them are Christians, though. And yet I doubt that they seamlessly find a home here because they share the faith of the majority. This project is an attempt to listen to some of the voices of these migrants, and to discover how they make sense of their journey to Australia, and their journey with God.

While I originally imagined this thesis would focus on migration, this focus has blurred. The project deals with the stories of migrants, but I was always unsure exactly which aspects of the migrant experience would be of most import and the project was always open to shifting. Daniel Miller suggests this is core to the anthropological practice of fieldwork and the encounters you have there. He says:

The anthropology I am committed to eschews such hypothesis testing...my only real hypothesis is that I really have very little idea of what I am actually going to find when I go out to conduct fieldwork ... I assume that the most important findings are going to be about things one didn't even suspect existed before going to live there. (Miller 2010 p7)

As such, this project retains a focus on migrants and their experience, but its primary contribution is to understandings of everyday Christianity rather than current debates in migration literature or the global literature on migrant churches.

1.5. The Field Site and Methods

Preston, a suburb in the middle ring of Melbourne, is typical of this ethnic and religious diversity. Preston is located on Wurundjeri land¹⁰. The land was taken in the name of the Crown when Australia was settled by the British and the first alienation of Crown land was in land sales in 1838 and 1839 (Forster, 1968). According to Forster, the first European settlers in Preston were predominantly Methodists and Particular Baptists. In the 1800s and early 1900s, Preston was home to dairy farms, chicken farms and market gardens that serviced the city of Melbourne (Jones, 1994). Dating from the 1860s, it was also home to diverse industries including tanning, brickmaking and ham and bacon curing (Jones, 1994). Preston remained “to some extent a backwater” (Forster, 1968, p. xiv) until the 1920s, when it achieved city status. In the two decades following World War II, Preston doubled in population, contributed to by post-war European migration. One of the signs of population change was the transfer in 1967 of the Yann St Methodist congregation to the Greek Orthodox church (Forster, 1968). In more recent years, Preston has welcomed waves of migrants from Turkey and the Middle East, and South Asia and East Asia.

Preston has a population of 32,848 people and about 34% of those persons were born overseas (ABS, 2016c). About 42% of the overseas born population—or 4,770 persons—in Preston identify themselves as Christian on the 2016 Census. This is a slightly lower proportion than in Australia overall, where 47% of the overseas born population claims Christian affiliation (ABS, 2016a). Most of the overseas born Christians in Preston selected ‘Catholic’ (n=2508) or ‘Eastern Orthodox’ (n=1361) as their affiliation (ABS, 2016c). At the time this project was begun, there were twenty-two Christian churches in Preston identifiable through public record (i.e., not including house churches or groups that meet unofficially and without advertisement). They represented seventeen different denominations.

A previous anthropological study concerns the identity of Greek and Macedonian migrants to the suburb (Danforth, 1995). Danforth is concerned with tracking “the global cultural war between Greeks and Macedonians as it plays itself out in Athens and Skopje, in New York and Brussels, in Toronto and Melbourne, as well as in villages in

¹⁰ For more background see <https://www.wurundjeri.com.au/>

northern Greece” (1995, p. 7). The chapters dealing with Greek and Macedonian emigrants to Australia are focused specifically on the lives of two brothers—one who claims a Greek identity, the other Macedonian. Danforth states the problem experienced by these migrants as one of being ‘doubly displaced’:

When they lived near the border between Greece and Yugoslavia, their national identity was ambiguous, their political loyalties suspect. They were never fully accepted as Greeks or as Macedonians. As immigrants to Australia, as members of diaspora communities, they have been doubly displaced; they have been marginalized even further from the national communities to which many of them would like to belong. (Danforth, 1995, p. 8)

Acclaimed local author, Christos Tsiolkas, writes in general terms about ‘The North’ (an area which includes Preston) in his 1995 novel *Loaded*. In the voice of the protagonist, Ari, a young second generation migrant, he says:

The North isn’t Melbourne, it isn’t Australia. It is a little village in the mountains of the Mediterranean transported to the bottom of the southern hemisphere; markets of little old ladies in black screeching a Babel of languages. Harridans, fishwives, scum. The North is a growing, pulsating sore on the map of my city, the part of the city in which I and my family, my friends are meant to buy a house, grow a garden, shop, watch TV and be buried in. The North is where the wog is supposed to end up. And therefore I hate the North, I view it with as much contempt as possible.

I resist the North, the spaces in which Greeks, Italians, Vietnamese, and the rest of the one hundred and ninety other races of scum, refos and thieves hold on to old ways, old cultures, old rituals which no longer can or should mean anything. (Tsiolkas, 1995, p. 82)

It is interesting to me that while Tsiolkas is painting a picture of how ‘other’ the North is to the rest of Australia, this picture of multicultural community is increasingly the norm in urban Australia. Things are changing in the North. Preston is relatively close and

well-connected to the city, and as the older generation of migrants sells its homes, more and more young professionals and families are buying into the area. To give a sense of this change, the electoral district of Cooper (previously known as Batman¹¹) which includes Preston, was recently a topic of heated media interest as it went to the polls in a by-election (e.g. Raue 2018) because it was a serious contest between Labor and the Greens for a federal lower house seat. Labor won by a small margin, but the strong showing for the Greens is indicative of the growing population of 'hipsters' (Potter 2018; Willingham 2018). Among the Australian born population in Preston, 45% claim a Christian affiliation on the 2016 Census (ABS, 2016c). This is compared to 58% of the Australian born population countrywide (ABS, 2016a). These younger, left-leaning, Australian-born residents of Preston are increasingly claiming no religious affiliation.

This project explores the interactions between faith and the migration experience not by heading to the margins of either Christian practice or migration experience but by examining the centre—'normal' churches in a 'normal' part of an Australian city. Furthermore, while the current literature on both migration and Christianity tends to focus on public worship and articulations of doctrine by church leaders, this project seeks to explore the everyday theologies of lay believers and the impact these beliefs have on regular life and personal devotional practice; ordinary people in ordinary places doing ordinary things.

I participated in worship at three different churches in Preston, attending each one for between six and eight months. While there, I participated and observed, with the view to analyzing these experiences and observations as part of this ethnography. These three congregations included;

1. A Catholic church, which worships in English but has a multicultural congregation;
2. A Seventh-day Adventist church, which worships in English but has a multicultural congregation; and
3. An Arabic Baptist Church, which worships in Arabic and is home to mostly Iraqi and Egyptian Protestants (who may or may not consider themselves Baptist, but who definitely identify as Arab).

¹¹ Named for the controversial founder of Melbourne, John Batman, not the Dark Knight.

In order to recruit churches, I first created a list of twenty-two churches in the suburb from public records (e.g. web searches, denominational information, phone book, and street directory). I then sent a letter of invitation and explanation to each of these churches, addressed to church leaders by name where this was publicly available. Each letter was followed up by telephone and the first three churches to welcome me into their church life are the three that are represented in this study. I chose three congregations because that represented the upper limit of scope for adequate participant observation, while also allowing for a diversity of comparisons and contrasts between faith traditions. Within each congregation, I approached individuals in person, inviting them to participate in interviews, auto-photography and focus groups. At both the congregational level and the individual level I provided information about the project and task, and sought signed consent. In the Arabic Baptist church, project information and consent forms were translated into Arabic to ensure participants were as well informed as possible.

For this project, I have participated in as many different aspects of church life as possible, including Sunday worship, community lunches, bible study groups, and events. In addition to these organised activities, I have sought to meet with people outside formal church programs. A generous group of people made appointments with me to interview them about their migration stories, often in their homes. While participant observation may be the bedrock of ethnographic techniques, more deliberate data-elicitation methods were employed to gather data that complemented participant observation. I used interviews and auto-photography as tools to access more intimate spaces and stories, and trialed the use of a focus group methodology that leveraged Christian practices of Bible study to facilitate discussion.

Ethnography refers to a field method (the process of immersive participant observation), to the practice of analysis (writing about that field experience) and to the research output (usually, a monograph) (Fetterman, 2010). Ethnography is not an objective or experimental science. It cannot be reproduced. Rather, ethnographic fieldwork involves interactive, firsthand experience with people in a social setting (Murchison, 2010) The purpose of ethnography, according to Clifford (1986, p. 2) is to “make the familiar strange, the exotic quotidian”. That is, I think, it draws our attention to what is surprising in the everyday and what is recognisable in that which appears at first to be incomprehensible.

Interviewing can range from informal conversations through to highly structured formal sequences of questioning (Murchison, 2010). In all cases, however, the interviewer's main role is to listen and secondarily to guide the conversation. Murchison (2010) suggests three key attributes of the good interviewer: being prepared to learn from your collaborator(s); being willing to cede some control to your collaborator(s); and being ready to adapt to changing circumstances. These attributes relate to both formal and informal interviewing. I used semi-structured interviews, employing a carefully constructed question schedule, but allowing flexibility in the manner and order in which the questions can be asked (Dunn, 2000). Within the semi-structured interview, I probed responses or explored unexpected ideas or experiences brought up by the respondent. Like structured interviews, the researcher is involved in directing the conversation in a semi-structured interview.

Much ethnographic practice includes conversations that can be classed as informal and unstructured interviews. This is a well-accepted part of ethnographic practice and a key part of creating rapport. Collaborators, however, are not always alert to the fact that intimate kitchen table discussions will be part of what later gets reported in an ethnographic text. I believe finding an appropriate balance between becoming 'native' and reminding collaborators that I was there to study was critical and the use of deliberate interviews was an appropriate complement to participant observation. By deliberate, I mean an interview which the participant recognises as such, for which formal consent is sought and which is recorded to allow for detailed analysis, and therefore creates accountability in reproducing the speech of collaborators.

Most interviews conducted were recorded and transcribed. The transcriptions are the disjointed language of speech and are not easy to read, furthermore, they wander through time and repeat and embellish details of each person's experience at different points. The transcriptions have therefore been written up as stories for use in this project. The story preserves the sense of the interview, and as far as possible the voice of the interviewee. Although, following Luhrmann (2012), the quotes are edited in minor ways for clarity. Each direct quote from an interview is listed with a cross references to the line numbers in the interview transcript. This is designed to allow participants (and other researchers on request) to ensure that I have represented their story and their words accurately. Two stories presented here (Story 9: Jessy and Story

14: Scarlet) were not transcribed and no line references are provided; the first, because the recording device failed and the second because the background noise in the café we conducted the interview was too much for an accurate word-for-word transcription. As far as possible, I have attempted to ensure interviewees have seen a copy of their transcript, story, and any mention of them in this document and allow them scope to respond with edits and comments. Participants were given the option to be represented by their real name or a pseudonym.

Autophotography is a method in which research collaborators are provided with cameras and invited to take photographs that are meaningful to them in some way. It has been identified as being of use in cross-cultural contexts (Brück & Kainzbauer, 2009), in examining identity in general (Noland, 2006) and religious identity in particular (Dollinger, 2001). Autophotography provides a useful tool to gather information about intimate spaces that may not be accessible to the researcher (Wallace, 2010). For this project, collaborators were presented with the request:

- Please take photos of things that make you feel at home; or
- Please take photos of things that have spiritual significance for you.

Following Brück and Kainzbauer (2009), I sought my collaborators own interpretations of their photographs. After the participant had taken photos, I interviewed the participant about what those photographs meant to them. Interestingly, because cameras and digital photography are wide spread, some of my collaborators provided me with photographs they had taken previously—not over the course of a week as I had suggested. As it was an experimental method, and since I am primarily concerned with what my collaborators think is important and what they want to show me, we simply discussed whatever photos they provided. Only three participants—all of them women and all from the Adventist congregation—were successfully recruited to the autophotography task. I use some of their images and interview data in this project, but I do not attempt to make any particular claims about the autophotography method.

Because of the Christian context for the project I proposed to run a short series of groups in each congregation that combined aspects of both Bible study and focus groups in order to provide a space for collaborators to reflect on their migration experience with reference to a key Christian text—Scripture. The purpose and conduct of Bible study groups (or fellowship groups, small groups, growth groups, etc.) differ widely between churches. One way of characterising the purpose of Bible study is

studying the Bible in order to grow as Christians, in which “observation, interpretation and application are fundamental” (Morris & Morris, 2004, p. 48). In many ways, they are similar to the research methodology of focus groups. Focus groups are “a research technique that collects data through group interaction on a topic determined by the researcher” (Morgan, 1995, p. 130) in which “interaction between members of the group is a key characteristic” (Cameron, 2000, p. 84). I took some aspects of Bible study and use them in a group context that mimicked a focus group. Like a Bible study it involved reading and reflecting on Scripture. Like a focus group, it was be focused on learning from participants rather than teaching particular lessons. I was only successful in recruiting participants from the Adventist church to one of these groups and then, only managed to run a single study. This was disappointing, as the conversation that was elicited was fruitful and is used in some parts of this project. I feel there is great scope for this method to be refined in future studies.

I began the project with a project blog, through which participants could discover more about the project and me, the researcher (<http://nswann.wordpress.com>). I was persuaded that Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) are part of an emerging, popular (as in ‘of the people’), collaborative and creative ethic that I was keen to employ in my project. The blog was an attempt to be honest about who I am, what my project is about, what my questions are. It remains open to anyone with internet access. It was an experiment with ‘open source’ research—to expose my reading and thinking, to link to books, articles and resources, and to allow people to comment on, challenge and refine the project. It was an attempt to harness the internet as a form of output and using the Internet to share data. Instead of using old methods on new communities, it was experimenting with using a new methodology in a more traditionally organised project. The blog was viewed often in the early days of the project, but created no dialogue with the communities I worked with. It seemed to perform more as a bulletin board than a discussion forum. As a result, when I welcomed first one, and then another, child into the world and our family during the course of the PhD, the imperative to maintain the blog dropped away in the face of other pressures (namely, the fierce competition for my timely attention from two small humans). I hope that the blog may yet be useful in disseminating research findings and publications.

Table 1 enumerates the data collected. The more experimental research methods of autophotography and the focus group Bible Study produced interesting stories and

facilitated alternative ways of storytelling, but were difficult to recruit people into. As a result, they are simply used in this project to build the overall picture of the communities and individuals I worked with.

Table 1: Data Collection

DENOMINATION	CATHOLIC		SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST		ARABIC BAPTIST	
PARTICIPANT OBSERVATION DURATION	6 MONTHS		8 MONTHS		6 MONTHS	
N	Events	Persons	Events	Persons	Events	Persons
IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS	8	10	12	13	7	7
AUTOPHOTOGRAPHY	0	0	2	2	0	0
FOCUS GROUP	0	0	1	12	0	0

1.6. Outline of Chapters

Chapter 2 will further develop the liturgical framework and provide the necessary theoretical discussion to draw together the work of Bourdieu on *habitus* with theologians such as Smith and Banner on liturgical formation. Each of the subsequent chapters will focus on a major church season. Chapter 3 discusses the season of Advent with a focus on the Adventist congregation and reflections on how church life and the oral histories of participants echo Scriptural narratives of waiting. Chapter 4 reflects on the story of Christmas—the incarnation—and discusses themes of embodiment with respect to the Catholic congregation. While this project focuses on the lives of the laity rather than clergy, I provide an Interlude which tells the stories of two trainee priests and reflects on how they came to faith in Jesus and know their call to the priesthood. Chapter 5 introduces the Arabic Baptist church and reflects on the season of Lent, which re-tells the narrative of wandering and sacrifice in the wilderness. Chapter 6 draws together stories from three women from each of the three congregations to talk about the way in which Christians learn to hold together joy and grief through rehearsing narratives such as Easter. Likewise, Chapter 7 draws together stories and vignettes from each of the three congregations to reflect on the way in which the season of

Pentecost trains Christians to be cosmopolitan in different ways. It is my contention in Chapter 7 that ‘cosmopolitanism’ is a way of talking about the liturgical disposition inculcated by remembering the season of Pentecost. Finally, Chapter 8 summarises this thesis and provides suggestions for future research.

1.7. Conclusion

Home, at its most abstract, is the place where you live. It is the place where you keep your most treasured belongings. It is the centre of the order of your relationships. It is where you have rest and safety. It is a site of meaning and belonging. It is the place both where you can be found and where you can go to hide. Home is the stationery centre of identity (Kinnvall 2004). But home need not be a house. Home as the place of life—in the sense described above—echoes Rapport and Dawson’s (1998) definition of home as “the place where one best knows oneself” (p. 9). And it could easily be applied to a Christian understanding of heaven or the ‘new creation’. For example, in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus urges his listeners:

Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. (Matthew 6:19-21, NRSV; c.f. Wright 2007 pp160-164)

The title “on the way home” reflects my own understanding of Scripture and what it means to be a Christian in the world. That is, I believe my true home is heavenly—it awaits me in the new creation—the apostle Paul tells Christians their “citizenship is in heaven” (Phillipians 3:20). The idea then, is that this life is a journey that Christians make “on the way home”. The theological injunction to live in the world, but not be of the world (e.g. Fitz-Gibbon 2000) suggests a transience and uprootedness that is similar to that presented in academic studies and fiction to do with migration. The title also has a hint of the substance of the journey. The very early church was known to refer to the Christian faith as ‘The Way’ (e.g. Acts 9:2, Acts 19:9, Acts 22:4, Acts 24:14; c.f. Peterson 2009 p302). This notion of ‘The Way’ reflects not just that life is

a journey, but also how that journey is to be lived and enacted. It is the mode of journeying. And that is the substance of liturgy—it is the training ground for learning The Way. And so this project is about how Christians journey from one place to another as they look forward to the full realization of their home in the new creation.

This introduction has provided background on Christianity and migration in Australia in general, and in Preston in particular. It has shown how significant migration is to the religious landscape of Australia, and argues that our understanding of multicultural church life is not well researched or understood. This section has positioned my project in the anthropological literature on Christianity, and begun to review the contemporary conversation between anthropology and theology. Chapter 2 will continue this conversation and propose an analytical method for drawing anthropology and theology together by using liturgy as a frame for understanding the stories Christians tell to each other and about themselves

2. Everyday Liturgies

2.1. Introduction

This chapter provides the framework for a methodology that weaves together secular and Christian theories of how the habits of life and self are formed. Contemporary theologians have been returning to liturgy both in practice and in their teaching on Christian formation. This project brings Pierre Bourdieu on *habitus* into conversation with the theologians James KA Smith and Michael Banner on liturgy. After describing the theoretical framework of a liturgical approach, this chapter then provides an example of using the liturgical lens to introduce each of the three congregations involved in this study.

While theological in origins, this liturgical lens is a useful framework for studying church practice and the everyday practices of Christians. While Bourdieu's analysis of the human is fundamentally that we are formed by and for power (that is, we seek to accumulate capital which provides us with power), for Smith, it is desire that is foundational—what we love. I will not attempt to settle this fundamental disagreement, but seek to identify ways in which both love and power are evident and even how the interplay between love and power can create contradictions and tensions. What I hope a liturgical approach will allow is a focus on key narratives in the Christian Scripture, which are enacted in church practice (ecclesiology), and then re-enacted in more everyday ways in the lives of my research participants. The way these narratives are embodied differs in different traditions and the lessons drawn from them have different emphases. I hope to show, however, that those Scriptural narratives that are embodied in the Christian liturgical tradition can be productively leveraged to provide insights into the lives of my participants and the way they interpret their own migration stories.

In interacting with this theological anthropology of Christian formation, I am perhaps implicating myself as one of the 'Emerging' Christians piercingly described by Bialecki and Bielo (Forthcoming). 'Emerging' Christianity is identified by Bialecki and Bielo as both an aesthetic and a theological turn to ancient forms of Christianity. While they acknowledge that Christianity "should not be reduced to hosting a singular relationship with time", Bialecki and Bielo suggest that Emerging Christianity's

tendency to “locate the centre of temporal gravity in the past” “upsets[s] the standard Christian entelechy” (of a future-focused eschatological *telos*).

It is true that in some Christian circles the “liturgical turn” is fashionable (cf. Gross, 2009; Harrison Warren, 2016; Webber, 2004). Bialecki and Bielo are right to look at the way the culture of ‘ancient-future’ church practices are a reaction to modernist mega-church Christian culture and practice. In Australia (and perhaps the UK), the adoption of modernist, megachurch practices has been less pronounced than in the USA and the ‘rediscovery’ of liturgical practice has been less a case of unearthing what had been forgotten so much as rediscovering value in that which had become tedious. Still, there is a ‘liturgical turn’ in Australian churches that is in conversation with American and UK theology and practice.

When I have tentatively tested a liturgical framework in academic settings I am usually greeted with curiosity, but then asked “Yes, but do your participants articulate it this way?” The answer is most often no, or not explicitly. But this should be unsurprising in the context of these theories regarding the habitual formation of the self. That is, Bourdieu’s problem with phenomenological knowledge, which focuses on experiential truth, is that it cannot go beyond description to analyse “the objective structures and internalised structures which provides the illusion of immediate understanding ... it excludes any inquiry as to its own social conditions of possibility” (1990, p. 26). So, scholars choose a framework through which to analyse behaviour and identity forming narratives. Bialecki and Bielo choose to analyse Emergent Christianity through the lens of Deleuze’s cinematic time-crystal because they see their subjects “thinking through this brokenness [of time] through the argot of their first media language”. This proves to be a useful theoretical intervention. But I doubt that their participants would articulate their turn to ancient ritual with reference to Deleuze. Juliet du Boulay describes the liturgy as an ‘intellectual architecture’ that is not explicitly expressed ‘but present as an undefined set of assumptions which has brought into being a time world which is accepted without reflection’ (2009, p. 132–133). While my participants are not embedded in the same seasonal and calendrical cycles as du Boulay’s Greek Orthodox villagers, they do practice remembrance in similarly habitual ways. My contention is that analysing the way Christian narrative and embodied habit play a role in the lives of Christians is actually often overlooked and that it can provide another useful lens for analysis.

2.2. Habits of Time and Space: A Theoretical Framework

To every thing there is a season and a time to every purpose under heaven. (Ecclesiastes 3:1, NRSV)

If you were a child of the '70s (or raised by children of '70s), you may spontaneously respond to this quote by singing "Turn, turn, turn".¹² As compelling as The Byrds may have been, it is far more ancient wisdom than that. It is taken from the beginning of the book of Ecclesiastes, which falls into the part of the Bible known as wisdom literature. Perhaps you expect—or hope—that Ecclesiastes will continue to outline the right time to plant or pull up, or weep or laugh, or mourn or dance, or to keep and to cast away, to seek war or peace: but it does not. It does tell you that there are right times for these things, but it does not proscribe what those times are. Is it just being nasty? Saying "There is a right way to do this, but I won't tell you"? Or, perhaps, it leaves space for culture. Perhaps it is wisdom itself to know that while there is a right time for things, that right time will be context dependent, contingent, and need to be expressed in ambiguity. Roland Murphy observes that each wisdom saying (or proverb; in Hebrew: *māšāl*) "presents only a narrow slice of reality; much depends upon its context"—to the extent that different proverbs can "go in opposite directions" without contradiction since each "proverb 'performs' when it is in line with the context from which it arises. The saying is not absolute; it is relative. Moreover, a shift of context can provide another level of meaning" (1990, p. 10-11). Bourdieu explains better than most how we learn what these 'right times' are.

2.2.1. *Habitus*

"I don't believe human beings store memory in our brains exclusively—there simply aren't enough storage slots or interconnective possibilities. And so, if not the brain, then where? I concluded that another viewpoint on memory was to see our bodies as 'peripheral memory storage devices'." (Karla in *Microserfs* (Coupland, 1996, p. 66))

¹² https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W4ga_M5Zdn4

This comedic quote from a character in Douglas Coupland's novel *Microserfs* is a surprisingly accurate metaphor for Bourdieu's concept of *habitus*. Imagining our brains as a kind of hard drive, Karla calls our bodies "peripheral memory storage devices" while Bourdieu:

proposes that human agents are historical animals who carry within their bodies acquired sensibilities and categories that are the sedimented products of their past social experiences. (Wacquant, 2009, p. 138)

That is, we are trained from birth, and through every interaction. We are shaped by pre-existing social and cultural forces, through the structures of economy and architecture, of education and the law. But while we are shaped by these things in ways that are often imperceptible to us, Bourdieu does not go so far as to find that they fully determine a person. For Bourdieu, it is necessary to find a path between structuralism and subjectivism; structures cannot be fully responsible for the actions of a subject, but neither is the subject fully free to act without the influence of material, cultural, social, or symbolic structures. His frequent collaborator, Wacquant, explains that *habitus*:

is a mediating notion that revokes the common sense duality between the individual and the social by capturing 'the internalisation of externality and the externalisation of internality' [in the famous expression of Bourdieu], that is, the way society becomes deposited in persons in the form of lasting dispositions, or trained capacities and structured propensities to think, feel, and act in determinate ways, which then guide them in their creative responses to the constraints and solicitations of their extant milieu. (Wacquant, 2005, p. 316)

Habitus is Bourdieu's "attempt to overcome the dichotomy between structure and agency whilst acknowledging the external and historical factors that condition, restrict and/or promote change" (Costa & Murphy, 2015, p. 3). Moreover, *habitus* is a "socialised subjectivity that agents embody both individually and collectively" (Costa & Murphy, 2015, p. 7). That is, *habitus* is learned and reproduced in and through community and social interaction. Costa and Murphy are at pains to point out that *habitus* is not only a theory– it is a 'thinking tool' that can shape research practice and interpretation.

Habitus is performed in different social ‘fields’ or contexts. What feels natural and is performed pre-cognitively in one field often becomes overt, sometimes even uncomfortable, when the subject is relocated to a different field. That is, when a person is moved from one field to another—say, by becoming a parent, or moving from one country to another—*habitus* becomes more visible and the subject is often able to be more reflexive and capable of self-analysis (Nowicka, 2015).

Bourdieu’s thesis is elegant and highly nuanced, but not without its critics. The philosopher Ranciere describes the legacy of Mauss’ *The Gift* to Bourdieu’s theory, but takes Bourdieu to task for replacing Mauss’ notion of ‘civility’ with a single-sighted fixation on power, through the accumulation of various forms of capital, as the sole motivator of human activity (2012). Ranciere takes issue with Bourdieu’s tendency to claim that while human actors may think they are being motivated by love or generosity, they are blinded to the ways in which these actions are simply attempts to accumulate various kinds of capital that will then give them power in certain fields:

Far more, then, than a critique of structuralist scientism, *Practical Reason* carries out a liquidation of Mauss’s conception of gift and mixture. Where Mauss sought invariants of noble sociability, Bourdieu asserts the generalized economy of self-interest and symbolic violence. (Ranciere, 2012, p. 156)

This critique comes from within the social sciences, but it is similar to that levelled against Bourdieu by the theologian John Milbank, who suggests that “specific forms of power are ‘fictions’ elaborated precisely by beliefs and practices, so that trying to see ‘power’ as more fundamental than these things is a hopeless task” (Milbank, 2006 [1990], p. 93).

While Ranciere takes Bourdieu to task for seemingly installing sociology as the only discipline from which true analysis of human interaction can be made, Bourdieu himself acknowledges that such insights are partial; that the way to understanding is to hear a range of voices and interpretations, that “all objectivist knowledge contains a claim to legitimate domination” (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 28). He points us to Nietzsche:

There is *only* a perspective seeing, *only* a perspective “knowing”; and the more affects we allow to speak about one thing, the *more* eyes, different

eyes, we use to observe one thing, the more complete will our “concept” of this thing, our “objectivity” be. (Nietzsche, 1969, p. 119)

Bourdieu’s insights into the way persons are made are profound. Although Bourdieu himself may be appalled by the suggestion, I will show in Section 2.2.2 that they are in many ways reconcilable with a Christian understanding of the formation of the person. Ranciere’s critique, however, usefully highlights two things; first, that perhaps it is worth making room for motivations that stem from desires other than a lust for power, and second, the warning that a Bourdieusian ‘radical critique’ can limit rather than open up the possibilities for radical action or activism.

2.2.2. Liturgy

Drawing on Bourdieu’s insights, James KA Smith has authored a series of texts encouraging Christian readers to think about people as being formed through liturgical practice (Smith, 2009; Smith, 2013; Smith, 2017). Where Bourdieu sees power at the root of social interaction Smith argues that the human is directed by what they love, and that desire is trained through (both religious and secular) liturgical practice. Smith’s use of the terms ‘ritual’ and ‘practice’ is somewhat different to their use in anthropology. For anthropologists, ritual is a heavily theorised concept. Rituals are actions with “generate meaning” (Seeman, 2004, p. 55) including, for example, worship rites, rites of passage and initiation, weddings, funerals, coronations. Ritual in anthropology is largely focussed on decoding how ceremonial action creates meaning within communities, even though there are a range of ways in which that decoding is performed: from psychoanalytic approaches, to phenomenological approaches, and to debates over whether myth or ritual is more foundational (Bell, 1997).

In contrast, Smith posits ritual as the outer ring in a Venn diagram, of which ‘practices’ is then a subset, and ‘liturgies’ as a subset of both. Rituals, for Smith, is synonymous with routine, and he includes examples of tooth brushing and bed time routines, as examples of ritual (2009, p. 86). In many ways his idea of ritual is the category most parallel to Bourdeau’s concept of *habitus*. Smith claims practices are “identity forming, *telos*-laden” and get hold of our core desire, and liturgies are the “thickest practices” (2009, p. 85). Liturgy, while traditionally used to describe the set words and order of the Mass or church service, is for Smith distinguished as a ritual of “ultimate concern”; that is, they are rituals and practices that “are formative for identity,

that inculcate particular visions of the good life” and that shape how we imagine the “the ideal of human flourishing” (Smith, 2009, p. 86–87).

Indeed, another synonym used by Smith for ritual is habit. Smith attempts to define some habits as ‘thin’ (he identifies “mundane” activities such as toothbrushing (2009, p.82) and others as ‘thick’ or meaningful (here he refers to Sunday worship, or the regular habit of listening to “inflammatory talk radio” (2009, p.82)). But within a few paragraphs, Smith is blurring the boundaries, suggesting that mundane habits can be identity forming; “the thin practice of exercise serves the thick end of finding meaning in the sacrament of marriage and family” (2009, p. 83). I suggest that rather than thinking about *habits* as thick or thin, we instead follow Geertz (1973) and think of our *descriptions* of them as thick or thin. This then makes sense of what Smith himself does when he parses what he calls ‘secular liturgies’, such as his reading of the way shopping at the mall trains our ultimate desires. He is providing a thick description of what could be seen at a surface level as a ‘thin’ or mundane habit and showing how meaning-laden it actually is. This is the task of the anthropologist: to expose what we think of as mundane as actually meaningful and identity forming

‘Liturgy’ is most precisely used to refer to those formal words and actions set down in the practice of worship. And while Smith ‘reads’ secular liturgies in practices like shopping at a mall, his discussion of church liturgies seems focussed on this traditional interpretation. So, he is less likely to explore the liturgy of morning tea after the church service than he is to examine the Eucharist. The theologian Kirsten Guidero (2014, Aug 21) critiques this focus on liturgical worship for three reasons: first, in correcting an overemphasis on the mind she suggests it moves too far in its focus on the body, second that “liturgical practice does not guarantee virtue formation”, and third that liturgy is not set in stone or given by God but a dynamic product of earthly authorities. She suggests that the conversation about identity formation needs “discussions that tease out the differences and interplay between emotions, thoughts, minds bodies and brains”. I think Smith has proposed something compelling by showing how liturgy brings together narrative—words and ideas in the form of imagination-feeding stories—and habitual, formative embodied practice. I think it is possible to use this framework with anthropological data to produce a discussion exactly like the one that Guidero proposes. So, in this project I hope to show how some aspects of Smith’s theory about liturgical formation can be applied in an anthropologically rigorous use of

primary data. I seek to be more explicit in my definition of liturgy than Smith, proposing that it is the way in which communities and individuals remember, retell, and re-enact stories from Scripture through habitual action. This includes formal ritual, such as the Lord's Supper, but also habits such as what you wear to church, or your propensity to do volunteer work, or how you relate to your family, and what that reveals about the intention of your desire. By tying it directly to Scripture, I limit it to a way of interpreting Christian community. However, there may be ways to take this methodological model and apply it using different religious or secular narratives in further research.

Smith attempts to recover an Augustinian anthropology, in which humans are primarily understood as oriented towards what we love. He follows Heidegger to suggest that it is what we intend towards with care that is the most primordial way we inhabit the world: "our primary orientation to the world is not knowledge, or even belief, but love" (Smith, 2009, p. 46). He goes on to argue that "our love or desire—aimed at a vision of the good life that moves and motivates us—is operative ... on a largely unconscious level" (Smith, 2009, p. 61). And so, there is similarity to Bourdieu in that we are formed by and form our habits in ways that we do not even notice. But Smith deviates from him in that, instead of seeking to read power relations from these habits, he seeks to discern the vision of the 'good life' we can glimpse in the habit. With this framework he sets about interrogating both sacred and secular practices as liturgical, placing these questions at the forefront of analysis: "What vision of human flourishing is implicit in this or that practice? What does the good life look like as embedded in cultural rituals?" (Smith, 2009, p. 89).

I feel like this has something to offer an anthropological reading of church practice in particular: what do the habits of my three congregations reveal about their vision of what it means to flourish? This focus on the 'ordinary' has precedent in the work of Michael Banner in his hugely influential book drawing together theology and social anthropology *The Ethics of Everyday Life* (2014). Like Smith, Banner leverages the liturgy as a way to engage with Christian moral action. While his work honors the contribution of social anthropology, neither Smith nor Banner use primary ethnographic fieldwork in their works, although they reference a good deal of ethnographic work. They both also focus on what liturgy *ought* to teach us about how to live, rather than examining how liturgical practice is actually reflected in the lives of

particular communities or individuals. This study is deeply indebted to their work, but I hope to contribute this latter insight; I hope to show you how remembering, retelling and re-enacting stories from Scripture is echoed in the lives of individuals and communities. It will, therefore, present phenomenological data about the life histories and church practices of migrant Christians, and highlight how liturgical themes are embodied in those practices and stories. The liturgical self is something that is both part of Christian formation and is *transformed* through the process of migration; migrants both adopt new practices and find ways to maintain continuity throughout the migration journey.

In his second volume on cultural liturgies, Smith (2013) argues closely for the way in which narrative and liturgy are intertwined. Indeed, for Smith, the nexus is between story and the body,

The emotional perception of a situation is not merely a hardwired, biological reflex; it is an acquired habit, a product of a passional orientation that has been learned in and through paradigmatic stories. And those stories and narratives that prime and orient my very perception of the world tap into deep wells of my embodied unconscious. I learn these stories with my body. (Smith, 2013, p39)

What he argues here is not unlike what anthropologists of nationalism argue with respect to foundational narratives (e.g. Anderson, 1983; Kapferer, 1988; Dawson, 2009). Paradigmatic narratives shape our responses to and interpretations of the real world. Smith suggests this is ancient Christian wisdom—understood by those who first developed practices of liturgy and monastic practices—but that modern Christians have preferenced the intellect over the imagination and that Christian communities are weaker for this. As a Christian educator, Smith is arguing that churches and Christian educational facilities ought to do more to capture the imagination. I find the argument that this is the way the world works to be compelling—it dovetails with anthropological theories of the person and imagination that I also find persuasive. But if this is indeed the way the world works, what I seek to understand is the ways in which church practices are *already* doing this, perhaps imperfectly, from primary data and firsthand accounts. I am less interested in what the church *ought to be* doing, than discovering what is revealed phenomenologically through the everyday life of church goers.

Section 2.4 is concerned with the way in which the temporal habit and shape of worship routines is deeply embedded, sought after, and reproduced by migrants even if (or perhaps especially because) the rest of life in Australia demands new temporal habits. As I have talked to people, I have been struck by what they articulate as being significant to them about their faith traditions, those aspects of their church and faith life they value. Often, the most critical things are not material, but intangible. I have been particularly struck by the way in which migrants seek to reproduce or recover particular temporalities and spatialities of worship, liturgy and faithful life in their new home in Australia. For the migrants I interacted and spoke with, these elements of their heritage—the spatial and the temporal in daily life—are things they seek out in churches in a new country; they are patterns they recreate, they are heritage that they bring with them to Australia in their bodies and enact in often-unobtrusive ways. Like other intangible heritage, these temporalities and spatialities are rarely recorded or archived. Instead, they are embodied and enacted, living in and through their collective practice. I suggest that it is worth developing the liturgical lens as a way of understanding these rhythms and habits. By reading social practice through a liturgical lens—and I am not suggesting this liturgical lens is sufficient on its own, merely that it is a novel tool for examining social practice, especially religious practice—we can see these temporal and spatial habits as a significant part of peoples’ heritage not only because they are loved and valued in and of themselves, but because it is through these habits that people have learnt to demonstrate love.

2.3. Interpretive Methods

I did not enter the field imagining that I would examine church practice and the stories of migrants through a ‘liturgical lens’, but I suspected I would have different insights to my unbelieving colleagues. While this project draws together anthropology and practical theology, it is a work of social science. I am committed to the significance of the position of the researcher, though, and feel that being a Christian researcher, researching Christians will have both strengths and weaknesses. Some colleagues have expressed their concern about my ability to adequately open up myself to the other, and I have written elsewhere of how I understand Romans 14 to be a “precursor to the idea of possible worlds and cultural difference. Paul does not suggest that our call as

Christians is to remake others into our likeness, but rather that the Christian is called to unmake himself to love the other. In light of teaching like this, I feel absolutely no tension between my Christian faith and a commitment to radical openness” (Swann, 2014). This concern that I could not open myself up adequately to the other contrasts with the challenge Ewing (1994) felt when she experienced dreams in the context of fieldwork with Sufi saints. Ewing felt the academy called her to remain professional and objective and suggests that “even in experimental writing, the anthropologist rarely budes from this subject position into the embarrassing possibility of belief” (Ewing, 1994, p. 571). Ewing argues that while playing the role of objective observer is more predictable and can allow both participant and researcher to draw clear boundaries around the project and their relationship, there is creative and transcendant potential when you can share “sources of significance”, such as dreams, with the subjects of one’s research (Ewing, 1994, p. 579).

While the answer to Hinson’s (2014) question — “what would a faithful ethnography look like?” — is only beginning to be answered, there is a longer conversation in the literature about a believing anthropologist’s subject position as they do research. For example, Ganiel and Mitchell (2006) dissect the categories of ‘insider’ and ‘outsider’ with respect to their research in evangelical Christian communities on Northern Ireland. Ganiel is a fellow evangelical Christian believer, while Mitchell is a religious agnostic. They examine the multiple ways in which different social identities make them insiders and outsiders, ultimately eschewing the dichotomy as inadequate to describe research relationships (2006, p. 17). Indeed, in this project, the congregation I am most clearly an ethnic outsider within (the Arabic Baptist church) is the one I am closest to in my own theological persuasion. Ganiel and Mitchell suggest instead that “one’s religious identity is mediated through a host of other social identities” and go further to suggest that social categories are insufficient on their own and call researchers to examine the “spiritual and emotional dimensions of identity and interaction” involved in participants’ responses (2006, p. 18).

Similarly, Brian Howell takes up Harding’s (1991) characterisation of evangelical Christianity as anthropology’s ‘repugnant other’ and speaks back to the discipline from his position as a believing evangelical Christian (Howell, 2007). He acknowledges the challenge that Christian anthropologists, especially those studying Christian communities, may be seen as “apologists rather than anthropologists”, but he argues

that a committed religious standpoint “can be valuable or relevant to specific anthropological research” (Howell, 2007, p. 372). Howell points out that the post-modernism commitment to the fact that all researchers have a ‘view from somewhere’ means that a faithful standpoint, well navigated and appropriately laid bare to the reader, need be no more or less problematic than any other subject position.

I find scholars taking both phenomenological and post-modern approaches to social science persuasive. Clifford Geertz entertainingly suggests that anthropology has had a post-modern flavour all along:

The contextualist, antiformalist, relativizing tendencies of the bulk of that [postmodern] opinion, its turn toward examining the ways in which the world is talked about—depicted, charted, represented—rather than the way it intrinsically is, have been rather easily absorbed by adventurer scholars used to dealing with strange perceptions and stranger stories. They have, wonder of wonders, been speaking Wittgenstein all along.
(Geertz, 1983, p. 4)

To some, it may seem strange to seek to combine a Christian framework for research with a phenomenological approach to knowledge, given Christianity's long association with modernism and the metaphysical. Given that one of the key characteristics of post-modernism is its skepticism of grand theories, how can I reconcile that with a belief in a grand theory like Christianity? Yet I find it compelling because it resonates with my Christian expectation that humans are finite and creaturely; all human experience is a straining towards understanding, whether it be understanding of the natural world, of other people, or of God himself. Post-modernism's questioning of the authority of the observer resonates with my theological commitment to service, rather than expertise.

For Harvey, post-modernity is primarily an historical condition that reflects the changing experience of space and time (1989). It is characterised by flexibility and fragmentation. Aesthetically it is a bricolage. Perhaps post-modernism's most significant contribution is its seeming argument for the intransigence of meaning. This characterisation, however, does not do justice to the acuity of post-modern scholars. Just because signifiers are unstable does not also mean that meaning and explanation are obsolete. Rather, I find Stanley Fish persuasive and find his conclusions about interpretive communities compelling:

(1) Communication does occur, despite the absence of an independent and context-free system of meaning, [and] (2) those who participate in this communication do so confidently rather than provisionally (they are not relativists), and ... (3) while their confidence has its source in a set of beliefs, those beliefs are not individual-specific or idiosyncratic but communal and conventional. (Fish, 1999 [1980], p. 54)

As Geertz suggests above, it has long been the concern of anthropology to understand and interpret these systems of meanings, to explain the context for communication and behaviour across cultural barriers.

Thomas Csordas notes that anthropological accounts of healing tend to focus on descriptions of rituals and interpreting these systems of meaning, rather than on “the *experience* of supplicants in healing” (1994, p. 3). He redirects the anthropological gaze and argues that there is an “experiential specificity of effect in religious healing” and it is this that he seeks to explore, creating “an account of the cultural constitution of the sacred self” (Csordas, 1994, p. 3-4). Likewise, in this project, I am less concerned with the formal proceedings of the church service and more interested in the way Christian migrants interpret their faith journeys. I seek to show how the remembering, re-telling and re-enacting of biblical narratives has not just an experiential specificity of *effect* but also creates an experiential specificity of *affect*.

Phenomenology shares with post-modernity a dissatisfaction with positivist models of understanding subject and object. The position of the researcher is challenged and understood to be intricately bound up in the world they are studying. I find the phenomenological insistence that we cannot ever be sure we totally understand the other powerful. And yet, I still expect that there are better and worse understandings of the Other. In particular, I have found Heidegger’s reflections on nearness helpful for reflecting on the experience of migration. For Heidegger, we succeed in understanding a thing by drawing near to it, but nearness is not the same as proximity:

Yet the frantic abolition of all distances brings no nearness; for nearness does not consist in shortness of distance. What is least remote from us in point of distance, by virtue of its picture on film or its sound on the radio, can remain far from us. What is incalculably far from us in point of

distance can be near to us. Short distance is not in itself nearness. Nor is great distance remoteness. (Heidegger, 1971, p. 165)

These reflections on nearness seem to echo Harvey's claim that new experiences of time and space demand new ways of talking about the world. The above quote also foreshadows the migrant experience of alienation among that which is proximal on the one hand and intimacy with that which is far away on the other. It also provides a frame for how the familiarity of liturgy and liturgical practice allows migrants from distant places to feel at home with each other. That is, the liturgical imagination can create a space for familiarity that facilitates communication.

Furthermore, I am persuaded by Levinas' call for a responsibility to the other merely in light of coming face-to-face with them as another being (Bergo, 2008). The other places ethical demands on us, lays claim to us. For Levinas, an ethics of responsibility precedes any objective searching after truth. I am committed to allowing my participants to speak back to the research findings and this is grounded in an expectation that I will not be able to understand the Other in a perfect sense. My reading and translation of another's experience—their culture—will be enriched by engaging in dialogue with them about my interpretations. Collaboration is not only about redressing power imbalance. It is also about achieving deeper "co-interpretations" (Lassiter, 2005, p. 12). The psychiatrist R.D. Laing puts it this way:

I see you, and you see me. I experience you, and you experience me. I see your behaviour. You see my behaviour. But I do not and never have and never will see your experience of me. (Laing, 1967, p. 15)

That is, we can never fully appreciate the experience of the other. This could be seen to doom to utter failure any social science that attempts to interpret the experience of someone else. I think, however, Laing would suggest that, even though our understanding is always limited, as we experience one another experiencing—that is, as we respond to one another—we get closer to sharing something of each other's experience. He goes on to say:

Since your and their experience is invisible to me as mine is to you and them, I seek to make evident to the others, through their experience of my

behaviour, what I infer of your experience, through my experience of your behavior. (Laing, 1967, p. 17)

My own motivations are not just philosophical, but also theological. They are deeply grounded in a theology of service and a responsibility to the other before the self. The theorist and theologian John Milbank I think would agree with Laing when he describes the way receptivity to the other should be ontologically primordial;

Since we are created, we are received, even as ourselves, before ourselves. Likewise, in order to exercise strength we must first be sensitive and attentive, which always involves a vulnerable exposure to risk, failure and the tragic misinterpretation by others of our own ventures ... On the other hand, just because receptivity is for us ontologically primordial, it cannot begin as a passivity in the ordinary sense: as I am entirely received, even as an I, there is no original 'I' that could be the subject of a passivity. Reception is therefore from the outset active and affirmative and this ontological circumstance is reflected ontically in our best attention towards others. Since we cannot be in their position save by falsely feigning an absolute sympathy which secretly seeks to displace them, our true attention weaves further the interval 'between', such that we most accurately sympathise by creatively responding with our own perspective. In this way the work of solidarity in its essence promotes, in their shared compossibility, both the power of others and our own. (Milbank, 2006 [1990], p. xvii-xviii)

That is, it is untruthful to pretend that one can ever fully understand another person or inhabit their space. We can only ever approach one another, and we sympathise most effectively when we creatively interact with another.

One of the key criticisms of an approach which seeks to give power to the research subject over representations of themselves is that they will hide the ugly truth about themselves. The common question is: What happens when your 'translation' is contested by the people you're working with? In an attempt to respond to this valid question, I follow Asad (1993) by drawing a distinction between translation and critique. Asad argues that explaining why the actions of another make sense does not

equate to justifying the right-ness or wrong-ness of those same actions. Producing an account of another culture that makes it coherent is not an act of charity, but one of accuracy in translation. Working in collaboration with a community should give you more rather than less right to produce social critique: “In order for criticism to be responsible, it must always be addressed to someone who can contest it” (Asad 1993 p. 156). Working collaboratively with people actually opens up *more* opportunities to ethically critique practice and culture than non-collaborative methods for the very reason that it creates the space for open disagreement.

Fountain et al. (2018) suggest with humour (and a backward glance to Robbins, 2006) that deeper interdisciplinary exchanges are going to be “awkward” and “problematic”. One of the ways in which this report may be discomfiting is its use of biblical references throughout.¹³ Using Scripture in this way is largely a reflection of my experience as a Christian anthropologist in which resonances (or dissonances) between the anthropological literature and Scripture fascinate me. Erich Auerbach, the literary critic, contrasts biblical storytelling with the storytelling in *The Odyssey*:

far from seeking, like Homer, merely to make us forget our own reality for a few hours, it seeks to over-come our reality: we are to fit our life into its world, feel ourselves to be elements in its structure of universal history (Auerbach, 1991 [1968], p. 15)

We fit ourselves into its story, both through knowing our place at the end of the narrative (in the ‘now but not yet’ of the risen but not returned Jesus) and through using the narratives of Scripture as interpretive models because “doctrine and promise are incarnate in them and inseparable from them” (Auerbach, 1991 [1968], p. 15). I hope that, while awkward, this proves to be creative and opens up a new way of looking at Australian suburban church communities. Nicholas Wolterstorff, a philosopher and believing Christian, examines this challenge to ‘inhabit the world of the biblical narrative’ and claims that “the church’s identity has been a *story-constituted* identity” (2001, p. 205, emphasis in original). I am, therefore, exploring the ways I, as a person of faith, can allow that faith to interact with anthropological scholarship. Furthermore, I use Scripture and theology because I feel that it illustrates the length of time and depth

¹³ I have used the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) for all Bible quotes.

of deliberation that people of the Jewish and Christian faith have given to ‘inhabiting the text’ and to discourses of, for example, belonging, citizenship and epistemology.

This focus on story has made me reluctant to abbreviate the life histories my research participants shared with me. To understand their experience and their way of interpreting it, I share them in full. Pragmatically, they are presented as numbered break out boxes in the text—separate from the analysis and the ethnographic reflections on church life. Each story is embedded in a chapter focussing on a particular biblical/liturgical theme, but none of them are exclusively focussed on a single theme. Nor do they reflect the theme perfectly—they are perhaps more like seeing “in a mirror dimly” (1 Corinthians 13:12, NRSV). There are, therefore, gaps between the stories and the analysis. This may make the analysis seem lacking, but I hope that it shows that life is disjointed, that faith often goes hand in hand with doubt, and that there is rarely a perfect correspondence between our intentions and performance. The link between liturgy and life is audible and visible but it is more often an echo or a glimpse than a perfect correspondence.

In contrast to the simultaneous backward (to historical narratives) and forward (to the eschaton) glance of the liturgical lens, my ethnographic narratives are told in the present tense and through the first person. Following Virginia Woolf, Avanesian and Hennig suggest that the present tense is used “under the dictate of an aesthetic of liveliness, this [the present tense] is declared to be an expression of the extreme timelessness of ‘moments of being’” (2012, p. 2). I feel like this is authentic to the ethnographic experience of a capturing a moment in the life of a community. I do not presume to speak for the community in an ongoing way, but present to you a moment in their being. Avanesian and Hennig furthermore suggest that,

The tenses of language do not depict the future, the present, or the past.
Nor do they refer to time. Tenses create an understanding of time in the first place. (2012, p. 2)

My use of the present tense is intended to capture and communicate this sense of momentariness—to help the reader feel in a physical way that despite the search for deep understanding, for thick descriptions, and for collaborative understanding, the ethnographic experience is fleeting and transient.

Furthermore, while the stories my participants tell are reflecting on the past, the

experience of being told their story is presented in the present tense. This is a deliberate device to help the reader feel the intensity of the moment. Similarly, while the chapters in this thesis are thematic, within these chapters I present participants' whole personal histories as they were told to me. I have chosen stories that provide some insight into those particular themes—even while they intersect with the themes of other chapters and issues beyond the scope of this project. But I am convinced that it is in their wholeness—rather than as fragmentary quotes—that these stories find their power and in which we most effectively hear the echoes of lives understood through a liturgical lens.

2.4. The Liturgical Lens

When I listen to peoples' stories, what do my Christian instincts hear? How are they embodying a Christian disposition? How does the shape of the Christian story (and by extension, the Christian calendar) shape the lives of these travellers? What can I tell about what they love, by the stories they tell, the priorities they set, the decisions they have made? To illustrate what this might add to Bialecki and Bielo's (forthcoming) discussion, for example, we could explore the tradition of remembrance in Christian tradition and how these 'Emerging Christians' creatively interact with and reinterpret this tradition. Jewish traditions such as the Sabbath and the Passover are embodied acts of remembrance that are foundational to Israel's worship of God (cf. Genesis 9:15, Genesis 9:16, Exodus 13:3) as is the Christian tradition of the Eucharist/Lord's Supper in which Christians are called to the remembrance of "Christ and Him crucified" (1 Corinthians 2:2). Christian churches of many persuasions have found themselves trying to find a balance between looking forward and looking backward; finding the balance is at once both theological and cultural.

The structure of each of the subsequent chapters will attempt to draw the reader into this experience of looking forward and backward. Each chapter will start with an introduction to the liturgical season and some relevant anthropological theory before turning to the ethnographic data and migration stories of participants and then reflecting on the way the liturgical stories can be heard echoing through in the way my participants retell their own stories. It is my hope that by introducing the liturgical

stories first, the reader will be able to start hearing those echoes in the stories of my participants before I draw them out explicitly.

Before concluding this section, however, I will show through an overview of the three participating churches that small habits—whether deliberate or unplanned, precognitive or rational—provide glimpses of people’s vision of God and the good life. Finding (or starting) a church in a new country that is comfortable, is not just about finding one that teaches the right things, or sings songs you like. It is also about finding a church which embodies the daily, weekly, annual and life-cycle temporalities through which you have learnt to live a life of faith. Through this familiar temporality, migrants find a way to demonstrate and practice love.

Story 1: Arriving at Sacred Heart Catholic Church

Father Bill has warned me that his parishioners are often rather late. So I am surprised to discover on my first visit that there is already a steady stream of parishioners arriving fifteen minutes before the service. Father Bill is right, though: it does take the best part of a half an hour before the church hits peak ‘fullness’. The congregation, once fully assembled, is large, young and multicultural, which is unusual in Australia.

The Mass at Sacred Heart contains all the typical liturgical elements of song and prayer and creed, homily and Eucharist. Its actual liturgy is quite familiar and is trotted through at a steady pace. But as a naïve Protestant, I am a little taken aback by the number of people who, after taking the Eucharist, walk past their seats and out the door before the service has finished. By the end of the service, only about half of the congregation remains. And three-quarters of them head to the door within a few minutes.

Not everyone leaves quite as quickly; a few people loiter to speak with a priest. Some folks gather under one of the Stations of the Cross to pray. Some chat to friends, some linger while kids played in the driveway. But even those who loiter are generally off the premises within 20 minutes. Often this is because the space (and the priests) are required for a baptism. Father Bill tells me they do so many baptisms

here that they prefer to do them in separate family services lest every week be overrun with this sacrament.

I come home from my first week at Sacred Heart and exclaim to my husband: “they managed to do the entire Mass—with liturgy, songs, creeds, Eucharist, and a homily—in under an hour!” I am amazed. When my Protestant church tries to do all those things it takes at least an hour and a half, and then we engage in that most Anglican ritual of morning tea in the church hall. (But perhaps if you are going to have Mass eight times a week, you need to keep it snappy!) Despite the brevity of the Mass itself, the daily (or twice daily) celebration of Mass and the permanent presence of priests on site (in a home that is very open to the congregation and the community) contribute to a sense of the church’s permanence. It is always there, always active, always available. This sense of constant presence resonates with the experience of migrants that I spoke with who grew up in India, especially those educated in Catholic schools or missions. There, the Brothers and Sisters were always at hand, living in the community. The church as a spiritual site was never closed up or off limits. It was always open to those who would pass through in praise, prayer or contemplation.

Attendance at Sacred Heart swells at special feasts, such as Christmas and Easter. Lent brings additional mid-week evening meditations. These annual events are additional to the regular pattern of weekly Mass, as are life-cycle events such as baptisms, weddings and funerals. Sacred Heart seems to satisfy migrants from different parts of the world by offering an experience that is somewhat more relaxed, allowing a range of different expressions of faithfulness in its midst—from what you wear, to how you use your body in worship (kneeling, praying, crossing, raising hands in song, all are up for grabs at Sacred Heart), to how your children are expected to behave, to when you arrive/leave the service, to what day you attend worship.

Among all the new things I encounter at Sacred Heart, this temporal shift—to shorter services with less interaction, but an ‘always on’ church—is one of the more significant. But if transitioning from my little Anglican church to Sacred Heart was a temporal shock, then the transition to Preston Seventh-day Adventist Church was a doubly-so.

Story 2: Arriving at Preston Seventh-day Adventist Church

I turn up on my first Saturday—for one of the key features of Adventism is seventh-day Sabbath worship—at 9.30 and finally roll home at about 5 o'clock completely exhausted.

My first encounter is with a very cheerful gentleman who greets me by wishing me a “Happy Sabbath” with the same kind of zeal that is reserved for Season’s Greetings in December at my own church. Only here, it happens every single week. And not just from the dedicated ‘welcomers’; each time I greet someone at church I receive the same enthusiastic ‘Happy Sabbath’. It is common for prayers during the course of the day to begin by thanking God for the privilege of being gathered together on the Sabbath.

This habit of meeting on Saturday instead of Sunday is distinctively Adventist. There are Adventist apps that help you monitor the approach of the Sabbath. The Sabbath is practiced in ways that are reminiscent of Jewish practice—for example, formal Adventist theology teaches that you should not engage in commerce on the Sabbath. When I met with my key informant just before I finished my fieldwork, she—who had once gently chided a fellow in the congregation, telling him “we’re not trying to convert her”—stepped over this self-imposed boundary to slip me a pamphlet on the rightness of Sabbath worship: a last chance attempt to share with me her vision of the good life.

Sabbath at Preston church starts with Sabbath School, during which the congregation break into small groups of children and adults. It continues through a song service, and Divine Service that roughly resembles a Baptist service. It often continues with a pot-luck luncheon, in which attendees each bring a dish to share, and is regularly followed by a seminar or perhaps evangelistic activities like pamphleteering. I have been told regularly by people born overseas that this pattern is common to Adventists everywhere. In stark contrast to the Catholic church, there are no additional services for special religious days or sacraments. Remembering the Sabbath is the height of religious observance. I greeted one woman with “Happy Easter” one April, only to be gently rebuked that Adventists celebrate Easter four times a year when they share in the ordinance of the Lord’s Supper. They celebrate

Easter, then, both more frequently than the Catholics next door (four times as opposed to once), but also less frequently, for the Catholics celebrate the Lord's Supper every week while the Adventists do so quarterly.

The pattern of study, worship, lunch and service is endorsed by the global Adventist Church and followed closely by Preston church. Preston church has a reputation among Adventists in Melbourne for being particularly conservative. And their rigorous observance of these habits is part of what makes it an attractive church for people from other parts of the world where church practice is more conservative. The Adventists at Preston Church seem to provide a strong sense of home and identity to migrants by replicating a very specific expression of worship, which extends even to the timetable.

When I interview Tabitha, a young student from Botswana, she talks to me about how much she appreciates the speed of Melbourne. While Australia and Botswana have these different tempos, Tabitha travels across the city to attend Preston church and practice Sabbath worship much as she did at home. Amidst the fast(ish) pace of Melbourne, she takes deliberate measures to carve out time for Sabbath worship. In some ways this means slowing down—a deliberate restfulness—but in others Tabitha brings her passion for activity with her. So, on the one hand, she tells me that she is frustrated by the lack of service opportunities with which to fill her Sabbath afternoons, and on the other speaks highly of the opportunities for involvement and leadership that have been offered to her at Preston in contrast with home. She has been both more and less active, embodying a heritage of “doing things in a similar way”, but also embracing the new opportunities at Preston.

Story 3: Arriving at Preston Arabic Baptist Church

I know very little about what to expect at Preston Arabic Baptist Church except that I do not really expect to understand much of what is going on. I do not even know if I will understand enough to commit to including it as one of my participating churches. I have invited my friend, Steve, who speaks Arabic, to come with me. He struggles a little with the vocabulary specific to Christian worship, but Steve helps me

make sufficient introductions to get started. Many in the congregation have good English, and after this first week, a number of parishioners take on Steve's role of whispering a translation in my ear during services. I am very lucky. One congregant is even training to be a certified translator and helps me by translating all my project information forms into Arabic—despite people's proficiency in spoken English, I want them to be able to read and understand the details of what the project is about and what rights they have.

The congregation is mostly Egyptian and Iraqi (because they can speak and understand the same form of Arabic; others from the Middle East/North Africa are warmly welcomed, but often connected into other more language-appropriate congregations). For the most part, the Egyptians I meet identified as Protestant believers before they left Egypt, while the Iraqi members converted from Chaldean Catholicism on the way from Iraq to Australia in countries like Syria or in Greece.

The service starts at 11:00AM. Ostensibly. Proceedings commence anytime between 11:00AM and 11:15AM. There are regularly only about a dozen people present when the service starts, half of whom are formally involved in running the service (leading the singing, doing IT, preaching, etc). The rest of the fifty to sixty strong congregation will show up at some point in the next hour. The service starts with singing which will continue for about an hour. The entire service at Sacred Heart would fit inside the time the Arabic Baptists spend singing.

Most people in the congregation have arrived by the time the singing has finished. People I meet in the congregation joke about the fact that this is just because people run on 'Arabic Time'. But it's hard to know—there have been a few hints that some people either don't like the music or give theological precedence to the sermon, which pretty consistently starts at noon, and perhaps turn up just in time for the 'important bit'. If it is that the congregation runs on 'Arabic Time', I have no doubt that there is a certain comfort in gathering together with people who understand this temporality, for I am quite certain most Australian Anglicans or Presbyterians would tut-tut about this habit. After dealing with Western temporal enforcement at work and school during the week, there is some comfort in knowing that church is a place where you will be understood and where lateness is not perceived as an insult like it is in the rest of Australia.

While the Catholic church swells for festivals like Christmas and Easter, the Arabic Baptist church seems to empty out at holidays. Most of the congregation have extended families who worship at Coptic or Chaldean Orthodox churches. The evangelical commitment of the Baptists means that special days, like special places, are held more loosely than they are to their Orthodox or Catholic families, and so they give honour to their families (who are quite often opposed to their Baptist practice) by worshipping with them on special occasions. It is an act of love or duty—even sometimes of evangelistic witness—that special religious days are spent with family at Orthodox or Catholic churches.

In these introductions to my three participating churches, all I have focussed on are the particular temporalities of the worship service and church calendar. These different routines could be just the outworking of a church landscape trying to provide consumer choice. Or perhaps they are merely the whim of the church leadership. The Adventists would be loath to call what they do liturgical; the Baptists would balk at the label 'ritual'. But they fit within the anthropological categories of practice and ritual. This overview of the three participating churches has shown that small habits provide glimpses of people's vision of God and the good life. The Catholic emphasis on participation in the Eucharist as often the high point of connection with God, is reflected in the early exit of a large proportion of the congregation. The commitment to finding God in and through formal worship and via the intercession of the priest is reflected in the sense that the church is always open. For the Adventists, however, their flourishing is seen in service—they are committed to long Sabbaths of deep study of the Scripture, community activity, and outreach to the community beyond church. In contrast, those attending the Arabic Baptist church, need to find a balance between their commitment to church and their commitment to family. This balance is not found at the expense of their faith, but rather their particular theology allows them to sit a little more loosely to the imperative of meeting in their own church for festivals and stay connected to family in other denominations.

When migrants find a church in a new country, it is not simply a matter of theological correspondence and comfort, but also about the individual's ability to participate in the regular habits through which they have learnt to live a life of faith.

These habits through which people practice faith are temporal, such as the Adventist habits of Sabbath bible study, worship, and community, or the Catholic habits of multiple Masses per week, or even an Arabic looseness with time. And they are spatial, including small bodily movements, such as how we use our bodies to kneel, or solid and architectural, like the kinds of buildings we find good for worship. These habits are embodiments of how individuals understand themselves to show love for God and their neighbour. As migrants, finding churches in which these habits can be reproduced provides comfort.

2.5. Conclusion

This section has provided an overview of the theoretical and interpretive framework for this project. The overlapping insights of Bourdieu's 'thinking tool' of *habitus* and the Christian concept of liturgy, demonstrate how a liturgical frame might be used to gain insight into congregational life, especially with respect to making migrants feel at home. The following chapters draw together reflections on the major liturgical seasons and the echoes we hear of them in the stories of my participants.



3. Advent

3.1. Seventh-day Adventists in Australia

The Seventh-day Adventist church has its origins in the nineteenth century North American Baptist tradition. It arose from the Millerite movement of the 1840s in upstate New York, which was centred on the predictions of William Miller that Jesus would return on October 22, 1844. That did not happen and the event has come to be known as 'The Great Disappointment'. While many Millerites returned to their original churches, there were those who regrouped, holding onto the centrality of Jesus' immanent glorious return despite a newfound unwillingness to declare an exact date for the event. Adventists continue to wait, eagerly, and very actively, for Jesus' return.

In the wake of the Great Disappointment, a number of key individuals shaped the emerging denomination of Seventh-day Adventism. Most prominent was a woman named Ellen White, referred to in the Adventist church as a prophetess, who wrote extensive interpretations of Scripture. Her writings remain secondary to Scripture but are held in very high regard. Born in 1827, Ellen Gould Harmon's family joined the Millerite movement when she was about twelve and she began having visions at seventeen. She was nineteen when she married the Adventist pastor James White and first published a year later. She was a prolific speaker and writer. In 1891, at sixty-four years of age, she was invited to Australia, she spent a few years in Melbourne, a short time in Sydney and a further five years on the New South Wales Central Coast at Cooranbong (Morriset), which is now home to the Adventist college Avondale. She travelled throughout Australia and New Zealand giving public lectures and wrote a number of significant texts here. She returned to the USA in 1900, where she continued working and writing until her death in 1915 (Krause, 1990).

Seventh Day Adventism is flourishing in Africa and the Pacific, in particular. In Madagascar, Keller (2007) identifies Seventh Day Adventism as a "New Church" - one that is Pentecostal, evangelical, fundamentalist, and rapidly growing. While it is true that Adventism is growing in the majority world, it remains a small denomination in Australia. The Australian Adventist church is bolstered by migration from those parts of the world where Adventism is flourishing. Keller's analysis is less about why people convert to Adventism, and more about why they stay Adventist: "on the nature of the

religious commitment of the ordinary members of the Adventist church in Maroantsetra and Sahameloka in the context of their everyday lives” (2007, p. 8). Her conclusion, is that what keeps people in the Adventist church is “the intrinsic worth of the religious activity itself”; that is, Adventists genuinely seem to enjoy Bible study (Keller, 2007, p. 233). And the appeal of this study, according to Keller, is that it provides clarity about the world, the self, and God. The “lens of Adventist cosmology”, she says, makes their vision of the world “amazingly clear” (2007, p. 234). This insight is a useful stepping stone for this study, which then seeks to examine the way in which that clarity is articulated in the migration stories of church goers. How is it that the Scriptures provide a clear vision of the past journey, the present reality, and the future possibilities migrants face?

Adventism is a particularly missional denomination, engaging in outreach through their churches, through the commercial sale of educational literature (commonly referred to as ‘Literature Evangelism’; see, for example, www.movemelord.com), as well as through social action and institutions. In Australia, Seventh-day Adventists operate a private hospital in Sydney, a tertiary college on the NSW Central Coast, a major business called Sanitarium Foods that makes the iconic Australian Weetbix, as well as many schools.

At the time of the 2016 Australian Census, almost 63,000 residents identified as being Seventh-day Adventists. Not only is the Adventist church more diverse than Australian Christian churches overall, it is also more diverse than the Australian population; approximately 61% of the Adventist population was born in Australia, compared to 67% of the total Australian population, and 74% of all other Australian Christians. The most significant migrant source regions among Adventists include New Zealand, Polynesia, Southern and East Africa, Maritime South East Asia, and Melanesia (see Table 2).

Like some of the churches I have worked with before, Seventh-day Adventists can see migrants as a mission field. In an Adventist-published historical overview of Adventism in the South Pacific, the author writes,

Today in Australia there is special significance in Christ's commission; "Go ye into all the world," because the world, in a sense, is coming to Australia. The Seventh-day Adventist Church, like other churches, finds

itself with a multi-racial membership and the challenge of a multi-racial outreach. (Clapham, 1985, p. 252)

But they also acknowledge the rejuvenation that migration will bring to the Australian church. In the same Adventist history quoted above, the author writes in the conclusion,

Are the only reservoirs of Adventist development and cooperation found in the advanced societies? Terms such as mission and missionary seem inappropriate to describe many situations filled from outside a country. The role of Third- World success in sustaining the faith and confidence of first world Christians should not be underestimated. Many would assert that God willed the missionary expansion of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries so that such areas might "pay back" with their zeal and success other areas during times of slow growth. (Clapham, 1985, p. 262)

Table 2: Place of Birth by Custom Religion Categories
Source: ABS, 2016d

Total Australian Population: Place of Usual Residence						
Place of Birth*	Seventh-day Adventist	Christian (other than Adventist)	Non-Christian religion/spirituality	No religion	Inadequately Described/ Not stated	Total
Top 20 regions (Descending order of frequency of SDA population)	%	%	%	%	%	%
Australia (includes External Territories)	61%	74%	33%	75%	31%	67%
New Zealand	6%	2%	1%	3%	1%	2%
Polynesia (excludes Hawaii)	6%	0%	2%	0%	0%	0%
Southern and East Africa	5%	2%	2%	1%	1%	1%
Maritime South-East Asia	4%	3%	4%	1%	1%	2%
Melanesia	2%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Not stated	2%	2%	1%	1%	57%	7%
United Kingdom, Channel Islands and Isle of Man	2%	5%	1%	6%	2%	5%
South Eastern Europe	2%	2%	1%	0%	0%	1%
South America	2%	1%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Mainland South-East Asia	1%	1%	10%	1%	1%	2%
Eastern Europe	1%	1%	0%	0%	0%	1%
Western Europe	1%	1%	0%	1%	1%	1%
Southern Asia	1%	1%	28%	0%	1%	3%
Chinese Asia (includes Mongolia)	1%	1%	4%	6%	1%	3%
Japan and the Koreas	1%	0%	1%	1%	0%	1%
Northern America	1%	0%	0%	1%	0%	1%
Central and West Africa	1%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
North Africa	0%	0%	1%	0%	0%	0%
Central America	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Other	1%	3%	10%	1%	2%	3%
TOTAL N	62,948	12,138,656	2,027,838	6,933,711	2,238,735	23,401,891

*Place of Birth categories at 2 Digit level of classification
Data Source: Census of Population and Housing, 2016, TableBuilder

By and large, Adventism is socially and theologically conservative. While often preserving aspects of this social and theological conservatism, many Seventh-day

Adventist churches are embracing more contemporary worship styles. A number of habits set Seventh-day Adventists apart from other Protestant denominations. The most obvious is that Adventists worship on the Sabbath. They have a high regard for the body and keeping it healthy, and aspire to excellence in education. As discussed in Story 2, the Adventist church has a form of worship and teaching that is reproduced in very similar ways around the globe. This chapter will start with an introduction to the theory and theology of Advent/waiting before exploring how some of these Adventist distinctives help characterize the way Adventists wait and reveal what they love.

3.2. Waiting

Advent, in the Western church, is the period of four weeks before Christmas in which the church retrospectively re-enacts waiting for the Christ-child, and looks forward with longing for His return. By remembering that God kept His promise to Israel through the provision of His Son, Christians remind themselves that His promise to return is also sure. This tension—between sorrowful waiting and joyful hope—is the heart of the season of Advent. The Church of England’s summary of the season is that “the characteristic note of Advent is ... expectation”. It is this future ‘Advent’ that is referenced in the denominational name ‘Seventh-day Adventists’. While they don’t have a seasonal church calendar like more traditional Christian denominations, the Seventh-day Adventists have Advent written all over them. An Advent sensibility is core to their identity; they are ‘Adventists’—waiting is what they do.

While I was recruiting churches for this project, I was waiting for the arrival of my own first-born child. Despite the suggestions of philosophically inclined men about the intimacy of pregnancy (e.g. Sloterdijk on the womb (Mostafa, 2012)), I was overwhelmed by the mystery of it, by the growing stranger in my belly, who I loved but did not know. I could not speed up the process of growth or birth through my own interventions, I could not press pause on proceedings until I had conducted a satisfactory quantity of fieldwork. The schedule for the arrival of my child was clearly out of my control. This is true also of Advent—both in the pragmatic sense of Mary’s pregnancy, but also as Israel waited for the Messiah. Pregnancy is also the metaphor Paul uses to describe what it is like to wait for the return of Jesus:

We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labour pains until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies. For in hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what is seen? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience. (Romans 8:22–25, NRSV)

This sense that things happen in God’s power and timing—and not through one’s own will or skill—is often represented in the stories I was told about waiting. Even when participants agitated for visas or jobs, they understood their success or failure as a matter of God’s provision.

The Roman Catholic theologian Hans Urs Von Balthassar suggests that patience is the ‘basic constituent of Christianity’:

the power to wait, to persevere, to hold out, to endure to the end, not to transcend one’s own limitations, not to force issues by playing the hero or the titan, but to practice the virtue that lies beyond heroism, the meekness of the lamb that is led. (Von Balthassar, 1994, p. 36–37)

Yet, this is not to say that this waiting is or must be some kind of mystic, serene process. It must also allow for expressions of Christian waiting that follow the description of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the Lutheran pastor-theologian imprisoned by the Nazis:

The only ones who can wait are people who carry restlessness around with them and people who look up with reverence to the greatest in the worlds. Thus, Advent can be celebrated only by those whose souls give them no peace, who know that they are poor and incomplete, and who sense something of the greatness that is supposed to come. (Bonhoeffer, 2010, p. 6)

This sense of waiting for greatness is characteristic of many of the Seventh-day Adventists I interacted with. Here at length is the great Adventist prophetess, Ellen G. White, reflecting on a verse from Lamentations and describing the appropriate shape of Adventist waiting:

It is good that a man should both hope and quietly wait for the salvation of the Lord. Lamentations 3:26.

There are precious promises in the Scriptures to those who wait upon the Lord. We all desire an immediate answer to our prayers, and we are tempted to become discouraged if our prayer is not immediately answered. Now my experience has taught me that this is a great mistake. The delay is for our special benefit. Our faith has a chance to be tested to see whether it is true, sincere, or changeable like the waves of the sea. We must bind ourselves upon the altar with the strong cords of faith and love, and let patience have her perfect work. Faith strengthens through continual exercise.

We must pray more and in faith. We must not pray and then run away as though afraid we should receive an answer. God will not mock us. He will answer if we watch unto prayer, if we believe we receive the things we ask for, and keep believing and never lose patience in believing. This is watching unto prayer. We guard the prayer of faith with expectancy and hope. We must wall it in with assurance and be not faithless, but believing. The fervent prayer of the righteous is never lost. The answer may not come according as we expected, but it will come, because God's word is pledged.

We need a calm waiting upon God. The need of this is imperious. It is not the noise and bustle we make in the world which proves our usefulness. See how silently God works! ... Those who desire to labour with God have need of His Spirit every day; they need to walk and labour in meekness and humility of spirit, without seeking to accomplish extraordinary things, satisfied to do the work before them and doing it faithfully. Men may not see or appreciate their efforts, but the names of these faithful children of God are written in heaven among His noblest workers, as scattering His seed in view of a glorious harvest.

Wait for the Lord, not in fretful anxiety, but in undaunted faith and unshaken trust. (White, 1961, p. 129)

White's call to wait calmly contrasts with Bonhoeffer's sense of the restlessness of the ones who wait. And yet, the picture she paints of being bound to the altar by the "strong cords of faith and love" (White, 1961, p. 129) hints at the way a certain restlessness ought to be controlled and directed through prayerful, faithful work. While she characterizes believing as waiting and being bound, she also calls on the believer to "walk and labor in meekness and humility of spirit" avoiding the temptation of working for greatness and recognition, but instead "satisfied to do the work before them and doing it faithfully" (White, 1961, p. 129). Two centuries earlier, the poet John Milton wrote of his frustration at the blindness that had overtaken his body, wondering how he was going to be able to do the things he felt called to do, but he concludes that "They also serve who only stand and wait" (Milton, 2001 [1655]).

When introducing the anthropological collection *Waiting*, Ghassan Hage notes that waiting "pervades social life" and suggests that the value of examining waiting lies in asking "what kind of waiting is exhibited in the phenomenon that one is examining?" (2009, p. 1). It is the task of this chapter to provide descriptions of some of Adventist participants' experiences of waiting and to discuss in what ways these experiences conform to or confound what might be described as an Adventist disposition of waiting. Furthermore, this project seeks to answer the question; how does this kind of waiting tell us what a person loves?

In that same collection, John Rundell points out that "we all wait for futures—yet not for the same ones, nor in the same way, nor at the same tempo" (2009, p. 51). Peter Dwyer proposes that one way of distinguishing between different ways of waiting is between waiting that is 'situational' and waiting that is 'existential'. Whereas situational waiting is engaged in the world, embedded in time and relationship "and never passive" (Dwyer, 2009, p. 19), existential waiting is "seemingly removed from time or, rather, from the meanings ... accorded to time in conventional Western settings" as when one's being is "encompassed by an uncertain future" (Dwyer, 2009, p. 21). He starts his article poetically, with a quote from Psalm 130, which I think is worth discussing in order to draw attention to his conclusion that such categories should be crossed precisely because the distinction between these categories is "personally experienced and context dependent". Dwyer only quotes verses 5–6, but I present the Psalm here in full;

Psalm 130

A song of Ascents

¹Out of the depths I cry to you, O Lord.

²Lord, hear my voice!

Let your ears be attentive
to the voice of my supplications!

³If you, O Lord, should mark iniquities,
Lord, who could stand?

⁴But there is forgiveness with you,
so that you may be revered.

⁵I wait for the Lord, my soul waits,
and in his word I hope;

⁶my soul waits for the Lord
more than those who watch for the morning,
more than those who watch for the morning.

⁷O Israel, hope in the Lord!

For with the Lord there is steadfast love,
and with him is great power to redeem.

⁸It is he who will redeem Israel
from all its iniquities.

(Psalm 130, NRSV)

It may seem to the casual reader that the Psalmist is easily, categorically, in a state of what Dwyer would call “existential waiting,” yearning for an uncertain future. But that would fail to recognise the way the Psalmist echoes great Old Testament themes about the Lord, His promises and His faithfulness. When the Psalmist declares “I wait for the Lord, my soul waits, and in his word I hope; my soul waits for the Lord more than those who watch for the morning,” they are reminding themselves that, even if they are feeling deeply and profoundly lost, they have past evidence that He is as faithful as the dawn. If not certainty, this perhaps speaks of at least a kind of certitude based on past experience. It is this sense of the Psalmist relating to God through history

(both personal and national history) and the way in which they speak to God, that confounds Dwyer's categorisation; for it seems to fit the category of "situational waiting," in which waiting is "embedded in time and relationship" (2009, p. 21).

It is the argument of this thesis that the habits of the Christian are influenced through reading passages like this. By rehearsing the biblical narratives of waiting through the history of Israel and the Christian church in worship and church practice, Christians form habits of living and practice interpreting their own lives. If the Christian experience is one of embracing liminality (cf., Turner, 2002 [1969]), then this Advent sensibility is perhaps one of the principal ways in which such liminality is embodied.

This chapter examines some of the liturgical habits of Adventists that shape their worship and daily lives and are bound up in this sense of right waiting—of being always ready for the return of Jesus. This first migration story, belonging to Juliette, who moved to Australia from Mauritius in her late teens, introduces three aspects of Adventist waiting. First, it shows us how Sabbath attendance was necessary, but not sufficient for Juliette's sense of herself as a genuine Adventist believer. Second, it brings up themes about how the work she engages in should be meaningful and, third, she reflects on diet and exercise and care for the body. These practices are ones that prepare her well for Jesus' return—they are a kind of active waiting.

Story 4: Juliette

Juliette is the chair of the social committee at Preston Seventh-day Adventist church. She's warm and full of smiles, and enthusiastically encourages folks to join in community outings and events. She and her sister, who also worships at Preston church, were born in Mauritius and came to Australia as teenagers. Her mother, who followed them to Australia a few years later, has recently passed. Juliette has invited me to her home in the evening during the week. It's a very nicely kept little townhouse in the Eastern suburbs of Melbourne. She is in her early forties, married to an Australian, and it is just the two of them at home.

Juliette's parents separated when Juliette was very little. After the split, her dad came to Australia. He had some brothers here already and he came here for a better life than he could have in Mauritius. Juliette's mum lost contact with him for a

few years. Her father remarried here in Australia and when the girls were nine and twelve he resumed contact. He had decided he wanted his children to come to Australia and he tried to bring them over. Her mother wanted the best for the girls, but they were still young and the girls stayed in Mauritius a few more years: “you can’t just send two kids, just anywhere: a strange country, people we don’t know” (transcript lines 26–27).

Then, when Juliette was about seventeen, a cousin who had also moved to Australia visited them in Mauritius. This gave Juliette, her mum and sister confidence that the girls could come to Australia (as adults and with trustworthy contacts they could reach out they felt safer making the move). There were some family issues in Mauritius that Juliette says “weren’t very nice” and her mum wanted more opportunities for her daughters. The standard of living was better, the opportunities to study and find work were better. Everyone wanted to leave Mauritius, and if you had the opportunity to go, why wouldn’t you? So, at seventeen, Juliette and her sister, who was twenty, flew the eight thousand kilometres across the Indian Ocean to Australia and moved in with their dad. He had sent letters over the years, and Juliette had seen photographs, but she was meeting him for the first time in her memory. Juliette spent her first two years here doing Year 11 and Year 12 at high school. She had learnt English at high school, but could not speak it. She found it hard. She was put in an ESL class to help with English, but her realisation that if she couldn’t speak she wouldn’t have any friends gave her the energy to pick up spoken English in her first year here. Living with her dad was hard; his new wife “was not right in the head”, says Juliette (line 221). So, after a couple of months the girls moved out of their dad’s home and in with their aunty in Preston. After about six more months the girls moved out on their own. They worked and obtained Australian citizenship and after a couple of years, they were able to sponsor their mum to come and join them in Australia.

Juliette was raised an Adventist by her mum in Mauritius. Her dad is not an Adventist. In fact, she can’t remember ever having spoken with him about religion. She thinks maybe his family were Catholic. The church was everything to Juliette, her mum and sister in Mauritius—all their friends and activities. Church in Mauritius included the same elements of Sabbath School and Divine Service but people were more involved. Here, the world seems a little more attractive. Her mother would never miss church—“rain, shine, cyclone”—church was so important to her. When

Juliette first arrived here, she felt like people just came to church and then went straight home. There were no activities or social gatherings. She feels a bit differently now that she's getting more involved. But, she clarifies, she didn't actually stay in the church very long after arriving in Australia, "because mum wasn't here I sort of discovered the world, and yeah, went wild" (lines 145-146). She stopped for about seven years.

Back on Mauritius, Juliette used to watch her cousins get dressed up in make-up and jewellery and go dancing. Her mother wouldn't permit her to go; she was a strict Adventist. But Juliette wanted to, very badly. Occasionally, she would try and get away with things like skipping school, but her mum and the church were very involved in her life. She thinks if she had stayed in Mauritius, even though she was a bit of a rebel, those things probably would have kept her on the straight and narrow. When she came here, church was not a part of her life, she was given more freedom, she chose these things over church. But she says,

You know, I've always believed. It's not like I didn't believe the church, the principles and Seventh-day Adventis[m]. I just wanted to go party.
(lines 251-252)

After finishing school, Juliette did an administration course at TAFE, and has worked in telecommunications for the last 14 years. She thinks she probably could have achieved more if she had worked at being a good student, but she says "I think boys interfered with my life!" (line 632). Her sister continued to go to church. Although, Juliette says it was probably hard for her sister because she is reserved in talking to people. It got easier for her sister to go to church when their mum arrived and she gained strength in having someone to go with. Only a small proportion of Mauritians are Adventists, but everybody, Juliette says is religious. It was very multicultural and home to many of religions, but there was a shared devoutness. It was a real shock to come to Australia and find how few people went to church. Coming to Australia challenged her faith because it became so much easier not to go. Other things get in the way; it's more fun, more attractive to go out than to go to church. Here in Australia, church relationships and friendship networks have been quite separate for Juliette. Outside of church and church events, she doesn't see

church people much. This is in contrast to Mauritius where the two were almost entirely overlapped. People here seem to be “busy in the world”, she says, “crazy busy!” (lines 405–406).

When Juliette’s mum arrived in Australia, she struggled with Juliette’s new way of life; sometimes giving her a big lecture, other times crying as Juliette got ready to go out, she would write verses of Scripture in Juliette’s birthday cards. Juliette found it difficult to go to Preston church, but every now and then she would go to a seminar at a different church or a conference with overseas speakers. On Mauritius, she could not choose to go—she had to—and she wanted to feel like she was in control of the decision to go. After she moved out at twenty-five, she remembers her mum and sister picking her up a couple of times to go to church; not Sabbath School, just the Divine service, and she wouldn’t linger, just go to the service and go straight home. But then she says, things got pretty bad with the partying. She was caught drink driving. And she went to church some more,

So that, too, helped me or something, I don't know. Then I sort of kept going, and then it became a habit, because mum was going to there. Then I used to go to church and then go to the house for lunch, and sort of making it. I used to try to go every Saturday. Because I mean I knew, you know, that's what I'm supposed to do. But I sort of allow[ed] other things to interfere with me. (lines 281–286)

I ask her whether it was the content of the service or the welcome of the people that she most appreciated and she replied,

it was nice to just go somewhere which is nice and peaceful and like I know it's not hurting me and [just somewhere you] might learn something ... it was just for the hour, just to like go, just get away from the craziness. Somewhere quiet and sort of peaceful and, sort of, there's nothing bad, everything's good. (Lines 298–302)

A few years later, she was going to church, but still had lots of external interests in work and her social life. She met Craig, a professional skydiver, in 2001 and they were married in 2007. He is not a believer, but has been made to feel

welcome at church. He knows that church is important to her and that it often takes up most of her Saturday. Sometimes, though, if there are extra things at church on Sunday, she will opt not to go to make sure they get the right balance at home. When they got married in 2007, church threw a kitchen tea for them and she managed to get him along to church. They weren't married in church, but it was important to her that they were married by a pastor. The pastor did some marriage preparation work with them and they ended up getting along pretty well—her husband took him skydiving afterwards to say thanks.

Even though Juliette finds her church relationships are confined to church events, I notice she has some devotional material in her lounge room. She tells me that she does a bit of guided Scripture reading every morning. The book she is reading at the moment is called *Daily Light for your Daily Path*, and she thinks her mum probably gave it to her. She mentions that she sometimes sings from her French hymnal. For the last four years, she has taught the six- to nine-year-olds at Sabbath School, so she doesn't get to participate in the adult studies. Sometimes she will buy the Sabbath School study booklet and read it in bed if she's not exhausted.

She tries to be healthy, not only because of Adventism's stance, but also "just for me anyway" (line 454). She's a member of a gym, which she doesn't go to enough. She laughs and says she's "sponsoring the gym" (line 457). She had the flu recently and decided that she wants to do better at being healthy "because I don't want to be sick and I don't want to be big". Her motivation is two-fold,

So, I kind of want to be healthy, and so I do it for me. But like say then I like the fact that you know the Bible says to be healthy, and that's okay, that you should try to be healthy. I'm not a vegetarian. I try to eat—not to eat a lot of meat, but I live with like a—what does he call himself—a meat-a-tarian, and he does all the cooking. (Lines 462–467)

But when she has choices over food—like when he's out, or if she goes out for dinner, then she will try to eat other things that are vegetarian. She says that she enjoys eating this way because it's what eating was like on Mauritius; there wasn't much meat. She's not much of a cook, Craig does most of the cooking at home, but she does enjoy going to family events and eating lots of beautiful Mauritian food prepared by

others. There's very little of her life now that she feels echoes her Mauritian upbringing. Just church. She is coming up to the 24th anniversary of her arrival in Australia and she says she's "more Aussie than anything now" (line 493).

Juliette and Craig went on a holiday to Mauritius in 2010. It was good, she says, but because they only stayed with her cousin for a couple of nights and spent most of their time in a hotel, Craig's experience was of a beach holiday. Juliette has been back four or five times since coming to Australia, but she says she's changed, she's a different person now: "I feel like I'm not one of them anymore" (line 541). She rephrases it a moment later, "here is home, so there is not home anymore" (line 551). Often her holidays have only briefly included visits to her old church and neighbourhood, and made the most out of spending time on the beach or in the Seychelles. There's not really anyone left there that she catches up with. When she first came to Australia, she wrote lots of letters, to her mum and to other friends, but life just got in the way and she lost touch. She has just got her own computer, though, and is excited about her new Facebook account. She's already connected with one old friend from church in Mauritius.

She recently, very happily, took a redundancy package from work. The company she had been working for had been bought out by another company and she was not enjoying the new management and the work she was being offered. Now, she is rethinking what she wants to do and is considering going back to study teaching. She likes working with the kids at church. She had hoped to get a job working in administration in a school and then studying to become a teacher. Juliette found work, instead in a doctors' office looking after injury management and pre-employment medical checks. She likes her colleagues—"they're very good people". But she's still thinking of schools, and managed to get a job interview at the Adventist school Gilson College a few weeks ago. But the pay is less, the hours are long, and it would be a long commute compared to her current position, so even if they offered her the position she thinks she would say no this time. She spoke with an Adventist school principal recently when he came to preach at Preston and he told her that,

teaching is the second-best job in the world. Apparently, parents are the first one. So, I figured, since I'm not going to be a parent, maybe I can become a teacher. (lines 695–696)

Her comment about not being a parent is delivered matter-of-factly, and it's off-topic for my project so I do not pry, but it's a comment that sounds loaded with story. She has called Deakin University, which is close by and is thinking through the workload and budget implications of picking up study while working. She thinks her current workplace would be flexible. She's not sure she wants to start a teaching career at 50, but even at 50 she says she would have at least 15 years of work left ahead of her. It's a hard decision.

3.3. Sabbath Worship as Active Waiting

My first contact with the Adventists was a cold contact letter I sent to their Pastor. He did not respond to my written communication, but when I followed up the letter with a telephone call he was all enthusiasm and welcome. He himself is a migrant, having come to Australia from Mauritius many years ago. He quickly paired me up with a sort of minder, Sandy. On first introduction, I wondered whether her role was to control my access to the congregation and its activities. But over the course of eight months worshipping in the congregation, Sandy took me under her wing and acted as my friend and advocate in the congregation. She is a gently spoken woman a decade or so older than myself. Sandy works in sales, but always seems to be deeply interested in her interlocutor and to always speak from the depths of her heart. She defended me against a very evangelistic community, carefully warning people that I was not there to be converted, but to do my research.

The church is modest, built of red brick with a pointed gable. There is an electronic sign that scrolls relevant information, like service times, across its screen. It is on a smallish block on a residential street, just off the high street. The lawn is neatly mown, a few trees provide some shade, and there are some pot-plants providing additional greenery. It has that look, common to churches in Australia, of being tenderly cared for on a tight budget. Every Saturday, there is an enthusiastic welcome from at

least one congregant waiting to meet you outside the front door. Often, it was Mark, a convert to Adventism from a Lebanese background, who grasped my hand and enthusiastically wished me a “Happy Sabbath!”, handing me the weekly notice sheet and inviting me inside.

Worshipping on the Sabbath is a key part of Adventist identity. The ‘seventh day’ is the Sabbath (Saturday). In the creation story recounted in Genesis, God creates the world in six days, and then, on the seventh day, He rested:

By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so, on the seventh day he rested from all his work. And God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he had rested from all the work of creating that he had done. (Genesis 2:2, NRSV)

People are created in the image of God, and part of the way the Israelites reflect His image, is to work for six days and rest on the seventh. Later, when the Israelites have fled slavery in Egypt, God gives Moses the Law, the heart of which are the Ten Commandments. The third commandment enshrines this habit and commands that the Israelites are to “remember the Sabbath Day and keep it holy” (Exodus 20:8, NRSV). To this day, Jews worship on the Sabbath and traditionally shun anything that might be considered work. Seventh-day Adventists do much the same; rest for all is so important to a number of the parishioners I speak with, that they will not shop on Saturdays as an act of protest against others being required to work. I ask a parishioner at one point about what they think of the fact that I am here on Sabbath working at my research amongst them, and the response was simply that my being there could only be a good thing; I was lucky to be able to do both at once. As for Jews, the Sabbath starts at sunset on Friday and continues to sunset on Saturday. Adventists generally embrace technology in any way that it can assist them distribute Adventists materials and Scripture, and there are a number of smart phone apps to help Adventists keep track of the arrival of the Sabbath.

Sabbath worship is liturgical in the sense that it is a regular habit that remembers a biblical narrative; it is the weekly re-enactment of the creation story. Max, an older gentleman, an elder in the church, and a migrant from Mauritius, talks about the necessity of Sabbath worship as a recognition of God as the Creator:

You've got to decide whether you obey the commandments as well, including the Sabbath day, because the Sabbath is only one of the Ten Commandments, and I did realise that most Christians do believe in not killing your brother and not ... committing adultery ... and so forth. They seem to have a little bit of difficulty when it comes to the Sabbath day. [They] say oh well, you know, Jesus changed that. But in fact, the Bible doesn't say that because of the resurrection of Christ on Sunday, everything suddenly was changed. The Bible doesn't say that, though we respect—I agree that Jesus rose on Sunday. But that day was not really blessed by God when he created everything, heaven and earth, and the fact that he himself rested on the Sabbath day, and hallowed it and blessed it. He didn't say that okay, you receive blessings, special blessings—you are blessed every day, you can be a blessing to anybody on any day. But there is something special about that day, because it commemorates God as our creator.

We remember that He is our creator, and that's how we were studying in the lesson not too long ago. Somebody brought up the fact that if you don't accept that God is your creator, or if you don't accept the Sabbath day that reminds us that God is our creator, then you don't have to accept that God is your creator. If God is not the creator, then you can believe anything you like, you're free to do whatever you like. (Interview with Max; lines 424–447)

Among other things, it reminds the worshipper of the need for both work and rest.

Adventist's commitment to the Sabbath is in contrast to most Christians, who worship on Sunday, the first day of the week. Sunday worship is a remembrance of the story of the resurrection of Jesus. Jesus died close to sundown as the Sabbath approached. His followers entombed him and rested on the Sabbath as Jewish law demanded. On the morning of the first day of the week, the women coming to embalm his body found the tomb empty. Sunday worship is also liturgical in the sense that it is a regular habit that remembers a biblical narrative; it is the weekly re-enactment of the excitement of discovering the empty tomb. However, it is not appropriate to make a completely binary distinction between Adventist Sabbath worship being focussed on

the creating Father and Sunday worship on the risen Son. Ellen White puts a Christological spin on the Sabbath. While I was with the Adventists, they gifted me a number of her most influential texts, including *Desire of the Ages* (White, 1990 [1898]). In it she suggests that the Sabbath “calls our thoughts to nature, and brings us into communion with the Creator” but notes that:

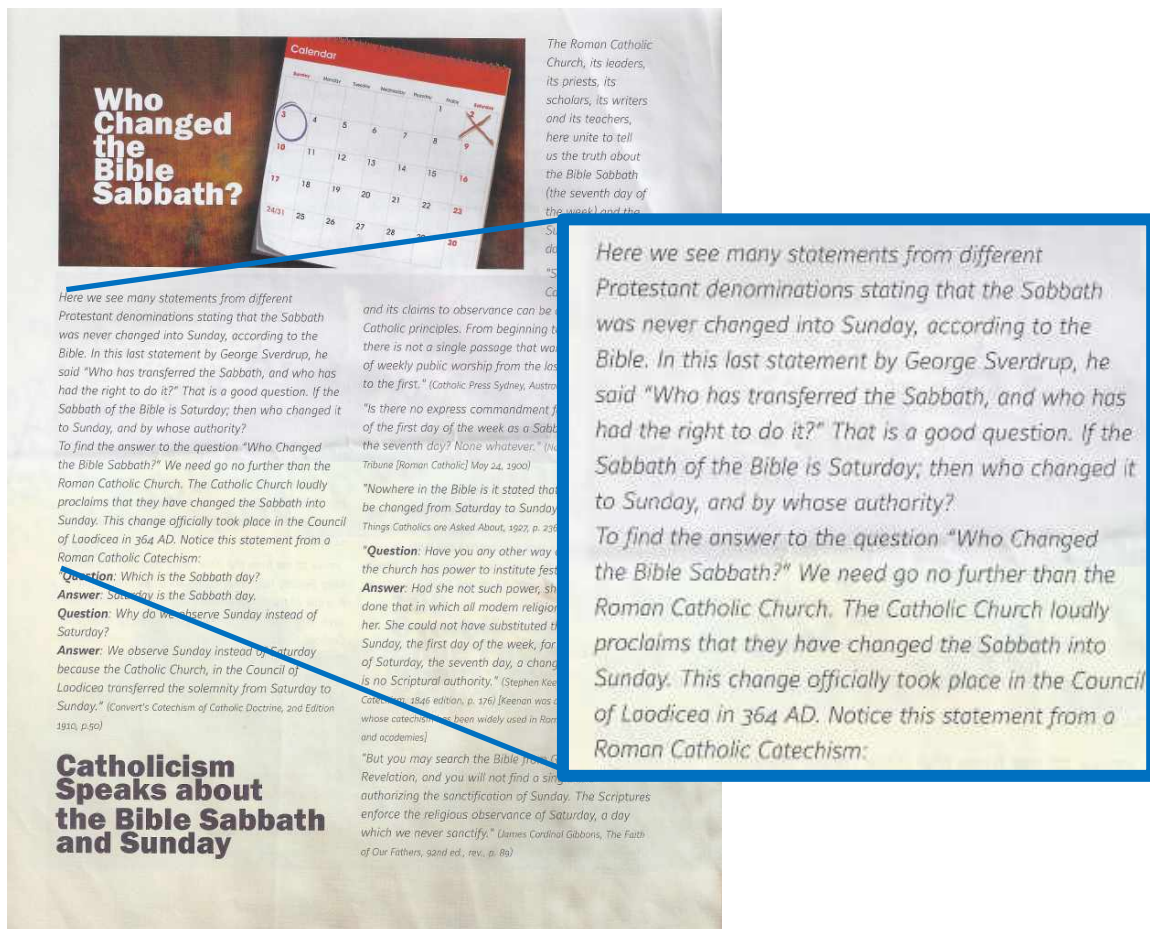
All things were created by the Son of God. “In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God ... All things were made by Him and without Him was not anything made that was made” John 1:1–3. And since Sabbath is a memorial of the work of creation, it is a token of the love and power of Christ. (White, 1990 [1898], p. 152, ellipsis in original)

Furthermore, she turns to Gospel texts in which Jesus gathered food and healed people in a way that his contemporaries thought broke the Sabbath commandment not to work. White shows how Jesus, who claimed to be “Lord of the Sabbath” taught His disciples that “service of God” and “doing well” (e.g., healing) is the object of the Sabbath. She argues that He did not break the Sabbath, but fulfilled it:

“Wherefore the Son of man is Lord of the Sabbath”. These words are full of instruction and comfort. Because the Sabbath was made for man, it is the Lord’s day. It belongs to Christ. For “all things were made by Him; and without Him was not anything made that was made” John 1:3. Since He made all things, He made the Sabbath. By Him it was set aside as a memorial of the work of creation. It points to Him as both the Creator and the Sanctifier. It declares that He who created all things in heaven and in earth, and by whom all things hold together, is the head of the church, and that by His power we are reconciled to God. (White 1990 [1898], p. 157)

So, while the Sabbath recalls and re-enacts the creation narrative, for Adventists it also points to and recalls the redeeming work of Jesus. They mourn the fact that most others who call themselves Christians fail to worship on and keep the Sabbath. In fact, the turn to Sunday worship is commonly attributed by Adventists to “the Catholic Church, in the Council of Laodicea” (*The Lost Day of History*, referencing “Convert’s Catechism of Catholic Doctrine”, 2nd edition 1910, p. 50”) (see Image 2).

**Image 2: Excerpt from the brochure "The Lost Day of History" published by Cornerstone Ministries, Cann River, VIC
www.cornerstone-ministries.org**



It is true that the Council of Laodicea enforced the keeping of Sunday rest. Yet there is no clarification in the document that at the time of the Council of Laodicea in 363–364AD the Catholic Church was the only church; the Reformation had not yet happened and Adventism was approximately 1500 years from existing. Rather, this argument carries the sense in which the early church was true, was corrupted into the Catholic Church, and that Adventism represents a return to the original faithful practice of the first apostles. One parishioner suggested that those of us engaged in Sunday worship would be saved, but only “as those escaping through the flames.” Much better, he thought, to realise the truth and return to Sabbath worship. The comment about “those escaping through the flames” is a reference to 1 Corinthians 3:10–15, in which the Apostle Paul is warning the Corinthian church to work faithfully, using a metaphor of their works of faith to build the church being like building a house:

According to the grace of God given to me, like a skilled master builder I laid a foundation, and someone else is building on it. Each builder must choose with care how to build on it. For no one can lay any foundation other than the one that has been laid; that foundation is Jesus Christ. Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw—the work of each builder will become visible, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each has done. If what has been built on the foundation survives, the builder will receive a reward. If the work is burned up, the builder will suffer loss; the builder will be saved, but only as through fire. (1 Corinthians 3:10–15, NRSV)

The parishioner can acknowledge that Christians in other denominations are building on the foundation on Jesus, but they are building with wood, hay, and straw, not with precious metals and jewels as Adventists are. They will survive judgement, but only through the flames, not with rewards for their efforts. As Adventists wait for “the Day”—the return of Jesus—they advocate for Sabbath worship as true worship.

In Juliette’s story we saw that Sabbath attendance was absolutely key to satisfying her mother’s and sister’s expectations of Juliette’s salvation, and that Juliette seemed to endorse the truth of that in recounting her experience. But even when she went to the Divine Service out of habit, she ‘let other things interfere’ that seemed to keep her at a distance from full participation or seemed to inhibit a feeling of closeness to God. Later in her story, it seems as though the habit of attendance embeds itself and reinforces her faith.

Part of Adventist’s active waiting is an attempt to persuade non-Adventists of the necessity of Sabbath worship. As I concluded my time worshipping with the Adventists, Sandy, who had been so self-controlled at holding herself back from evangelism to me, handed me that very same piece of Adventist literature. It is a magazine-style treatise on the importance of the Sabbath. It recounts much of what I have discussed above; the Sabbath as part of the Ten Commandments, that Sunday worship is an artefact of the Catholic Church, and that Sabbath worship is the true way to keep God’s commands. The content of the booklet is less interesting to me than the fact Sandy gave it to me. She had been so self-restrained in avoiding proselytising, but in what might have been our final

moments, she could not restrain herself from attempting to share with me the truth about the Sabbath in the hope that I might realise the error of my habit of Sunday worship. I read this act as one of great love. If she really loves me, and she believes that Sabbath worship is so crucial to salvation, she must share that news with me.

3.4. Striving for Your Best Self in Order to Be Always Ready

At the time I conducted my fieldwork, my husband was working in University chaplaincy. One of his students was from an Adventist background and, on hearing that I was working with Preston church, she pointed out that they were the most conservative Adventists in Melbourne. She was keen to make sure that our understanding of Adventism—and of her—was not shaped by the very traditional form of worship and theology I would encounter at Preston.

My habit at Protestant churches in Australia is to wear jeans to Sunday worship. Not jeans with holes, nice ones. Maybe dark denim. And sandals or boots, and a t-shirt that I had paid at least \$30 for. Maybe a jacket or a nice knit. Likewise, Benjamin, who at one year old was about as easy to get dressed as an octopus, I would happily take to church in tracksuit pants and a t-shirt. But this is not the way at Preston church. Most women wore smart dresses or skirt suits, a few wore pant suits, but skirts and dresses were the norm. Apart from a few youngsters in edgier ensembles, the fashion was modest and conservative. Women had their hair and make-up done. Men wore collars and ties, and suits were common. Even little children were dressed in their Sabbath best of little suits and party dresses.

In discussion with congregation members afterwards, they articulated the traditional view that dressing well was a sign of giving God your best and honouring Him. The Protestant culture I grew up in was a reaction against the way in which this theology had been used to exclude people who could not or did not feel comfortable dressing in such a way. Instead, advocating for relaxed dress codes in which everyone would feel welcome and embody the belief that God accepted everyone as they are. However, I cannot fault the Adventists at Preston for moving from ‘present yourself at your best to God’ to ‘you’re unwelcome if you’re not dressed well enough’; I never felt shamed by the way I presented myself and did not witness such happening to other newcomers.

I did, however, hear tales of rebukes made against Adventist women for failing to be properly modest. Peter, a migrant from Romania, matter-of-factly told me he has taken the time to have words with at least one woman about making sure she was dressed appropriately. I do not know how long it takes to transition from 'newcomer' who is extended the grace given to me, to a woman who 'should know better' and receives such a rebuke.

And yet, Anna, a university student who migrated here from Botswana/Zimbabwe with her mother and brother in her teens characterises Preston as "laid back", specifically with regard to clothing.

There are ... older members of the church who, obviously, would not really be comfortable with seeing someone in a very short skirt or whatever but if that was to happen, you wouldn't be (trails off) Someone might speak to you but it won't be in a very firm manner as it would be in Botswana. In Botswana, it could even get to the extent of a very severe speaking-to. (Interview with Anna; lines 479-483)

Tabitha, a young post-graduate student from Botswana, who travels across town from Sunshine to Preston every week, has a similar experience to Anna,

I find people here, like I find them quite relaxed. Whereas, back home it's like you have to look really good ... I guess it's more of a cultural thing. So, we do not wear trousers at church, no, no, no, no. You can wear them at Preston, it's not a problem, but back home, as a woman, they don't expect you to come up wearing trousers and you always have to wear a skirt or a dress. (Interview with Tabitha; lines 322-327)

While Adventist dress codes and Sabbath worship marked out Adventists in Mauritius, Max feels these things pass invisibly under the noses of most Australians. In his home country of Mauritius, it was obvious who was a practicing Adventist; on Saturday, when you went out to the shops or such, you would recognise them because,

They are a bit more dressed up, and they all carry either a hymn book or the Bible or both. Straight away we'll see they are a Seventh-day Adventist. (Interview with Max, lines 285-287)

But in Australia, he says, it does not seem to matter what you are wearing, people do not seem to notice these signs. The habits at Preston church provided different opportunities for different individuals. On the one hand, there is the scope to continue to dress well for church—to bring their best to God. But on the other, it provides people from more conservative backgrounds, with experiences of strong community policing regarding what is worn and with more traditional ideas about gender roles in leadership, greater freedom of dress and more opportunities to participate.

3.5. Caring for Your Body so That You Can Continue to Actively Wait

Seventh-day Adventists may not be well understood by Australians, but they have had a significant impact on the life of so many of us through their food manufacturing company Sanitarium. Their signature breakfast cereal, Weet-Bix, is a cultural icon of similar ubiquity to Vegemite (amongst Anglo Australians, at least). According to the company's website,

Sanitarium Health Food Company was registered as Australia's first health food company in April 1898. It was established as part of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Australia to promote and produce plant-based health foods based on its belief that plant-based diets were originally designed to provide optimal health as outlined in the biblical model (Genesis 1:29). Worldwide, the Church operates health food industries and health-care services based on this philosophy.

(<https://www.sanitarium.com.au/about/sanitarium-story/profits-for-charitable-purposes>)

Sanitarium remains closely connected to the Seventh-day Adventist church and its mission. Helping people in the Australian community live healthy lives is seen as an act of service and, hopefully, a missional activity that will draw people into the Adventist church. Likewise, the private Sydney Adventist Hospital (commonly called 'the San') describes itself and its mission this way,

At Sydney Adventist Hospital, our Mission, "Christianity in Action", defines who we are, what we stand for, and our reason for being here—creating and fostering an environment that guides our work to show that

we care for our patients, our colleagues, our community, and ourselves. In 1903 Sydney Adventist Hospital was founded by the Seventh-day Adventist Church (SDA) for the special purpose of carrying out Christ's Mission of health and healing. Recognising the biblical importance placed on the well-being of the whole person, the SDA Church makes preservation of health and healing of the sick a priority and considers healthcare to be the human expression of Christ's healing ministry.

(Source: <https://www.sah.org.au/our-mission>)

This focus on caring for the body is a distinguishing feature of Seventh-day Adventism. And caring for the body is about making sure that one is 'ready'. Your own body is the first thing you are steward over, you are responsible for its best possible functioning, that you might make the most of your time now, and be poised for Jesus' return; "Christians are privileged to develop their physical and mental powers to the best of their ability and opportunities" (Ministerial Association, 1988, p. 270).

This care is extended through habits such as a vegetarian or vegan diet, regular exercise, drinking lots of water, practicing early bedtimes and getting adequate sleep. Seminars and training about how to care for your physical and mental health are regular parts of the life of Preston Church. Health initiatives, such as building hospitals in developing countries, are regularly integrated into Church mission. Although they cannot be disentangled, it would be simplistic to see these health initiatives as being instrumentalised purely to attract converts; healthy bodies are understood as good in and of themselves. I have also heard it said that if people have healthy bodies, they have more time to turn to Christ, and can give more of their attention to investigating Adventism than they could if they were ill and struggling. The official Adventist website in Australia summarises it in this way,

As Christians, we believe the best way to show our love and respect for God is to be the best we can: physically, mentally, socially and spiritually. We believe that a wholesome lifestyle contributes to good physical health, which enhances a person's mental and spiritual potential. (Source: <https://adventist.org.au/>)

While I was attending Preston Church, there was a great deal of enthusiasm for the Complete Health Improvement Program (CHIP). CHIP is “a four-week lifestyle education program that aims to help adults reduce their risk of lifestyle-related chronic disease such as type 2 diabetes, heart disease and some types of cancers.”¹⁴ Seventh-day Adventist volunteers are trained to deliver the program to the community, including some members of the Preston congregation, and the program met with near universal enthusiasm. The Lifestyle Medicine Institute sponsors a column in the monthly internal Adventist magazine, *Record*, covering subjects such as how to swap out unhealthy foods for healthy alternatives (*Record* Dec 15, 2012), tips for going plant based (*Record* Sept 7, 2013), and CHIP success stories (*Record* Dec 21, 2013).

The commitment to vegetarianism is based, primarily, on two biblical narratives. The first, as referenced by Sanitarium, is that of the creation story in Genesis, in which Adam and Eve are told:

“Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.” God said, “See, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit; you shall have them for food. And to every beast of the earth, and to every bird of the air, and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food.” And it was so. (Genesis 1:28–30)

The second, is the story of the prophet Daniel, whose story is told in the Old Testament book of Daniel. Daniel was a Jewish man, taken as a slave to the court of the Babylonian Emperor Nebuchadnezzar, when Israel was exiled to Babylon. Daniel and his three friends have the abundance of the food of the court to indulge in, but they refuse, insisting on only eating vegetables. The palace master is worried that this diet might make Daniel and his friends weak, and lead to his own punishment by the king. So, Daniel strikes a bet with him, suggesting that he allows them their preferred diet of vegetables and water for ten days and to see if it makes them weak or strong. At the end of the ten days they appear stronger and fatter than the other men in custody eating the

¹⁴ <https://www.sanitarium.com.au/about/sanitarium-story/lifestyle-medicine-institute>

royal rations and so they are allowed to continue in their habit. God gives them great wisdom and they rise in favour with King Nebuchadnezzar. Much ink is spilled over the interpretation of this story and the justification for using it as a template for vegetarianism.

Many of my participants, however, share with me the well-known (among Adventists) secret that lots of Adventists are only aspirational vegetarians, or vegetarians who are quite happy to eat meat sometimes, or even declare the whole vegetarianism commitment to be unnecessary. In Juliette's story above, she said;

So, I kind of want to be healthy, and so I do it for me. But like say then I like the fact that you know the Bible says to be healthy, and that's okay, that you should try to be healthy. I'm not a vegetarian. I try to eat—not to eat a lot of meat, but I live with like a—what does he call himself—a meat-tarian, and he does all the cooking. (Interview with Juliette, lines 462–467)

But when she has choices over food—like when he's out, or if she goes out for dinner, then she will try to eat other things that are vegetarian. She says that she enjoys eating this way because it is what eating was like on Mauritius; there just wasn't much meat. Anna, in her early twenties, is almost finished her University degree in speech pathology. She is bright and articulate and has a soft spot for my one year old, Benjamin. I invited her to lunch and prepared a vegetarian meal, but in conversation Anna reassures me she's not a vegan or vegetarian. She follows some Old Testament cleanliness directives and does not eat pork or shellfish, but she does not keep a full kosher kitchen following all the Levitical rules (e.g. keeping meat and dairy separate).

Another member of the Adventist church who held up as important, but did not necessarily stick to, a plant-based diet, was Sandy. She was born in Lower Hutt, New Zealand, and moved to Australia as a young woman twenty-odd years ago. She took a camera for me as part of the auto-photography task. This photo (Image 3) is of a collection of soft toy sheep and lambs.

Image 3: Sandy's collection of lamb toys



Her reflections on her affection for the adorable furry creatures that also taste really good are humorous,

I love sheep and I love lambs, and I like to eat them too. I try and be a vegetarian now, but I must admit, I do like the taste of lamb. I haven't had it, but I can tell you I love it—it's beautiful meat. (Interview with Sandy; lines 318–320)

Sandy confides to me that “there's a lot of Adventists that do eat meat, trust me” (line 658). She tells me there is nothing wrong with eating meat—“Jesus ate meat” (line 661)—but if you look forward to heaven, you won't be able to eat meat “because you can't have lamb because you can't kill the lamb” (line 668). She seems pretty conflicted about it, saying,

And there's a lot of health advantages to not having the meat too—a lot of health advantages—it has cholesterol in it; you don't get cholesterol in plant food. So that's why Seventh-day Adventists are one of these sects—they're a people that live very long because the majority of them don't eat

meat and they have a plant-based diet, and it's actually been proven that you can live up to 10 years longer. I have to get off the meat, but I only have meat when I'm relapsing and I'm freaking out on something, then I'll have meat, but that only happens every now and then. I'm better off not having the meat. Because I just did the CHIP course, so we're going back onto a vegetarian diet; and it's worth it. (Lines 670–679)

She goes on to talk about how she had a little lamb toy as a child and so it's meaningful to her and she purchases toy sheep and items with sheep motifs wherever she sees them. She aspires with such longing to a proper Adventist vegetarianism. Her meat consumption is a negative symptom of 'relapsing' and 'freaking out'.

To say Adventism is about being a vegetarian would be very wrong. The vast majority of the Adventists I met, would put Jesus and His immanent return at the centre of their understanding of being Adventist. But this practice of vegetarianism and healthfulness is such a visible part of Adventist practice and outreach that it takes on a very strong significance in Adventist identity—both from within and outside the Adventist community. Eating is such a significant part of our daily practice and, when immersed in Adventism, what you choose to eat is a regular reminder of the stories of Genesis and Daniel, whether you choose to eat meat and animal products or not. This act of thoughtfulness in eating shows not that you love animals (although you might), or that you care about over consumption and climate change (although you might), but that you care for the one body you have been given by God and that you seek to be a good steward of this gift as you wait for Jesus' return.

3.6. Conclusion

This chapter has introduced you to my Seventh-day Adventist participants and shows you that many of my participants are still very much “on the way home”; they are waiting by preparing themselves and others, often with a sense of urgency. As John the Baptist's Advent cry was to Israel to, “Prepare Ye the way of the Lord”, here is a community that dedicates themselves to that preparation. They long to see all Christians convinced of the rightness of Sabbath worship, they strive for lives of excellence in their work and study, and work at maintaining the healthfulness of their bodies.

Light-heartedly, I can attest to my own 'advent' sensibility while engaging in fieldwork. There is a sense in which I spent my time in the field patiently waiting, engaging in work that sometimes seemed futile but convinced that when worked out with 'fear and trembling'¹⁵ it would ultimately be fruitful. Not with the assumption that this fruitfulness would equate to worldly success, but fruitful in that through these experiences I would grow in character and faithfulness.

¹⁵ Philippians 2:12



4. Christmas

4.1. Introduction

My son is easily overstimulated. Christmas is a challenge for us to manage because the intensity of bodily, sensory and emotional stimuli is overwhelming. It is all at once full of wonderful, new, and indulgent things, and also full of unfamiliarity (especially if we are travelling) and the loss of regular routine. It sends his head spinning with wild excitement and frantic disorientation. As his mother, I do my best to contain his exuberance and the excessive stimulation of Christmastide, but I am not sure this sensory intensity is entirely inappropriate given that this is the season in which Christians recall that God took on human form. In parks all around Australia, people gather for Carols by Candlelight and sing of the baby Jesus:

Veiled in flesh, the Godhead see
Hail the incarnate Deity
Pleased as man with man to dwell (*sic*)
Jesus, our Emmanuel!
("Hark! The Herald Angels Sing", Wesley, 1739)

The babe Jesus, we sing, is God "veiled in flesh". He is deity incarnate, 'enfleshed'. He is our Emmanuel, which is Hebrew for "God with us". If liturgy in general is about the embodied act of remembering, retelling, and re-enacting stories from the past, then Christmas is a moment to particularly focus on the nature of that embodiment, or as Christians might talk about it, incarnation.

In our discussion of liturgy and *habitus* we have explored the ways in which our habits can be both deliberate and unselfconscious. This picture, therefore, seeks to point out how the traditional liturgy of the church and its concomitant images and metaphors of a light coming in the cold dark depths of midwinter are remembered and re-enacted (despite the environmental and calendrical dissonance) and also lived out and experienced in ways that create new habits. How do these bodily sensations fit together with faith and belief? The relationship between the mind, body and spirit is not straightforward either from within a religious context or from without.

Harrison Warren, writing about liturgy from within the Christian tradition, suggests that Christians are often seen to either think too much about the body (e.g., with an overemphasis in sexuality) or not enough about bodies (e.g., by focussing on the life of the Spirit at the expense of the body). Neither of these criticisms are completely fair, she says:

At root, Christianity is a thoroughly embodied faith. We believe in the incarnation—Christ came in a body. ... In the Scriptures we find that the body is not incidental to our faith, but integral to our worship. ... Our bodies and souls are inseparable, and therefore what we do with our bodies and what we do with our souls are always intertwined. (Harrison Warren, 2016, p. 38–39)

The Nativity is an incredibly physical, and emotional story in which transcendence and immanence are held in spectacular tension. At Christmas we remember that “the Word became flesh and made his dwelling amongst us” (John 1:14a, NRSV). These brief words from the start of the Gospel of John are a summary of Christmas. It is the most existential migration narrative in the whole of Scripture—God left heaven to dwell on earth amongst us (cf. Lee, 2004). John does not provide much more in the way of material detail about exactly how this occurs, and the Evangelist Mark skips over the Nativity entirely. This story of the birth of the God-child, which is perhaps the most well-known in all of Scripture is only recorded in two of the four Gospel accounts. Luke, a doctor, listened to the stories of Jesus’ mother Mary and records at the end of his retelling of Jesus’ birth that “Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart” (Luke 2:20 NRSV). She told him about the angel that visited her, before she was married, to tell her she would become pregnant. Mary was understandably doubtful, because she was a virgin, but the angel told her that her relative Elizabeth, thought to be barren and too old for childbearing, had conceived in old age. Neither menopause nor virginity it seems can stop God getting you knocked up. Mary offered herself as the Lord’s servant and rushed off to visit Elizabeth. These two women at opposite ends of the fertility spectrum—one young and unmarried, the other old and past the point of hopefulness—celebrated together.

Luke tells us that Mary visits Elizabeth when she was in her sixth month and stays for about three months. I imagine she was there for Elizabeth’s labour and

perhaps it was she that tells Luke about the birth of Elizabeth and Zechariah's son—the child who would grow to be John the Baptist. Elizabeth's husband, Zechariah, was a priest in the temple. He too was visited by an angel, while he was alone burning incense in the temple, and the angel told him he would have a son. Zechariah struggled to believe and was struck mute as a sign that the angel speaks the truth. At his babe's circumcision, when Zechariah confirms Elizabeth's declaration that the child should be called John as the angel had commanded, his tongue is loosed. Then, he prophesies that his child will be a prophet of the Most High, preparing the way of the Lord. Luke goes on to show us that this Lord he prepares the way for is the babe just reaching the end of its third month in Mary's belly. She probably cannot even feel him move yet. She may not even be showing.

While Zechariah was a priest, Mary's Joseph was a descendent of David. He lived modestly and worked with his hands as a carpenter, but he was from the royal line. When a Roman Census was called, he took his pregnant fiancé with him to be counted in his ancestral home of Bethlehem. He had thought to divorce her quietly but Joseph, too, had a visit from an angel and was convinced to keep her and the child. The child was born in Bethlehem, the town of David. Traditionally, we represent his birth as taking place in a stable, and the text does say that Mary “wrapped him in swaddling clothes and placed him in a manger” (Luke 2:7), but there is some academic debate about exactly where and in what circumstances he would have been birthed (e.g., Bailey, 2008). A whole host of angels visited shepherds in the fields and sent them to visit this baby, declaring him to be their Saviour, Christ the Lord. The term ‘Christ’ is the Greek translation of the Hebrew ‘Messiah’, which means ‘anointed one’, and is used to describe God's chosen king.

Some months, or perhaps even a year or two later, kings from the East, also called the Magi, arrive. They had followed an unusual star, and it led them to Bethlehem and to Jesus and his mother Mary. They provided the baby with gifts—gold, frankincense, and myrrh—which foreshadow his role as king (wealth in the form of gold), priest (frankincense is used in the temple), and sacrifice (myrrh is an embalming perfume). This visit is commonly celebrated on January the 6th. In Orthodox churches, it is often when Christmas is celebrated and gifts are exchanged, just as gifts were given to Jesus by the Magi. In the Western church, this narrative is remembered in the

celebration of Epiphany, and the focus is on God being recognised by the Gentile (i.e., non-Jewish) Magi.

There is constant tension in this story between the poverty of Jesus' birth and the grandeur of his being; there is tension between Old Testament prophecy and the real lived presence of a child. The tension between finding the Christian God in texts or in lived experience—between transcendence and immanence—is characterised by Matthew Engelke as “the problem of presence” (2007). Bialecki reflects that “these two solutions, a God inscribed in a text and a God who discloses himself through the senses, are not the only solutions, and they are not even mutually exclusive” (2017b, p. 6). This tension is not a failure of theological clarity, but the embodiment of the tensions Christians are trained to try and hold together. One of the narratives that Christians re-tell liturgically that attempts to hold together the complexity of trusting the prophetic word of Scripture with lived experience is the Christmas story. Tanya Luhrmann has recently argued that holding onto this tension is not easy, but is hard work and requires effort. She reflects,

Faith is about holding certain commitments front and centre in one's understanding of reality even when the empirical facts seem to contradict them. That is why faith takes work and why faith changes the faithful. Yet it can be easy to forget that faith is for the faithful full of complexity and contradiction because our modern social world predisposes us to think in such flat-footed ways about belief. (Luhrmann, 2018, p. 303)

The hard work of faith is reinforced on a weekly basis as Christians gather together and rehearse the stories of Scripture in embodied ways. In the chapter I will do three things. First, I will give you a very brief overview of the shape of the Catholic church in Australia. Second, I will introduce you to the church of Sacred Heart and try and help you feel what it is like to participate in Mass. And third, I will share the stories of a number of migrants who have passed through it and reflect on how they hold together this tension between transcendence and immanence.

4.2. Catholics in Australia

Catholicism arrived in Australia with the First Fleet, mostly in the persons of Irish convicts. The first Australian Mass was celebrated by an emancipated convict, Fr James Dixon, in 1803, but it took almost forty years before priests were formally dispatched from the UK to Australia (Dixon, 2005). While the first Australian bishop was English, most of the priests serving in Australia were Irish. Australian-born priests only began to outnumber Irish born priests in the 1930s. The Catholic population in Australia was predominantly of Irish heritage until the 1950s (Dixon, 2005). The ruling class in Australia was English (and, if religious, Anglican). The Catholic church with its Irish heritage was by-and-large working class. Catholicism and a commitment to left-wing labour politics have historically gone hand-in-hand in Australia.

After the two World Wars, there was significant migration to Australia, and many of the source countries had sizeable Catholic populations. Australia's Catholic churches were challenged to provide a spiritual home to migrants from Italy, Malta, and continental Europe. In the early 1960s, one of the outcomes of Vatican II was the decision to celebrate Mass in the vernacular (Dixon, 2005). As well as offering Mass in English, the Australian Catholic church started sourcing priests from these countries of origin and began offering Mass in other languages as well. Integration was rocky, but the Catholic church's theological commitment to the unity of the Catholic church meant that post-war migrants (and those that followed) were accommodated within existing parishes and congregations. Since the post-war period the Australian Catholic church has also welcomed migrants from the Middle East, South-East Asia, South Asia, and Africa; these migrants continue to transform both the laity and the priesthood.

In the suburb of Preston, the Western Catholic community is predominantly Australian-born (64%). Fifteen percent of Western Catholics in Preston are Italian-born and two percent each are born in the Philippines, Vietnam and Lebanon (ABS, 2016e). However, forty-three percent of Catholics in Preston identify as having Italian ancestry, seventeen percent identify as having Australian ancestry, and a further fifteen and fourteen percent identify as English and Irish respectively (ABS 2016f)¹⁶. This is only an approximation of the diversity at Sacred Heart, as people travel from beyond Preston to

¹⁶ Note that in the Australian census each individual can nominate up to two ancestries, so some individuals may be counted twice in these figures.

come to this parish, and many of those that identify as Catholic on the census may only be nominal and not attend Mass. It gives us an approximation, and some insight into the diversity of the local Catholic population.

4.3. A Place of Welcome

Sacred Heart is a beautiful building—an imposing red-brick Romanesque church sitting high on a hill on the major Melbourne road Bell Street, between High St and Plenty Road (see Image 4). It is so lovely that I originally hypothesised that perhaps Bell Street takes its name from the elegant bell tower, but on later investigation I am convinced it is more likely there was an early settler named Bell somewhere in the district. The steps to the entrance look like they were designed to be posed on by young women in white Cinderella gowns and my next (equally flawed) assumption was that the style of building reflects the Italian heritage of the parish. It was, however, built prior to the post-war boom in Italian migration, opening in 1936 and having been built at a cost of £15,000 (Carroll & Rule, 1985, p. 113).

Father Bill, who was the priest at Sacred Heart while I conducted my fieldwork, was the first church leader to welcome me into a church to do my research. He is a brother in the Society of the Divine Word or the Divine Word Missionaries (abbreviated to SVD). According to their website the SVD “are an international community of Catholic missionaries—priests and brothers—founded in 1875 by a German priest, St Arnold Janssen. Across the world today, there are more than 6000 members serving in more than 70 countries.”¹⁷ Furthermore, “Our SVD identity is rooted in a call to witness to God's love precisely in situations where its inclusive embrace is not recognised and where its openness to the rich diversity of peoples is not appreciated.” When we first met, Father Bill told me that the SVD were seeking a parish in which to train their deacons and priests, they specified four requirements for their new home: first, it should be in a multicultural part of the city; second, in a low socio-economic part of the city; third, have a large presbytery so that they can offer hospitality; and fourth, within view of a mosque. All four requirements are met in Sacred Heart. Preston is multicultural, with significant sections of public housing (although the area was already

¹⁷ <https://www.divineword.com.au/index.php/who-we-are/who-are-the-divine-word-missionaries> accessed 11/09/2018

gentrifying when I started my fieldwork and it has continued to escalate rapidly in the nine years since), Preston mosque is visible from the highest point on the property and the presbytery is generously proportioned for hospitality. It is a brick bungalow of that most desirable vintage for inner north real estate (1900–1940) located just behind the church. There are a number of lounge style meeting rooms and offices, beyond which are private living quarters for the priests and trainees. The presbytery is perhaps not so much a semi-public space as a semi-private one. It is a space that the priests regularly invite parishioners into and one into which they invited me to interview parishioners.

Walking through the front door of the church, I was surprised by how light and airy it is inside—so much of my experience of old Protestant churches is that their interiors are dark and dank. The internal walls of Sacred Heart are white painted plaster, the ceilings are high, and there is a glass wall rather than a brick one between the foyer and the body of the church, all of which contributes to a bright and open atmosphere. It is a big space with room for what must be upwards of 500 people. There are four quadrants of seating which you can navigate by three aisles (a central aisle and aisles between the side walls and the pews). From the foyer, there is also access to an upstairs gallery.

Image 4: Sacred Heart Church (Source: N. Swann, 3/06/2012 11:40, iPhone4s with filter)



The SVD priests that serve at Sacred Heart are often in training for mission, or from overseas. The young deacon who greeted me on my first visit was a young man, Eddy, from Flores in Indonesia. Eddy is dressed in robes (albeit relatively plain ones) for he is a priest in training. He will be priested and leave for a placement in Russia before I return from maternity leave. He had not met me before and assumed I was visiting the parish on this Sunday. He greeted me with a warm smile and vigorous handshake, making sure I got a copy of the church bulletin.

I know a little about Catholic tradition and was aware that most Catholics will genuflect when they pass the altar. I baulk at bowing to the altar (which, theologically, I do not consider to be an altar but simply a table) but do not wish to cause offence. I chose, therefore, not to go through the central door and walk down the central aisle to find a seat, but instead opted for a more discreet entry through a side door and headed down the aisle between the wall and the pew where I could sneak into a seat without passing the front of the altar and causing anyone offence by my genuflect-less-ness. As I watched others coming in to take their seats, I noticed that not everybody bowed as I expected, but I could determine no particular pattern to who genuflected and who did not.

Around the walls of the church are stained glass windows depicting the Stations of the Cross. The altar faces east and is flanked on the north side by a statue of the Virgin Mary and on the south by a statue of Jesus. To the left of the altar, the Virgin is draped in traditional blue and the alcove behind her is scattered with stars. It is elegant and an unsurprising element of a Catholic church's design. Similarly, a statue of Jesus is unsurprising, but this statue of Jesus is positioned in front of a mural evoking the style of Albert Namatjira¹⁸. The mural depicts a (stereo)typically Australian landscape in which stand a handful of Indigenous Australians in traditional dress who appear to be gazing upon the statue of Jesus. This particular display struck me as rather unusual, but in my time at Sacred Heart I did not hear anyone speak of it. The Australian national flag hangs at the front of the church to the left of the altar. In conversations with longer-term congregation members I later discovered that a range of flags representing the countries of origin of parishioners used to be on display in the church. They were removed some years ago and now adorn the corridors of the Presbytery.

¹⁸ Namatjira is a famous Indigenous Australian artist known for his watercolour paintings of Australian landscapes (Klienert, 2000)

As I took my seat, the church began to fill around me. Like most churches I have ever been to, people here sit in similar places each week. I could not know these patterns on my first visit, but as the weeks passed by I started to recognise the regulars and their preferred places. On this occasion, I chose to sit towards the back on the left—“to get a good view of everything”—I told myself. When I returned from maternity leave, this little corner of the church became my regular haunt (it provided an easy escape route to the foyer when my babe became restless or noisy).¹⁹

I was surprised by the youthfulness, diversity, and sheer size of this congregation. All three characteristics are unusual in Australian churches. While there were some older Italian parishioners attending this 10:00AM service, Sacred Heart has an Italian speaking priest and holds a regular weekly Mass in Italian, which attracts many from the Italian community. I attended the more multicultural English-speaking Mass attended by significant groups of migrants from South Asia (especially India) and South East Asia (especially Vietnam and the Philippines), as well as congregants from other European countries and South America. There is also a sizeable group of congregants from Tonga and a Tongan choir leads the music once a month.

Mass on this morning, as on most ordinary Sundays, was a rather ‘low’ affair.²⁰ The priests and attendants wore robes, but the priests were happy to roam the church while giving their homily and, when not speaking set liturgical text, they spoke in a casual and familiar way to the congregation. The songs the congregation sang were often contemporary, tending towards the folk-music end of the hymnal spectrum. Traditional Catholic distinctives such as affection for the Virgin Mary and the Saints were not usually dwelt on during the Mass. Parishioners, however, display devotion to Mary by praying at the statue of the Virgin even if such things are often elided by pastoral staff.

The music was led by one guitarist and two or three people leading singing. A musician asked us to rise for the first song, as the priest and attendants processed into

¹⁹ A few months later I will sit on the right up the front with a research participant and this displacement from my usual seat makes me uncomfortable. Even just the change demanded of my habitual countenance—the angle I turn my head to see the screen, or the reader, or the priest—feels awkward and distracts me from the service.

²⁰ ‘High’ church is a term to describe services that are formal, often including many ritualistic elements like the ringing of bells and use of incense. ‘Low’ church is more casual, with a looser commitment to those rituals, or the abandonment of them entirely.

the church. One of the attendants bore a golden cross. I expected the music to be unfamiliar, but I knew a number of the songs from my upbringing in the Lutheran church. On the one hand, I found that there was little congregational participation in singing. It was a large gathering, and yet the musicians did the lion's share of the work. I sang out loud and felt my voice echoing around me. But on the other hand, it still felt more enthusiastic than at other Australian Catholic church services I have been to. The music was not a performance in the way of a high gloss Pentecostal service, nor in the sense of a highly practiced cathedral choral ensemble. It was more like we are sitting quietly around the campfire, listening to a few of our own—more talented than ourselves, but by no means recording artists—gently share their rendition of Kumbaya. Despite this impression of performance, I did not feel uncomfortable joining in the singing as is my practice in my own church. I felt little external encouragement or constraint over whether to sing or not to sing. In contrast, there were powerful physical habits of crossing and kneeling, speaking and staying silent that took me weeks to settle into. There was a physicality to the vertical relationality of worship—that is, the relationship between person and God—that I have not practiced week in and week out before. These habits of kneeling and of silence reminded me of my smallness and creatureliness. I was particularly struck by the potency of kneeling in prayer—its mild discomfort, its vulnerability and humility. I was not silent because I thought God was somehow more present here than He is anywhere else (although that might be the conviction of some I sat beside). But these physical disciplines—ones that my own flock have largely abandoned—helped me to embody not just Catholic theology, but my own theology as well. Indeed, this feeling of being left to my own devices extended to a whole range of the service elements—whether to pray the set prayers aloud or not, whether to sign myself with the cross or not, whether to genuflect or not. Indeed, a few weeks later when I asked Father Bill what his position was on my taking the Eucharist at Sacred Heart (I know that in most Catholic churches people who are not baptised Catholics are not invited to share in the sacrament) his response was that it is entirely up to me.

The first song we sang is sang regularly over my six months of attendance:

Here I Am Lord

I, the Lord of sea and sky,
I have heard My people cry.
All who dwell in dark and sin,
My hand will save.

I who made the stars of night,
I will make their darkness bright.
Who will bear My light to them?
Whom shall I send?

CHORUS

*Here I am Lord, Is it I Lord?
I have heard You calling in the night.
I will go Lord, if You lead me.
I will hold Your people in my heart.*

I, the Lord of snow and rain,
I have born my peoples pain.
I have wept for love of them,
They turn away.

I will break their hearts of stone,
Give them hearts for love alone.
I will speak My word to them,
Whom shall I send?

CHORUS

I, the Lord of wind and flame,
I will tend the poor and lame.
I will set a feast for them,
My hand will save

Finest bread I will provide,
Till their hearts be satisfied.
I will give My life to them,
Whom shall I send?

CHORUS

(Daniel Schutte, 1981)

It is a lilting and quite easy tune to sing.²¹ The language of calling, leading and going is evocative of the migration journey. It is a reassuring lyric in the way it describes the Lord's sovereignty over sea and sky, stars and snow. It reflects the distinctively Christian tension between God's sovereignty and human agency; it is God who will "break their hearts of stone" and whose "hand will save", yet there is still a need for a human agent. In this case, the agent humbly volunteers their service.

I never got to interview the priest, Father Nguyen, who presented the sermon this week; he left to do further study in Thailand before I returned from maternity leave, but his sermon was memorable both for its content and for its delivery. Father Nguyen

²¹ A performance (not from Sacred Heart) can be viewed here:
www.youtube.com/watch?v=GINNh15cT08

did not preach from a pulpit, he stood instead in the aisle in the midst of the congregation. He spoke on Matthew 13:24ff, in which Jesus uses various metaphors to explain to his listeners what the kingdom of heaven is like:

He put before them another parable: "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to someone who sowed good seed in his field; but while everybody was asleep, an enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and then went away. So when the plants came up and bore grain, then the weeds appeared as well. And the slaves of the householder came and said to him, 'Master, did you not sow good seed in your field? Where, then, did these weeds come from?' He answered, 'An enemy has done this.' The slaves said to him, 'Then do you want us to go and gather them?' But he replied, 'No; for in gathering the weeds you would uproot the wheat along with them. Let both of them grow together until the harvest; and at harvest time I will tell the reapers, Collect the weeds first and bind them in bundles to be burned, but gather the wheat into my barn.'" He put before them another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed that someone took and sowed in his field; it is the smallest of all the seeds, but when it has grown it is the greatest of shrubs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches." He told them another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed in with three measures of flour until all of it was leavened." (Matthew 13:24–33, NRSV)

Father Nguyen walked into the congregation, down the aisle, and asked the congregation what images Jesus would have used if he was Vietnamese. For a while people kept silent, but he was not asking rhetorically and he encouraged the congregation to provide a suggestion. After a moment, someone suggested boat people. Father Nguyen affirmed this image as something which symbolises a search for liberty, a characteristic of the kingdom. He then suggested from his own experience, from his own village, that an appropriate image might be a wedding feast, where everybody brings their best to offer and celebrate together. Interestingly, in other places in Scripture (e.g., Matthew 22) the kingdom is described as a wedding feast. Although, in

these pictures of kingdom as feast, it is God who provides everything for his guests, it is “a feast of God’s abundance” (Hauerwas, 2006, p. 188).

Father Nguyen turned to the congregation a second time and asked, “what if Jesus was Italian? what image would He use?”; someone suggested family unity. And again, “what if Jesus was Filipino?”, and someone suggested care for the elderly, the vulnerable. And finally, “what if Jesus was Aussie? if He was Melbournian?” the suggestion from the congregation was “footy”. This got a rigorous laugh, but Father Nguyen seemed to be expecting it and interpreted footy through the lens of mateship. He described a scene from the previous night’s Carlton vs Essendon game in which Jesus would have got up and cheered for both teams when they got goals. The congregation seemed to react positively both to his style of preaching and found the approach entertaining. Perhaps it was because I am not sufficiently Melbournian myself, but I found the suggestion of footy as a picture of the kingdom rather uncomfortable and I wondered if the other suggestions seemed equally stereotypical to those from Vietnam, Italy and the Philippines. I never got the chance to ask, though, because the congregation disperses so quickly following the service.

Following the sermon, we sing the song ‘Be Not Afraid’²²:

You shall cross the barren desert,
but you shall not die of thirst.
You shall wander far in safety
though you do not know the way.
You shall speak your words in foreign lands
and all will understand.
You shall see the face of God and live.

Be not afraid. I go before you always.
Come, follow me, and I will give you rest.

If you pass through raging waters in the sea,
you shall not drown.
If you walk amid the burning flames,
you shall not be harmed.

²² To hear the tune, visit: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zeTpISSA5x8>

If you stand before the pow'r of hell
and death is at your side,
know that I am with you through it all.

Be not afraid. I go before you always.
Come, follow me, and I will give you rest.

Blessed are your poor,
for the kingdom shall be theirs.
Blest are you that weep and mourn,
for one day you shall laugh.
And if wicked men insult and hate you
all because of me
blessed, blessed are you!

Be not afraid. I go before you always.
Come, follow me, and I will give you rest.
(Robert Dufford, 1975)

It is not an unusual piece of Christian lyricism. It evokes scripture; for example, the barren desert and wandering of the Exodus, the gift of language at Pentecost, Jonah or the disciples in their boat while Jesus slept before he calmed the storm, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego in the fiery furnace, Psalm 23 and 'the valley of the shadow of death', the Beatitudes from Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. The lyrics operate as metaphor for trials and struggles, but many of these trials are explicitly migratory (crossing the desert, wandering without knowing the way, passing through the sea) and it is possible that these words were chosen as a deliberate encouragement to the many overseas born parishioners.

The preparation for the Eucharist followed the Australian Catholic liturgy. On this first visit, I was cautious and did not presume to be welcome to participate, although there was no public announcement, nor anything in the bulletin, about who could take communion. If I knew nothing about Catholicism in Australia, I would have had no reason to hold back from taking part. The bread was distributed from three stations at the front of the church. The congregation flowed up the centre aisle to the front, received their bread and flowed out again. Literally, it flowed out—many straight

out the front door despite the fact that the service had not yet finished. Those people who leave at the end of the Eucharist are particularly difficult to make contact with.

There were two collections during the service; one for the running of the parish, and another for the CatholicCare Church Appeal²³. Even though I had explicitly thought about praying with research participants in the field, the offering took me off-guard. I wondered if giving money in this way was equivalent to offering some kind of incentive, with all the concomitant ethical considerations that would have. But failing to put something in the plate, failing to materially contribute to the community in this way, seemed like a similar holding back from full participation as would be failing to pray.

As the service finished, people quickly gathered handbags and jackets, most did not talk to anyone other than the family or friends they were seated with. The church emptied in a matter of minutes. Of the two hundred or more people at Mass, maybe 20 lingered in the foyer to talk together or to speak with one of the pastoral staff. Father Bill was generous in his time and introduced me to congregation members from overseas. This introduction seemed to be critical in helping people to trust me. One of the first people he introduced me to was Helena, a migrant from India (see Story 12). Helena had journeyed from India through Malaysia and Brunei and through multiple denominations. She likes Sacred Heart because she can come here and worship in her way. She can pray the way she likes. She was deliberate in telling me she doesn't worship statues, like the one of Mary or Jesus, they are not gods themselves, more like a photograph of the real God.

I also interviewed a young couple from India, Prakash and Aditi (see Story 5). They were the only people from Sacred Heart who took up my offer to come to my home for an interview. Prakash and Aditi, a Catholic/Hindu love match, appreciate this Catholic church for the openness and welcome it provides to Aditi, who though she converted to Catholicism in order to marry Prakash, still carries the Hinduism she was raised in close to her heart.

In later weeks, I introduced myself to other congregation members, but I struggled to persuade them to participate in my research. I met Teresa, who was born in Australia to Italian parents and she invited me to interview her in her home (see Story

²³ The second collection will change each week and be directed towards various charities, Catholic organisations and building projects.

6). My interview participants told me that this is a warm community, one that they love and commute back to even after they leave Preston. My initial experience was not incompatible with this assessment of warmth, but as the weeks passed I expected things to get increasingly familiar—warmer—but each week, to me, felt similar to this first one, friendly but distant. The closer I tried to get the further away I felt.

Story 5: Prakash and Aditi

It is hard to hear the audio from Prakash and Aditi’s interview, because their toddler entertains himself in the background, drawing and playing with cars. They are the only people from Sacred Heart who take up my offer to come to my home for an interview. They are about my age, we are university graduates and professionals in the process of starting families.

Prakash was brought up in a Catholic family, while Aditi was born into a Hindu family. She never really went to church at all in India, even once she had met and married Prakash. She likes Sacred Heart because they seem to be open to people of other faiths, “they respect one another” (line 43). There are other churches, she says, that are more conservative.

Prakash was born in Bombay, he corrects himself—Mumbai—a name change he hates. His family was Catholic and have always had a very strong faith. His maternal grandfather was “very heavily into theology” and a “spiritual compass in the family” (line 110). He would see his extended family every week or two and always at special occasions, “So, you know, we grew up in a normal sort of Catholic upbringing” (lines 121–122).

Aditi was born into a Hindu family in Delhi. Prakash and Aditi met while studying engineering at University in Aurangabad. They introduced their parents to each other, and their parents knew that the relationship was serious. Their parents counselled them to do what was necessary for Aditi’s career, so, when they finished their degrees, Prakash decided to go Australia to further his studies and Aditi pursued her career in India. After Prakash finished his studies in Australia, he went back home again. They had a Hindu engagement and a Catholic wedding. Her family were a bit worried about how she would adjust to married life in Australia, because it is a

completely different culture, but they were always in touch and she knew Prakash well, so it wasn't as hard for her as they imagined. Prakash says the trust of Aditi's parents was so important and he wants to keep that trust at all costs.

They have been here in Australia for about six years. They have no-one here, no family support. They have been regulars at Sacred Heart since they arrived here. Their son was born here and they have decided not to confuse him by teaching him both Hindu and Catholic traditions; Aditi says it's "better to stick to one" (line 356) and they will raise him Catholic. But, she also thinks it would be good for him to visit India. Her parents would take him to temple, and that would be OK for her. Aditi says she feels that religion is something you have to come to your own terms with—you should not be forced into a religion. Prakash interjects, "Absolutely! I absolutely agree" (line 381). When he was growing up:

we were told now is when you stand up, now is when you sit down,
now is when you kneel, now is when you say this prayer and now is
when you say that prayer. It was very regimented in that regard and
there was no meaning behind why we were doing that ... You know, we
were just told that we needed to do that. (Lines 381–392)

But in India, no matter what your religion, you listen to your parents. Catholic sermons presumed that Catholicism "is the only thing that's right and true and just and every other religion is not worth mentioning really" (lines 438–443).

Prakash and Aditi keep bouncing off one another, finishing one another's sentences. Prakash says the church in India is very conservative, "I mean there was very little tolerance to other you know religions and things like that but here in Australia you can actually see what, you know, true Catholicism is all about. It's very liberal and accepting of other people's differences and backgrounds and different religions and you know, I love that. And there are only some priests in India" he pauses, and Aditi finishes for him "who actually, who would preach that" (lines 458–467). That is why they come to Sacred Heart; "because of the open-minded accepting nature of people in the community", Prakash says (line 484).

Prakash says that as he grew up, he started understanding his faith personally: "I developed a very deep connection with my faith after my brother passed away"

(lines 403–403). He lost his brother about eight years ago, only six months before coming to Australia. Even though he had been practicing his faith for a long time, it was only then that he says it hit him: “okay, that’s where the role of faith comes in” (line 514). Prakash says:

Just because you’ve converted into being a Catholic you’re not going to overnight wake up being a Catholic. I know I didn’t. I know it took me after practicing faith for such a long time that it hit me eight years ago that, ‘okay, that’s where the role of faith comes in’. I want her [Aditi] to have her own experience and journey because that’s where she’ll really appreciate what’s on offer in terms of the spiritual life. (Lines 508–519)

Prakash says giving Aditi the space to grow is the most important thing. It’s important not to push anyone to believe in something.

When Prakash first came to Australia, he lived with an old family friend. Hilda—he calls her Aunty Hilda—and his mum had grown up together, went to nursing school together and even worked together. Hilda and her husband decided to come to Australia over twenty-five years ago. Prakash says they are very spiritual people. Prakash had an old friend from school who had come to Australia years earlier. He was Catholic too, but had stopped going to church and didn’t really practice his faith any more. The “general feedback” Prakash had about life in Australia was that people don’t practice their faith here (see lines 591–622). He was lucky to find a home with Hilda and her family who were spiritual and had friends who were practicing Catholics. After six months with Hilda and her family, Prakash moved out to a place in Preston and came to Sacred Heart.

At this point both Prakash and Aditi reflect on the fact that they really don’t understand why there are so many churches in Australia. “It’s confusing!” declares Aditi. In India, Prakash tells me, there are just Protestants and Catholics, “just two varieties, that’s it!” jokes Prakash “And then you come here and then you’re like “Whoa!” (lines 680–684). Prakash went to Preston Anglican church and maybe one or two other churches, but the Catholicism of Sacred Heart was familiar and they lived very close by. Prakash and Aditi reflect that even though young people and people

from “other ethnic backgrounds” come and go at Sacred Heart, there seems to be a lot of continuity:

That’s the other thing about Sacred Heart the faces that we see today, some of the faces are the same people we spoke, persons I spoke with eight years ago. (Lines 733–734)

Prakash and Aditi’s little one engages in a little exploration around our house and leads to Prakash asking when Chris, my husband, and our little Ben will get home from church. I joke that Anglican priests preach for much longer than Catholic ones and it will be a little while before they get back. Prakash has always appreciated priests “who don’t go overboard with the sermon, but they make a point; they give you one point to take away” (line 1044). He remembers with fondness Father McCartney, the priest who was at Sacred Heart when he first arrived. Father McCartney, Prakash says, “was a hoot!” (line 1060):

He had an amazing way of being able to paint a picture of what life can be. The amazing things you could do and I can’t remember one sermon that we, with Father McCartney, we didn’t crack up laughing during the sermon or something like that. He used to make everyone laugh during the sermon but also, he would give us one point to take away. One, one area that we can develop for one week. (Lines 1071–1079)

They know a lot of people who have moved away from the parish boundaries, but who keep coming to Sacred Heart. It’s important for them that they don’t feel judged here:

You know, there’s an open environment where there is accepting, the people are accepting of people who come from different backgrounds and faiths and they’re accepting and it’s beautiful. (Lines 1217–1219)

Staying faithful has a lot to do, Prakash says, with associating with the right people:

If you’re going to be associating with people who don’t go to church who don’t have any spiritual background or any of that it’s just not going to work, it’s just not going to work for you, personally it’s not

going to work for you. Personally, I know what I need for myself, I don't know. It's tough enough handling myself let alone anyone else. So, I know what I need for myself and what I need is to be in an environment where, you know they still practice faith, they still have that element of 'okay, this is important; this is very, very important, even in today's world it's important'. (Lines 1112-1121)

He works as an engineer and has professional relationships with his colleagues, but doesn't see much of them socially:

Oh absolutely and they've given me a hard time about it [being a believer]. You have two choices you can either succumb to peer pressure and say, 'ah okay, okay alright, alright, I agree with what you say'. Or you can say, 'you have the right to believe what you believe and I have the right to believe what I believe'. It's just about being firm about that. Having a little bit of faith in yourself. That's what faith is all about isn't it? (Lines 1138-1155)

Prakash suggests his friend drifted away from a life of faith partly because the people he hung around with never went to church. Although if he had to imagine how his friend would explain it, he thinks he would say that he sees too many people going to church and then getting out of church and doing the exact opposite of what they had just learned and preached.

Prakash and Aditi have not been home to India often and not at all since their child was born. They have been back once to Bombay and Prakash notes that he is lucky Aditi's parents are so accepting of him even though he's from a different faith. Both of their parents have visited on different occasions since they had their child. They keep in touch using Skype—it means so much to them all that they can watch their grandson growing up. Prakash and Aditi are planning to visit India later this year. They are worried, however, because their child (like so many children born in Australia) has an anaphylactic allergy to nuts. Nut allergies are very uncommon in India and nuts are used all the time in cooking. In Australia, "when you tell someone that your child has got food allergies, they understand", says Prakash (line 947). But in India, "no one knows what a food allergy looks like, no one knows" laments

Prakash (line 952). And, they add, ambulance services are really poor: “pretty much you’re responsible for getting someone to the hospital in an emergency” (lines 959–960). They push those fears aside saying “we don’t want to think too much about that” (line 964).

Story 6: Teresa

Teresa is a stalwart of the Sacred Heart congregation. She has been a member of the parish since she was a child. Now a grandmother, she sits in the front pew with her husband John, and her ninety-one-year-old Italian-born mother. She rarely misses a Sunday Mass and often performs duties as an altar server. Teresa has invited me to her home for our interview. She lives with her husband and mother in the house her parents bought decades ago as new immigrants. The garden is orderly and combines pebbles and architectural succulents in a way that I have been taught signals Mediterranean ownership. That is a polite way to say that my mother probably would have pointed out the garden and lamented the Greek and Italian penchant for concrete and small plants. The home is now on very busy street and very close to the train line and station. The warning bell on the boom gate on the level crossing is frequently audible on the recording I make of our conversation. I imagine that decades ago, when her parents bought the property, the quantity of today’s traffic was completely unforeseeable, and the proximity to the rail incredibly valuable to a working family. Inside, the home is clean and orderly, too. More like my grandmother’s home than the home I grew up in, and very different from the chaos of my own home life in an era of programmed obsolescence and disposable consumption. It carries with it the sense of the preciousness of things—the imperative to look after the things you are lucky to have.

We sit at the dining table and Teresa makes me a cup of tea. She is a little concerned that her story doesn’t qualify for my project, because she was born here. She repeats often during the interview that she “doesn’t know what to tell [me]” (e.g., interview transcript line 431–432) and implores me to ask her the questions that I want answers to. I feel I fail her in this regard, pointing her in general directions

rather than giving her explicit directions. When she feels like she has nothing to say, our conversation often turns to my little Benjamin, who is four months old and asleep in the pram when I arrive. I ask her to start at the beginning, not only of her own story, but of what she knows of her parent's story and their journey to Australia.

Teresa's mother and father were born in Italy, near Padua, into farming families with strong ties to the Catholic church. Teresa's mother has a sister who is a Salesian nun who spent thirty years in Egypt before moving to Israel. Ten of her cousins were also nuns, and three were priests. So, Teresa says, she is "very Catholic" (line 137). Teresa's mother was twenty-seven and her father was thirty when they were married in the early 1940s. Work was hard to come by and after talking with their families, they decided to emigrate to Australia. Teresa's dad had an uncle here, who had emigrated in 1920 after the First World War. This uncle completed the sponsorship papers for them and submitted them to the Australian government. In those days, Teresa tells me, you either had a sponsor or you applied directly to the Australian government. They were lucky to have a sponsor as it meant they did not have to stay at the Bonegilla migrant centre²⁴, which was "like a refugee camp" (transcript line 168). Instead of receiving a dowry, Teresa's grandparents paid for her mother's fare to Australia. Her father's fare was £349 and he needed to pay it off when he arrived in Australia.²⁵

The day before she left Italy, Teresa's mother went to church and made a vow. She vowed that she would not wear gold if God would only give her the strength and courage to "confront a new journey, a new passage in life" (line 178). They were poor, she did not even have an engagement ring, and she swore that her wedding band and earrings would be the only jewellery she would ever wear "if God will give her the courage and strength to be able to work and to raise a family, and that everything will go alright for them in Australia" (lines 176–8). When I ask if her mother thinks the vow has helped her, Teresa is emphatic in her agreement. Her mama will be 91 next month and to this day, Teresa tells me, she has never worn a piece of jewellery other than her wedding band and earrings.

²⁴ See <http://www.bonegilla.org.au/> for historical detail.

²⁵ This is in stark contrast to the £10 fares available to post-war migrants from England.

After visiting the church, her mother and father farewelled their families and boarded the ship. On board the ship, they never missed a Mass. When their ship arrived in Port Melbourne, her father's uncle was there to meet them. Within a week they had both started work. Neither of them spoke English. Her mother got a "family job" working Monday to Friday and her father took a job in a sack factory, making, fixing and cleaning hessian sacks for products like flour and potatoes. Their uncle showed them how to catch public transport. The factory was owned by a Jewish firm. They kept the Sabbath and worked on Sunday. For Teresa's father, however, Saturday was a day to work. The Jewish owners had a strong affection for Teresa's father because of the role that Italians, especially those from the north, had played in saving many Jewish people during World War II. And so they gave him a key and he would work on Saturdays. On Sundays he would go to 5AM Mass at St Francis' church in Melbourne's CBD and then go to the factory for another day of work. Although he worked seven days a week, he never missed Mass.

Her mother would go to Mass every Sunday, too, but not always with her father. She often went early because she had a Sunday lunch to prepare. Every day, to this day, she says morning, afternoon and evening prayers. During their early years, they always had boarders staying with them and so her mother would say her Rosary on public transport on the way to work, I assume because there was no quiet time or space to do so at home. Teresa believes that their faith has only grown stronger through moving to Australia. Whenever something happened, she says "they always turn[ed] to God" (line 339). She recalls one night—the night of her father's birthday—when they received a call telling them that her mother's sister had been hit by an ambulance and killed. Her parents and a maternal uncle who had also emigrated sat together and said the Rosary all night. They never had the chance to fly back home, but her mother would offer a Mass here at Sacred Heart. Teresa credits her own faith to their belief.

Their children, including Teresa, were born here. She recalls being teased at school for the kinds of food they would bring—the pasta dura bread, salami, stuffed artichokes. They were laughed at and embarrassed. Most of the immigrant kids at her school were Maltese or Italian. She can remember crying and choosing not to eat her lunch at all. She laughs, "that was before the Australians learned how to eat a variety of foods ... Now the Australians ... eat all the different nationalities! You do better than

we do now” (lines 252–254). Her dad has often told a story about coming home from work one day and while he was crossing the road, an Australian called him a ‘dago’ and a ‘dirty wog’, spat in his face, and told him to “go back to your own country” (lines 284–285). As kids, she and her siblings would ask “what did you do, dad?”. He said, he didn’t do anything. He finished crossing the road and prayed “God forgive him”. That, says Teresa, is “faith coming out” (line 288). She thinks that these days, we’re more tolerant towards refugees. Even though there’s still racism going on, she tells me we’re more tolerant now of the Sudanese and Muslims. I am part of the ‘you’ Australians that have learned to eat all the nationalities, and part of the ‘we’ that are more tolerant now.

It was not only food that they were teased for. Teresa and other migrant children went to school without knowing any English. They dressed differently. And Teresa remembers the horror of her curly hair. Her mother would not let her cut it. She would comb it and send Teresa to school with little bows in her hair. Her husband John’s birth name is Giampiero. When he started school at St John’s in Clifton Hill, the teachers could not pronounce his name and gave him the choice of being called John or Peter. He chose John. Teresa explains in frustration that now this discrepancy is a hassle when he needs to sign documents, because his legal name is different from the name he is known by.

She does not remember any such teasing happening at church, though. She never had a problem at church. For me, my Lutheran-ness is closely bound up with my German heritage. I ask Teresa if it is similar for her; is her Catholicism an expression of being Italian? Are those two things bound up for her? “No, no, no, no, no, no, no” she answers (line 438). Sacred Heart is her spiritual home and, as I would have seen, she says, it is a very multicultural place. Although she doesn’t tell me the specifics of her life’s hardships, she tells me that she’s “been through a lot” and that the “back of that church has seen a lot of my tears” (lines 443–444). It intrigues me that Teresa chooses the multicultural service over the Italian one. Later in our conversation, Teresa tells me both she and her mother spurn this service:

I don’t like going to the Italian mass, I never have liked going to the Italian mass, because then you go to show off. And they criticise you, “ah, she wore same outfit last week.” ... Mum would never go to the

Italian mass, because they were all too busy talking, too busy looking what everyone else was wearing. They never went for faith, they only went to show off. And that's wrong. You go to Mass—you go to Mass for faith. With the Australian Mass, it didn't matter what you wore, you could ... have gone to mass with old jeans on and in old top, and no one cared. They went ... for faith. And that's the different culture.

I go to church because I want to go to church, because of my faith, and to please my love to God, not to see what someone else wears. Might as well stay home. That's being a hypocrite. It's not right. Italians are funny people, when it comes to that. (Lines 1099–1122)

Teresa says that her experience of growing up different and being treated badly means that she now loves welcoming people to Sacred Heart and treating them the way she would want to be treated. She's a "people person"—she laughs and tells me John jokes that she "would talk to the ants" if she had to (lines 628–629). At the back of the church, she always says "welcome" to people; "you see someone new and you say 'welcome!'" (line 629–650). She enjoys it when the priest invites the congregation to shake hands with and welcome the people around them during Mass. This seems pretty minimalist interaction to me, so I ask what else happens in the congregation to build community. Teresa mentions that they have special morning teas after the service every now and then, relationships are built through the parish school, and there's an annual dance that brings the community together.

Although there was always abundant food in Teresa's household, there was not a lot of money for gifts and niceties. After paying off their passage to Australia, Teresa's parents poured their resources into purchasing two homes; the one we are sitting in was the home Teresa grew up in and will one day be hers, and they purchased a second house in Reservoir that will be her sister's inheritance. Teresa cannot remember ever opening a birthday or Christmas present when she was growing up. She tells me a story of her seventh birthday; she was in Grade Two at Sacred Heart Primary School. A friend of her mother's remembered it was her birthday. She wished her a happy birthday and asked, "what did you get for you birthday?". Teresa did not answer. She walked away, hid in a corner, and cried. At

Christmas, Mass was the most important thing. They would always go to midnight Mass:

You know, you go to Mass on Christmas day and Jesus is born and that is all that matters. Presents don't matter. (Lines 514–515)

Although there were no presents, Teresa remembers there was always a real Christmas tree. And there was always a feast; antipasto, lasagne, a good turkey. Her mother was an excellent cook and a good seamstress; Teresa admits they never went without food and clothes. I ask if any of these traditions are things she shares now with her kids and grandkids. No, she says, she usually cooks a turkey for her mother, her husband John, and herself either before or after Christmas sometime. But her kids don't want turkey. They ask for chicken.

Both Teresa and John have a history of working in hospitality. When John first left school he got a job working for his cousins, the original owners of the Melbourne institution Pellegrini's. They met working in a restaurant; John was a cook and Teresa was waiting tables. She, too, can work in the kitchen, but was recovering from surgery for Carpal Tunnel Syndrome that was aggravated working with the pans in the kitchen. She jokes about how all chefs are a bit crazy; "I always said I'd never marry a chef, and then I married a chef!" (line 851). They weren't married at Sacred Heart, but rather at Saint Anthony's in Alphington. By way of explanation, she tells me that John's father was unwell at the time, but the specifics of why this led them to be married elsewhere are unclear. She tells me it was not a typically Italian lavish affair; "we weren't one of those big woggy weddings!" (line 871–872). It was very small, only 37 people. They have four children, two boys and two girls, who were all baptised at Sacred Heart and attended the parish Primary School. They came to Mass with John and Teresa until about fifteen or sixteen, but "then they sort of ..." and she trails off without specifying exactly what they "sort of" (line 908). But it's such a common pattern, that I understand. That is, I do not know the hearts of these particular young people, but like so many others they have reached the age of independence and chosen to walk away from institutional Catholicism. They all have partners and between them there are six grandchildren. Teresa reels off all their names and birthdays. But she reflects:

We just keep praying for them. And you can't say nothing, Natalie. You don't say nothing to them. Just a week ago, [I] handed [them] up to God, God takes care of them. And they're happy. (Lines 896–898)

Only one of Teresa's children has visited Italy. Teresa still regularly speaks with family overseas on the telephone, especially her aunty, the nun in Israel. She has no aunts or uncles remaining on her father's side, but her mother is the eldest and has four remaining siblings.

Teresa thinks of both her parents as having a lot of faith, both were very prayerful people. This faith and prayerfulness are what she thinks gave them the courage to keep going on in their new life here in Australia. Likewise, prayer and meditation play a large role in Teresa's spiritual practice. When I ask her describe what she means, she describes sitting on her bed and "being in the Lord", meditating in the Holy Spirit. She tells me that the Trinity—three people in one God; Father, Son and Spirit—is a mystery of the church. And when she meditates, she just sits there breathing in and out and "just let it all out".

Teresa's mother returned to Italy for the first time twenty years or more after first arriving in Australia. They went together when Teresa was eleven as, in those days, children under twelve paid half fare. Her father made a return visit the year after. It was not as urgent for her father to return, as both of his parents had already passed away. On another occasion, her parents went back together for three months. It's important to them that when they return to Italy they visit Saint Anthony in Padua. Her mother is devoted to Saint Anthony, whose shrine is there. Teresa calls him the patron saint of children, but further investigation leads me to think he is rather the patron saint of lost and stolen things, although often pictured with the child Jesus. It is very important to them to return to their roots. "But it's funny though", Teresa says, "they couldn't wait to get back. Mum and Dad always say their home is Australia" (lines 1047–1048). Returning to Italy was the catalyst for realising how much they had changed and "how they've created something" (line 1065).

4.4. Embodied Flexibility

Each of these stories shows us a picture of the work involved in maintaining a 'faithful' life. As I introduced at the beginning of this section, Luhmann has recently argued for an appreciation of the labour involved in faith; "Belief is easy, faith is hard" (2018). For Teresa's parents, church attendance was very frequent. Her mother prayed the Rosary regularly and, at times of grief, with great intensity. Prakash's childhood was characterised by regular church attendance and family devotions. He can identify the way in which his friend's faith has waned as he gave up church attendance. The relationship between faith and attendance can be a bit of a chicken-and-egg problem (which comes first? Which is generative of the other?) even in theological reflections.²⁶ Luhmann suggests that the actions of the faithful take place in a 'faith frame', she says,

The faith frame creates a different epistemological stance than the factual frame of the everyday, ordinary world. Its objects are not quite as real as tables and chairs, but they are also felt to be more real, more morally important, more central to self and purpose. The faith frame catches up the way the faithful want to be and the world as they think it could and should be. To choose to think with the faith frame is a decision to enter into another way of thinking about reality which—like fiction—calls on the resources of the imagination to re-organize what is fundamentally real and what lives in tension with the ordinary factual frames of everyday reality. (Luhmann, 2018, p. 316)

Even though Luhmann seems to want to take us beyond a brain/body dichotomy ('beliefs' are simply cognitive, while faith is more all-consuming way of being in the world), this faith frame still seems to place faith in the brain—it is a work of imagination. Smith's account of Charles Taylor's use of the idea of the 'imagination' argues that because the imaginary drives behaviour pre-cognitively, it is therefore closer to affection than cognition; it is "'closer' to the body" and "hints at a more embodied sense of how we are oriented to the world" (2009, p. 65). To do the work of

²⁶ For an academic theological discussion see Lindbeck (1984), The contemporary popular debate about church practice is often framed around believing and belonging; see for example, Breuel (2012) arguing for belonging before believing, or Lawrence (2012) arguing against.

the imagination my participants engage in repetitive embodied practices, such as church attendance and prayer. In this sense, an understanding of the incarnation and the significance of the body is foundational to the whole liturgical approach. The work of faith seems to be at its most effective when the whole body is engaged in the process of remembering.

I wonder whether, if we were to take the faith claims of believers more seriously, our model of faith might look more like Milton's work on the emotions (2005). She argues that neither a biological nor constructionist model of the emotions is adequate, and proposes instead that emotion is ecological. Following Ingold's work on knowledge (1992), she suggests that emotions are both pre-cultural and socially constructed,

For human beings, of course, much of the environment is social, and that is one reason why the idea of social interaction as the source of all our understanding is so persuasive. But the mechanisms that connect us with that environment must exist independently of social interaction, otherwise we would not be capable of engaging with our social environment and learning anything from it. (Milton, 2005, p.35, emphasis in original)

Some of the work of these faithful Catholics is attentiveness to the experience of the divine—the voices heard in the night (see Story 9: Jessy), the easing of a broken heart (see Story 12: Helena), the comfort of prayer (see Story 6: Teresa). I want to honour the Christian tradition that God is personal, not a Gaia style environmental being, but the experience my participants have of him often takes place in ways they feel, emotionally, in their bodies. It is my suggestion here that faith, like emotion, could be 'ecological' (both a pre-cultural experience of something spiritual and a culturally constructed set of stories, rituals, and relationships) *and* that it requires labour (both in attentiveness to the divine and through practice(s)).

Sacred Heart's elasticity in practice means it can accommodate people from so many different cultural backgrounds. In my interviews with Helena and with Prakash and Aditi, they explicitly state as much; Helena appreciates being able to worship "her way" with influences from different denominations, and Aditi feels welcomed despite her Hindu heritage. Catholic theology demands unity, but the SVD priests seem to understand that there is a wide range of cultural practice and allow space for different

styles of performative worship. For Aditi, this represents “respect”. Prakash feels like “true Catholicism” has been revealed to him here. He repeatedly mentions that ‘practice’ (by which it seems he means attendance at Mass) is critical to maintaining faith; just believing with your head is not sufficient, you also need to practice with your body. But it is important to Prakash that those bodily actions have reasons—he scorns his upbringing in which he was told to do things with no explanation. The body and the mind must act together. For Teresa, the strength of her parents’ faith is revealed through their commitment to Mass and prayer.

Sacred Heart provides a familiar enough Catholic experience—of liturgy, of lectionary, of prayers, and with a usually brief and relatively simple homily—and packages it together with enough flexibility to allow for differences in Catholic practice without anyone ever feeling identifiably out of place. To paraphrase the ex-Prime Minister John Howard, Sacred Heart seems able to identify ‘core’ church practice from ‘non-core’ embodied expressions. This echoes the Christmas narrative of incarnation; in the Catholic tradition, the liturgy is an expression of the eternal in human terms²⁷. But just as the eternal God became a particular man, living in a particular time, place and culture, so the liturgy can be made to fit by and to different individuals (e.g., Bevans, 1985). Now, this is not to say that unfamiliarity with church settings generally or Catholic practice in particular might leave a visitor feeling somewhat at a loss, nor that there are no confronting differences about church in Australia compared to church in other countries, but this tension between familiarity and flexibility is one that helps people worship in familiar ways at Sacred Heart.

4.5. Christmas Beyond Sacred Heart

While Sacred Heart has the most traditionally liturgical worship service of the three congregations I worked with, there are Christmas traditions embraced by both of

²⁷ The Catechism of the Catholic Church states “The liturgy is the work of the whole Christ, head and body. Our high priest celebrates it unceasingly in the heavenly liturgy, with the holy Mother of God, the apostles, all the saints, and the multitude of those who have already entered the kingdom. The liturgical celebration involves signs and symbols relating to creation (candles, water, fire), human life (washing, anointing, breaking bread) and the history of salvation (the rites of the Passover). Integrated into the world of faith and taken up by the power of the Holy Spirit, these cosmic elements, human rituals, and gestures of remembrance of God become bearers of the saving and sanctifying action of Christ.” (Catholic Church, 2012, Part Two, Section 1, Chapter 2, Article 1, 1187 and 1188)

the other congregations I visited. The Arabic Baptists prepare boxes of gifts each year for Operation Christmas Child.²⁸ The boxes are prepared months early in order to allow for shipping to other parts of the world, and in this way the community starts to prepare for Christmas as early as September/October. Children play a particularly visible role in the celebration of Christmas, both in that celebrations are directed towards them as recipients of the joy of the occasion, but also that they perform the story for the congregation. During my fieldwork, I spent a Christmas with both the Arabic Baptist church and the Adventists and both involved children in a costumed re-enactment of the Nativity.

Neither of these churches, however, placed heavy emphasis on meeting together on December 25th. For the Adventists, the emphasis is always on Sabbath worship over festivals, remembering Christmas on the 25th December is a human construct and without theological significance. The monthly publication of the Australian Adventist church, *Record* (cf. record.net.au), is decidedly un-festive. The two 'Christmas Editions' I collected in my time at Preston church each contain 24 pages and only one to two pages of Christmas-related content each. It is not the case that the Nativity is without theological import, however. Adventism owes a great deal to the writings of Ellen White, and her book *A Desire of the Ages* is one of her most significant texts and is a retelling and exposition of the life of Jesus. She says of his birth;

The story of Bethlehem is an exhaustless theme. In it is hidden "the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God." Rom 11:33. We marvel at the Saviours sacrifice in exchanging the throne of heaven for the manger, and the companionship of adoring angels for the beasts of the stall. Human pride and self-sufficiency stand rebuked in His presence. Yet this was but the beginning of His wonderful condescension. (White, 1990 [1898], p. 15)

The Adventists I speak to at Preston often celebrate with familiar things like trees and gifts in their homes, but it definitely lacks the fervour and abundance that has been part of my experience in mainstream Protestant or secular Australian celebrations. Indeed, one of the few articles in the *Record* explicitly dealing with Christmas as a theme

²⁸ <https://www.samaritanspurse.org.au/what-we-do/operation-christmas-child/>

was an editorial reflecting on the wealth we experience in middle-class Australia and concluding,

Christmas provides a perfect opportunity for us to review whether we're responding to Christ's call in its totality—whether those of us who have been given much are giving much in return. Simple questions should provide clarity:

- How much have I spent on holiday accommodation this year versus how much have I given to provide basic shelter to the homeless?
- How much have I spent on clothes this year versus how much clothing have I provided to those in need?
- How much have I spent eating out versus how much I have donated to those who are hungry?
- How much time have I spent visiting friends versus how much time have I spent visiting those in need of a friend?

And not just to think about it, but to do something about the imbalance most of us have in our lives. Let's not just *tell* the world about the love of Christ, this Christmas let's *show* our world the love of Christ. (Standish, 2012, p. 4)

But the matter of how to remember Christmas as Adventists is not settled nor a matter of consensus, for on the page opposite this editorial the following poll was advertised (see Image 5):

Image 5: Poll published in the Adventist Record Dec 2012



Similarly, the evangelical, low-church disposition of the Arabic Baptist church means they too sit loosely to festivals like Christmas. While they have a stronger affection for Christmas celebrations and would be more likely to meet and celebrate Christmas than the Adventists, this disposition is complemented by the family situation of many members being strongly connected to families who still worship in Orthodox, Coptic or Catholic churches. Often, for these families, Christmas is highly significant, and many in the Baptist church will attend Mass with their families on these occasions as a sign of love, respect, or duty. Indeed, when you examine this habit (of leaving your own beloved church to celebrate with family in a church which you believe to be perhaps 'less correct' than your own), it has an element of the incarnational to it; that being together in community as Jesus became 'God with us' is a priority. So, while Sacred Heart swells with attendees over festivals like Easter and Christmas, the Baptist church shrinks, and the Adventists simply continue with regular Sabbath worship seasoned with a dash of Christmas cheer on the Saturday leading up to the 25th December.

Despite the fact that 'Christmas' is not celebrated in the ways we might recognise it in the West in all three of these churches, the story of Jesus birth and what it teaches us about being human is still significant in each of the denominations I worked with.

How to understand what makes us human is a fundamental question for both theology and anthropology. Flett (2017) finds commonality between theological anthropology (i.e. how theologians conceive of the human) and philosophical anthropology (i.e. how philosophers and social scientists might conceive of the human), by drawing our attention to Clifford Geertz's influential proposal that human beings are "incomplete or unfinished animals" (Geertz, 1973, p. 49). Flett suggests that for theologians such as TF Torrance, finitude and plasticity are characteristic of what it means to be human and created in the image of God. Indeed, Flett points out that because of Torrance's understanding of God as Triune (Father, Son and Holy Spirit; three in one), human sociality becomes "the basis for the expression of the image of God and the fulfilment of human stewardship" (2017, p. 216). Joel Robbins, in his reflection on Flett's chapter, finds this "shared sensibility" useful for making theologians and anthropologists "good dialogue partners" (2017, p. 235). He points out, however, that the role of culture in finishing or completing the human is a point of contention. For Geertz, and other anthropologists the human is "so dependent on culture that it creates them much more than they create it" (Robbins, 2017, p. 235). Whereas in his reading of Flett and the other theologians in the collection he is reviewing, the theological perspective is that humans depend "on God first, themselves second, and culture at least a little less than these other two" (Robbins, 2017, p. 236)²⁹. What I have attempted to do in this chapter is explore the ways in which Christian culture (primarily through the vehicle of liturgical habit) is itself both consciously and unconsciously 'theological', so that the teasing apart of dependence on God, oneself, and culture is problematized.

4.6. Conclusion

In Australia, we rarely have a "cold coming" to Christmas like the Magi in TS Eliot's famous poem (1927); rather "contemporary Australian Christians continue to be caught up in the tension of celebrating the rich liturgical and festal tradition of Christianity in a radically different context" (Pilcher, 2007). Instead of celebrating Christmas in mid-winter, in the cold and dark and under cover of snow, in Australia

²⁹ This is a point theologians themselves take up and debate. For example, Medi Ann Volpe (2013) criticises the theologian Katheryn Tanner for privileging the Christian's agency in precisely this way.

Christmas arrives with the heat of summer, under a scorching sun. The sensory experience of Christmas is inverted from both the original narrative and European and North American tradition. Novelty jumpers and fireplaces may be part of our cultural imaginary, but not part of our experience. Instead, as the sun beats on the brickwork and heats up our houses, we monitor the long-term forecast trying to figure out the best (that is, coolest) day to turn on the oven and do Christmas baking. We still feast. Many still prepare roast turkey and glazed ham for Christmas dinner, though it is often cooked ahead and served cold with salad, but a great number of Australians flock to the fish market and spend exorbitant amounts of money on fresh seafood.

Not only is the weather so radically different in December, but because Australians enjoy summer in December, January, and February, the Christmas holiday is also the end of the school year and the start of our long summer holiday. Advent in Australia is not so much a time of hopeful waiting as it is of frantic activity—end of year concerts, work Christmas parties, a never-ending list of social events and last ditch attempts to catch up before the end of the year and the long summer break. For many, Christmas is the last organisational hurdle before a well-needed summer holiday.

Despite the fact that there are now more people claiming no religious affiliation than there are people claiming Catholic affiliation (ABS, 2016a), many Australians can be found in a park on a summer evening singing Christmas carols at an event organised by local churches. Mimicking the northern heritage of mainline Australian Christianity, we call these gatherings ‘Carols by Candlelight’ despite the fact we only experience the traditional symbolism of lights shining in the darkness if we keep the kids up way past their bedtime. We slap on the sunscreen, pack the picnic, pull out the rug and listen to the story of Christmas told through readings and songs. The Nativity is the most familiar Christian story in our community.

The Catholic church is the most traditionally liturgical of the churches I worked with, but it is also the most flexible. It has a long history of welcoming Catholic migrants from around the world. Embodiment and incarnation take pride of place in the community of Sacred Heart, as seen in the particular sensory character of worship in that place. Its flexibility and gentleness seem purpose-built to accommodate a range of worship practice. This is evident in the faith and migration journeys of some of Sacred Heart’s parishioners whose stories I have shared. In their own way, they have each found a home in this place because of the way it allows them to practice their faith in a

way that feels authentic. This also provides a glimpse of the non-nationalist, non-ethnic orientation of this community—a theme I will pick up and explore further in Chapter 7: Pentecost.

Epiphany: An Interlude

Shortly after Christmas, liturgical churches celebrate Epiphany Sunday. It is a remembrance of the revelation of God to the Gentile Magi—those wise kings from a distant land who brought gifts to the baby Jesus. Unlike Christmas, or Easter, or Pentecost, which remember God’s actions among humans, Epiphany is about the response of humans towards the incarnate God. I have stated previously that I want to show you lives of everyday believers and not have my focus on what is preached from the pulpit. This brief interlude tells the stories of two priests from Sacred Heart Catholic Church.³⁰ It focuses on the life stories of these priests rather than their performance as priests in church. I hope these stories will show you the way in which these Catholic Christians come to know Jesus and to respond to him.



I have a warm welcome from Father Bill, and both of his juniors, the deacon, Eddy, from Flores and a young priest, Stephen, from India are generous with sharing their stories. They had very different paths, Eddy’s family is devoutly Catholic, while Stephen’s background is Hindu. Both of these men were inspired by the life of priests that ministered to them in their home countries.

Eddy’s family were devout Catholics and he has succeeded in committing to the priesthood despite a somewhat playful and irreverent spirit. Eddy’s family were heavily involved in parish life; his dad was a Catechist, “like a second in charge” (transcript line 24) of the parish after the parish priest. The Catechist was responsible for teaching people about the faith (‘catechising’). His parents always spoke well of the church and the priests that served in it. Once, when he was a child, their parish was served by a priest from England. His dad knew how different their cultures were and was amazed that this man would come to them and work with them, living his life like he was from Flores. In Eddy’s words:

³⁰ This section follows closely from Chapter 4, which describes Sacred Heart Catholic Church and presumes upon the ethnographic setting provided in that chapter.

My dad [was] amazed by that because he understood that England—European culture—is totally different to my culture. And this priest, he came to our place and he helped us in many different things, and he felt he lived his life like people in our place. (Interview with Eddy, transcript lines 57–60)

His dad kept talking about this priest over the years and the story was a key part of what inspired Eddy to train for the priesthood himself. Eddy says Divine Word Missionaries are:

Always sending missionaries to different places, so not only in Flores, but to different countries. So, after I entered the seminary, in my own mind I am aware of that I will go out; I will go somewhere. (Lines 75–77)

His home of Flores, an island now part of Indonesia, was first visited by Portuguese merchants and missionaries in the 16th century. Both merchants and missionaries were successful, and the island is now almost entirely affiliated with the Roman Catholic Church. Eddy tells me he was born into a Catholic family, and points out that though Indonesia is a majority Muslim country, Flores is “ninety—ninety-five—percent Catholic” (line 16). Although in his recollections, the missionaries are Dutch rather than Portuguese. He says the Dutch and other Europeans “came to our place and they helped us to spread the Catholic faith” (line 22).

Eddy entered a Divine Word seminary in Flores. At first, he simply tells me that when he came to Australia he decided to join a different order—Missionaries of God’s Love³¹—in Canberra. After we have been speaking for a while, though, he elaborates on the story. Perhaps we have built a little trust? He has a cheeky streak, perhaps Eddy just thinks the story needs telling. Eddy did not voluntarily leave the Divine Word Missionaries. Seminary in Flores was strict; there were no movies, no parties, no drinking, a curfew at night. He has been in Australia now for seven years and looking back, he can see that these rules are “biased”; he reflects that in Flores and Australia, *what* they study is the same, but *how* they act is different:

³¹ <http://mglpriestsandbrothers.org/>

I look back and somehow it's a bit biased. Like the way we act in Indonesia and the freedom I have in Australia. We train to be priest in same Catholic Church, but we acted differently. I should say, in our place they're very strict. (Lines 120–123)

One night, Eddy snuck out to go to a friend's house some distance away to watch a soccer game on the television. On the way back to the seminary, with the hope of sneaking back in undetected, they were in a car accident, "and that's why they caught us" (line 130). "For us", he tells me, "that was a big thing". He was kicked out:

So I was disappointed. I still wanted to be a priest, but if I stay in Indonesia I think I won't have a chance to be a priest again, because I have failed, so I can't do it again. (Lines 137–139)

Some time after, a priest from the Missionaries of God's Love (MGL) visited Flores. Eddy told him his story, and this priest told him that his indiscretions need not keep him from the priesthood if that was what he really wanted. So, at twenty-eight years old, Eddy came to their seminary in Canberra, where he spent the next three years. Because Eddy had been expecting to join a missionary order, he felt prepared for the need to leave Flores. It did not come as a great shock to his family either. Care for his parents will fall to his younger brother and his wife (when he marries). He thinks his brother and three sisters feel OK about that. Families in Flores are quite happy when their sons become priests or daughters become nuns.

The MGL brothers might forgive a love of football, but they have a strict code of poverty. Given his upbringing on Flores, the lifestyle was not a huge shock for Eddy. It took a while for Eddy to realise how significant it was for the Australian born students he was studying with:

I remember during that time we just ate liver. Yeah. And no sweets, chocolate and anything to do with cake and stuff, and also, we don't have television in our house and we don't drink beer and wine, and yeah, it is totally different. But for me because I come from Indonesia to Australia, somehow it doesn't make [as much] difference for me because our lifestyle is different and Australian lifestyle is different. But after I had stayed for one year and I started to realise that, because mostly the

students—the seminarians—who trained with me are young Australians. So they grow up a different way. I should say, they have barbeques and drink beer and all these things and they have to give it up. So I start to see this is a different point of view to the way I live in my country and the way young Australians live here, and we come to the same place where we should sacrifice these things. Which is, for me I find it a bit easier. But for my friends—who are Australian—they find it really difficult. (Lines 85–95)

Two years after coming to Australia, Eddy went home to visit and everybody could see he had changed. He thinks he had been strongly influenced by the Australian sense of equality and a ‘fair go’. Growing up in Flores, he had status as the first-born son and a priest in training. People looked up to him and served him. In Australia, for the first time, he had to do his own laundry and cooking and cleaning. When he went home, he did more of these things, and when other people did them for him, he noticed and said thank you. His willingness to see all people as equal was welcomed when he was interacting with people of lower status, but less well received when it meant he felt able to express his opinions to people of higher status. Eddy suggests that it is the Australian sense of a “fair go” that disrupted his sense of hierarchy. But a few moments later in our conversation he also reflects on the theological underpinnings of this sense of hierarchy and equality:

In Indonesia, even though I trained to [be] a priest, the way we think about God is like ... he is untouchable because he is too holy, too good, and sometimes we honour him, but sometimes we feel scared, like sort of ‘oh’. If we sin, even when we know there’s forgiveness, we [are] still scared and that’s like somehow [pause] that’s oppressed our inner being a little bit; I’m the wrong person [who] always make mistake.

And when I come to Australia I think [that] changed, because this God—someone you can look up to, or high, or very big—but he also became our friend. He always comes back—I mean, looks after us whatever happened, whatever you done in your life. So that before I saw that God is up very high and when I come to Australia I feel less like that. We become friends

and somehow it is more real; like, it is not just about what you feel. Like I feel guilty or happy or the reason behind it, it is God. But when I come to Australia I feel his presence like a real, true relationship. So where often we fail, where often we are happy, and that's the way we—I—look to God as like a friend. Yes, more, so not a scary person or very far away for me, but is more closer. I feel that way. (Lines 222–235)

It is not clear whether it is this theology of how we relate to God that has impacted the Australian sense of equality, or whether the Australian sense of equality predisposes us to give this emphasis to the way we relate to God (correlation is not causation). But it does seem clear that, for Eddy, these two things are related; that his newfound friendship with God who was high above him and far away makes human hierarchies less natural. I asked him to clarify whether he thought this different way of understanding God was a difference in teaching or had to do with the place, and he responded:

I think we were training differently. So, in Indonesia, ... we had a training as a priest which is always say uh, look differently, intentional. God is like, yeah, more up ...

And when I come to Australia the training is more like how the personal relationship you feel with the Lord. In Indonesia we have that personal relationship, but my theological background and my childhood [were] very strong in me and so that's why ... God is more like, I should say, he is the one I look to, I respect, I pray to, but still like I feel its far, yeah, quite far, like untouchable ... very pure and sometimes scary, make you feel guilty. I think the training in Indonesia and in here is very different.

In Indonesia because of our image—[you] become a priest and you should be good, don't make a mistake, you should behave. I mean in here too, you should be good and behave—but it is more who you are. (Lines 246–260)

There were pragmatic things that were difficult to acclimatise to, Eddy found the change in diet—from rice three times a day, to cereal, porridge and sandwiches—to be a shock to his system. He found English hard and it took a long time to feel confident with

language. Eddy found Sydney to be shockingly large, and in reflecting on the biggest differences between home and Australia, he told me:

City life, city lifestyle probably. And I think I should say that's a big shock for me too, because I come from a small town—a small town in here it's like village or something—my place is not really village, not, let's say small town. And jump to the big city. I arrived in Sydney and totally "Whoa!" (Lines 341–344)

But he also found Australian streets very quiet, especially after hours. He was used to people being out and about, he says:

Even I find in Sydney in some streets, "oh where is the people?" Because I didn't realise they were working, or they live in a house, maybe only two [people], but with two cars. Because, in Indonesia we always see people just walking around, many people and a lot of noise. Different houses with different noises and people okay with that. Noise everywhere, even all night long, but here it is different ... and I find Canberra, the first time I arrived in Canberra, a bit lonely because I find it very quiet, like when I walk on the street very quiet. Where are the people around? I couldn't find the people ... (Lines 358–364)

Eddy is due to leave soon, to go to Russia as a Divine Word Missionary brother. In his application, he wrote of his desire to serve street kids, and among youth, and with "family disorder" (line 568). He acknowledges it's going to be a big challenge. But he has already experienced so many different cultures, that he feels equipped for that. He has already started learning Russian, going to Hoppers Crossing every week to a Russian community for lessons. There are twenty other Divine Word Missionaries in Russia. He has contacted them and they've told him that he should be ready for new cultures, to be prepared for the "crime rate", and prepared for the cold (lines 589–590). He will spend the first two years in Russia doing further training before he will be able to act as a priest. Eddy's parents have come to accept the decision "because of the ... faith behind it" (line 615), but they (at least initially) preferred he stay in Australia. They see Eddy going to Russia as a sacrifice and believe, he says, that "there's a grace in it" (line 617). They are giving away this precious thing—their first-born son—and they believe they

will receive back something even more precious; “they believe that what I am doing is a part of the family offer(ing) something better to the Lord” (lines 620–621).

When I returned to Sacred Heart after maternity leave, Eddy had left for Russia and new young priest, Father Stephen, had joined the team. Father Stephen is slight and full of spritely energy. His devotion expresses itself through a search for a kind of pure and holy living and through acts of service. He was born into a Hindu family near Hyderabad, in South India. But Stephen was sent to a Catholic school and the principal, a Catholic priest, impressed him. Stephen converted to Catholicism and eventually became a priest. One of the first things he tells me in our interview is how this priest inspired him: “his lifestyle, his mission, his service for the people in India, touched me” (Transcript of interview with Stephen, lines 19–20).

Stephen is the second youngest of nine children. He left his parental home when he was in only Year 1 to live with his eldest sister so he could go to a school that had good standards. He lived with her until he finished Year 7. She is a mother figure to him—more so perhaps even than his own mother; “if something happens to my sister, I’m more emotionally disturbed than [if it happens to] my mother” (line 192–193). Then in Year 8, he was sent to stay in boarding school. He spent four years—from Year 8 to Year 12—at the boarding school run by the Montfort Brothers Catholic Missionaries.³² As a child, he dreamed of becoming an engineer, moving to the USA, earning a lot of money, getting married and having children. But during high school, he was so touched by the life of his school principal that he “was in confusion” (line 297) over whether to become an engineer or a missionary. Eventually, due to his convictions, he chose the life of the missionary.

Stephen was baptised when he was seventeen. At first, his family opposed his conversion. His dad, especially, “was so stubborn and was so strict regarding me converting to Catholicism” (line 33), but his eldest sister and her husband supported him. One of the reasons she could support him was because their time together meant that she understood him better than his parents did, he spent more years in her care than in his parents’ home. When he first decided to convert, his parents were so angry that they stopped paying for his school fees and study materials. It was a real struggle.

³² For more information see the home page of the Montfort Brothers <https://www.stgabrielinst.org/site/en/home/>

But the support of his sister got him through. He thinks maybe if he had been a thirty- or forty-year old adult, he would have had more resilience, but says it was very hard at only seventeen. I am surprised that they sent him to a Catholic school in the first place, then, but he tells me that it was by far the best option for education in his hometown.

The majority of his classmates were also from Hindu backgrounds, Stephen estimates that maybe ten per cent of the students came from Catholic backgrounds. Only about two other children from his cohort of seventy converted to Catholicism. Stephen deliberately points out that no one forced him to convert, just his own convictions; by his own free will, he says, he became Catholic (line 106).

At seventeen, Stephen entered seminary, where he spent the next thirteen years studying. After seven years, his parents, as well as his eldest sister and her husband and children all became Catholics too. He calls it a miracle. They were committed to the Hindu faith, but they were touched by Stephen's faith, his life, his mission work, and were persuaded. He again points out that he applied no pressure: "No. They were convinced of my life, my faith, and they too became Catholics and they also worship only Jesus" (lines 147-148). Since then, two more sisters and their families and two more brothers and their families have also become Catholics. There are three sisters who remain Hindu. Stephen always uses the language of Catholicism; he talks of how his family have become Catholics, not the more generic 'Christian'. His relationship with all of his siblings and his parents are now very positive. He says they respect him as a Catholic priest and even the children of his Hindu sisters are being educated at Catholic schools. The one thing that still causes his Hindu sisters some consternation is that they believe there is no salvation without marriage. They are troubled by his commitment to priestly celibacy and ask him how he can live without getting married and having children: "they don't understand my life mission or what I am doing" (lines 230-231).

The seminary Stephen joined was also run by the Montfort Brothers Catholic Missionaries. He did all his priestly training in India, but he was trained for international mission. After he was ordained, his Superior General asked him to go to Australia. It was at the end of his studies that different priests came to his seminary to promote their brotherhoods that Stephen learnt about the Divine Word Missionaries. Their charism is "preach the Bible where it has not reached" (line 269). Stephen says that leaving his state and even his country was appealing to him:

I didn't want to stay in my place because of my background that my people are not accepting me or maybe have more problems speaking in my own place and that if I go outside, I'll be more active and more accepted, I thought ... even Jesus said, man is not accepted in his own country, but he is loved and accepted in other places. (Lines 271–274)

It was the commitment of his school principal to the lives of poor Indian children that most touched Stephen's heart. That was his own dream; that in becoming a missionary, he might educate poor children and look after poor people, "that was my great, great dream" (line 304).

When his Superior General asked him to leave India for mission, Stephen identified three preferences; Brazil, Australia, and Argentina. He was given Australia:

Now you may ask me, "in Australia, there are no poor people, financially", you may think. But it is not merely financial poverty, it might be emotionally, a person may be affected, mentally, or psychologically which I can help out with. However, heart in hand, in the depth of my heart, still there is a zeal to educate the poor children. (Lines 306–309)

With the support of some friends, Stephen sponsors about ten children going to school in India. He has a monthly allowance of \$AUD200, and he tells me that he puts half of it aside every month to send back to India to support poor children to attend school. He says it was a resolution from the beginning of his time at seminary that half of his income he would give to children's charities.

Stephen tells me that coming to Australia, he:

carried with me a lot of anxiety, tension, fear within me when I came here, but always, I had a faith in God. Nobody is with me, but God is with me. So if God wants me to do his Work, I will do it. If I am not able to do it, I keep my hands on my chest and say, I am not worthy to do mission here, then I may go back to India. (Lines 363–366)

He had learnt English as a second language at school, and had completed his University studies in English. He was not worried so much about speaking the language as he was concerned about understanding the Australian accent. It took a little while to feel

confident. He also struggled with Australian food. When he first arrived at the Divine Word boarding house, two Australian women cooked for the priests; boiled vegetables and barbeques were common. Back in India, Stephen would eat rice three times a day and food was full of spices. Stephen struggled to comprehend how anyone can eat a plain boiled potato:

When I came here, boil the carrot, boil the potatoes, then barbeque. Each of these things I was not at all used to eat ... Very plain. Just simple boiled potatoes they are eating. I was thinking, what sort of food it is eating one boiled potato. [laughs] And they're saying 'oh, it's nice, nice', 'oh, excellent, good'; I thought, simple boiled potatoes and they're saying excellent and good, which my heart was not telling me it was good; I was cursing the cook, I was cursing myself, why did I come and eat in this world, and I couldn't eat, and go to bed I feel so hungry, then get up and eat one banana or apple, I have cup of coffee or tea then I struggle initially, but if you ask me today, I enjoy Aussie food. It is ... in that way, no; [inaudible] any food you are eating—Vietnamese food, Chinese food, Japanese food, all this food, different nationalities, of course, I only tasted in Australia.
(Lines 385–386 and 404–411)

Stephen was sent to different Australian towns and cities for training—visiting Brisbane, Sydney, and Alice Springs, as well as Melbourne. He has also spent three months in Wellington, New Zealand as an acting parish priest. He says people would often invite him round for a meal and it was in that way that he got to taste food from Vietnam, the Philippines and China, as well as 'Aussie' food.

Stephen struggles to reconcile some of his Catholic moral teaching with the habits of Australian Catholics. He is shocked and saddened by the acceptance of the way couples live together before marriage—and especially that couples living this way are allowed to participate in communion. He also finds it difficult that children leave the family home before marriage. Young adults often move out of home, leaving the guidance of their parents or grandparents, and he thinks that this could contribute to leading them down paths to “drugs and whatever” (line 505). Here, he says, there is no fear of parents or grandparents. Everyone is so independent that they can do as they please.

Eddy also wondered about the different culture of church going here. Stephen clearly articulates his moral affront, while Eddy, who still finds it wrong, seems to take a more curious approach. Eddy was also shocked by how few people go to church. He had so many internal questions about why people don't go to church, wondering "Have they lost their faith?" (line 370). His diagnosis of the problem, now, is that people seem to have so many "better offers" (line 389). Eddy finds many of the youth disconnect from church after they finish high school. Once they turn eighteen, he sees that they can move out of home and have "other things to do" (line 380); the city lifestyle, Eddy says, is that the "weekend is party time, yeah, so they chill out and have a good time with friends: have a couple of drinks; parties all Friday, Saturday and Sunday they rest" (lines 383–384). But it's not just a problem for young adults—parents, too, disconnect. Eddy reflects:

Maybe they're busy, maybe they're working and that makes hard for the parents to come to the Church, and also on the weekend we told parents they'll have a rest but they're not, because if they have kids maybe there's footy training for the kids, or lessons, or birthday party for the kids and they should bring them around, move them around. I think this makes them somehow slowly disconnect from the church. (Lines 393–397)

Eddy thinks it is grandparents that perhaps keep families tied to church. If grandparents are attenders, then maybe the rest of the family will attend for "baptisms, weddings, and funerals" (line 399). If this kind of non-attendance happened in Indonesia, Eddy says that the priests would "force them" asking "why don't you come to church then?" (line 414). But here in Australia, in Preston, they don't ask pointed questions like that, rather "if they turn up, we accept them" (line 422). The philosophy here is that "everybody is welcome" (line 430) even if the priests think that a family is seeking baptism just because of family expectations, they don't push expectations, instead explaining a little bit, gently, about the faith. Eddy has learnt to accept this behaviour from parishioners (cf. lines 399–405). He doesn't agree with it, but he can understand it. He accepts it.

It's not just his parishioners behaviour that Stephen finds shocking, he also struggles with the propensity of priests to drink alcohol and smoke cigarettes:

Back in India, priests are expected not to drink, not to smoke, especially in public places or especially when they visit the families; that is encouraged, people expect it and the priest not to smoke, not to drink. So that's why, till today I never smoke, I never drink because of my background in India. So, when I came here, I saw the priest smoking, I saw the priest drinking, even sometimes we visit the families; families automatically offer, "Father, would you like to have beer or wine?" But for me, it was a shock, that being a priest, how can we drink? We need to be an example; priests, we are men of God, we are servants of God, so people should see that goodness of God's grace in us; so when they look at ... because we are in a place of Jesus; when we offer Eucharist, we are in the place of Jesus, so how can we be like a smoking and a drinking, and saying to the people not to smoke and not drink? See, what I preach, I need to practice; what I practice, I have to preach. (Lines 519–530)

Stephen's priestly identity is strong, and he is committed to setting a strong example for his parishioners:

I am aware of my own priestly identity, I can say, more than human identity. Human identity is important, but once I am ordained, I am priestly; my identity should be seen around people who are both human and divine. When it comes to the divine aspect, what am I giving to the people? If you and go to pubs or restaurant, you won't drinking, is there a difference between you and me, regarding it? (Lines 566–570)

What looks 'holy' is different in Australia and India. In Australia, priests drink and smoke. In India they do not. In India, children gather round him "playing, hugging, pulling, pushing" (line 633), but Stephen has received strong warnings in Australia to avoid such behaviour. Because of the revelations about child sexual abuse in churches, it is not acceptable to be alone with children, or to play physically with them. Stephen says he loves children, but in Australia he is "very aware" of his relationship with children (line 649). The stories of abuse have disturbed him a lot and the warnings he has received have made him very afraid. He describes his experience at home:

I am having fourteen nieces and nephews, okay? When I go home, I will be at home sitting on the chair or on the floor, all my children will be falling on me. And being a priest back in India for six months, I was in charge of the children's ministry as well as the youth ministry, and these children, if I'm in the room, without knocking on the door, they come and grab the chocolates, sweets from the rooms; but here, it is entirely opposite. I love to be with the children, to give faith or Jesus, but because of this past life here I do not know what happened but because of child abuse I am very aware of my relationship with the children. (Lines 643–652)

Back in India we believe that the kingdom of God belongs to the children, okay? Being a priest, but children in India they come and they will be around me, playing, hugging, pulling, pushing ... we are a fatherly figure to these children, okay? But when I came here they said, because of the child abuse, so that they said, "you cannot touch the children"; "you cannot take to their rooms"; "you cannot hug the children"; "only in blessing time"; "you should be very careful". All these things disturbed me a lot. Even I'm afraid I can tell you today. I'm afraid of it. (Lines 631–637)

Stephen reflects on another difference between home and Australia being that people hardly talk to strangers in public places. At home, it's common to sit next to someone on the train and introduce yourself and start talking, whereas here in Australia, people hardly talk to each other. Australians read or listen; they travel "with their own worry" (line 715). Stephen has learnt to do the same—he now opens a spiritual book as soon as he gets on the train. He feels that interpersonal relationships are lacking in Australia. He has had to do things alone much more since arriving in Australia. In India, he would always have company—if he needed to catch the train someone would walk with him to the station. Although he lives with a small number of other priests, instead of socialising, they often retire to their private rooms after meal times. The same is true in families, he thinks.

Stephen says he feels like he has lost some of his prayerfulness since arriving in Australia. He is trying to reclaim the habit. I ask him what prayer looks like for him, and he tells me that, first, it means being with God; time alone with the Lord. Stephen says it

includes petitioning God for things, for help, but that he also spends time meditating on things like a life incident, or a passage from the Bible, or somebody's experience.

Not long before Stephen left India for Australia, there had been several attacks on Indian students here. It was big news at home and some of his friends told him "Oh, you'll be stoned to death there!" (line 709). But Stephen says he hasn't experienced any kind of racism here. When he walks down the street in casual clothes, he looks just like a student, but still he hasn't encountered any racist attitudes. Sacred Heart is a multicultural parish, and everyone knows he is a priest, so he has been easily accepted at church. Now, Stephen says he feels at home in Preston. There are lots of Indian people here, and lots of Indian shops. The congregation has welcomed him and he has lots of friends from different nationalities. Living in the Presbytery with Father Bill and Father Ennio, he says they have a "charism of oneness, togetherness" (line 885), they look after one another and care for each other:

We cook together, eat together, pray together now. So, in that way I feel at home. I have full confidence in that when we were missionaries, that if anything happens to me, they are there. (Lines 886–888)

Like Stephen, Eddy has seen a lot of different places in Australia. After spending three years with the MGL brothers, Eddy transferred back to the Divine Word Missionaries. During his training with the Divine Word Missionaries, he has spent time in Melbourne, Brisbane, and Alice Springs. I can't help but think he's seen more of Australia and had more, different cultural experiences than many of my Australian-born peers. In Alice Springs he worked with Indigenous Australians and he reflects that their way of relating to each other and to God is more like he was used to on Flores; "Aboriginal people think pretty much the same as my people think" (lines 490–491). Eddy tries to make sense of these radically different cultural experiences he has had, he holds onto the more Western idea of God as friend, but acknowledges the importance of understanding and becoming like the people he ministers among:

I think, somehow, I feel rich inside me because I can cope with this, I can understand them, and at the same times I should adjust myself in terms of, "oh, yeah, because this is the way they think." (Lines 535–537)

Eddy has thought about the way theology and culture interact. He speaks briefly of the way Aboriginal Australians and the people of Flores bring Catholic theology and their culture together:

But somehow, they put together their culture and their faith, like Catholic faith, so we call it enculturation. Yeah, enculturation. So, they put it together, our theology and their lifestyle and religion, which I find really good. Our place did the same thing; put together our faith and our culture. Only in Australia because of modern way of life, so it is bit different. We more ... we operate with faith and freedom. You're free to do something. So that's the way I see, like, and with that I find also easier to move to another place, like because I believe that ... I still, I have Catholic faith, but people have different way of thinking about something, thinking about God, different cultures, different kind of the way they relate to the Lord.
(Lines 544–533)

I remain unsure why Australia ought to be seen as any different in Eddy's mind to the 'bringing together' of theology and culture that he can recognise on Flores or in Alice Springs. I suspect that it is because Western culture simultaneously carries such a pervasive Christian heritage, while also loudly declaring its secularity.

Eddy's decision to be a priest doesn't simply transform him as an individual, he says "once you become a priest, it is like your whole family, they feel like they are a part of me" (line 625). And, he says, not just his nuclear family, but his whole extended family, his whole town, his whole village (line 627). When he goes home to Flores, he delivers a Mass and the whole town will get involved; it will be like a party. He will feel like a hero. In the Catholic faith marriage and priesthood have a similar status. Both are celebrated, but the ordination of a priest is "bigger", "higher" (line 640–641).

When Eddy tries to reconcile the fact that he needs to act in different ways when he is home in Flores compared to his life here in Australia, he sometimes worries that he has "lost my culture or I lost my background", that perhaps there is something wrong with him. But he is becoming more confident:

I think I [am] happy with what I am now. And when I look back, I think that's the way they live and we operate in different way[s]. Like I said

before I am happy to stand in [these] two different cultures. It doesn't mean that I lose my background and totally to the new lifestyle, but I can stand in [these] two situations because two places, two culture[s], different people in these two places are related in different ways. I think I got that, I'm happy with that, to cope with that situation. (Lines 660–665)



These two stories show us the way knowledge of God is not only revealed through the text of Scripture, but also through the actions and performance of other believers. The priests who served Eddy and Stephen's communities were inspirational to them. Their parents and siblings shaped their commitment to the path towards priesthood. Their physical experience of life in Australia has changed their faith: making Eddy more egalitarian and convincing Stephen of the need for holy living. They both talk about the consistency of what they have been taught in seminary—the substance of their faith has been consistent—but the lived experience of migration has changed how they inhabit that knowledge.

5. Lent

5.1. Introduction

From Henry Thoreau (2016 [1854]) to Cheryl Strayed (2013), we have a fascination with people choosing to turn their back on 'civilisation' and entering the wilderness. These are narratives of solitude and danger. Sometimes, such as for Strayed, they end well. But sometimes, like the experience of Christopher McCandless (Krakauer, 2007), they end tragically. The season of Lent is the Christian wilderness re-enactment. In some ways it is foundational to these other narratives, and in others it presents a contrast; in the wilderness Jesus does not seek himself but the Father, He never doubts his sustenance for he knows that God will provide. This chapter focuses on the Arabic Baptist congregation and explores how they think about loss and sacrifice.

The season of Lent spans the forty days before Easter and is traditionally a re-enactment of sorts of the forty days Jesus spent in the wilderness at the very start of his ministry. It is a way of remembering this period of sacrifice, of waiting, of fasting, and of staying obedient in the face of temptation. After his cousin, John the Baptist, baptised him and before he started his public ministry, Jesus wandered the desert for forty days and forty nights. 'The temptation', as it is sometimes called, is one of many periods of forty days or years mentioned in Scripture. They are often periods of trial: for example, the flood lasted for forty days and forty nights, the Israelites spent forty years wandering in the desert before they were allowed to enter the promised land, and Moses spent forty nights on Mt Sinai receiving the law. Indeed, Jesus' temptation is in some way the fulfilment of these previous stories.

The gospel of Matthew (4:1-11) reports that while he is in the desert, Jesus is visited and tempted by the devil. Each of the temptations mirrors a moment from Israel's forty years in the desert, "but where in both instances Israel as a people or Moses as a leader failed the test, Jesus passes his (Blomberg, 2007, p. 14). First, the devil suggests he use his power to solve his hunger urging him; "command these stones to become loaves of bread." But Jesus responds with a quote from Scripture, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God." These are God's words to Israel while they are wandering in the desert, reminding them that he made them wander for forty years so that they would learn to trust in Him. Jesus

demonstrates to the devil that he has learned this lesson. Then the devil tempts him to throw himself down from the temple so that God might use his angels to protect him and prove his love. Again, Jesus quotes Scripture and references the Israelites forty years in the desert, responding “Again it is written, ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test’” (Deuteronomy 6:16). The reference is to a time in the desert when the Israelites were thirsty, quarrelling amongst themselves, and calling into doubt whether God was really with them. Jesus does not doubt the way the Israelites did. Finally, the devil tempts Jesus with power, offering him all the kingdoms of the world “All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me” (Matthew 4:9). But Jesus, commands the devil to leave, paraphrasing the first of the ten commandments, the rules received by Moses while the Israelites wandered the desert; “You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve.” Jesus is the faithful Israelite. Each year, the season of Lent allows Christians to inhabit and recreate—with varying levels of immersion and intensity—their own forty days for reflection like these biblical precedents.

As Jesus fasted in the wilderness, so many Christians have a tradition of fasting in Lent. Catholic theologian Dix (2015) claims that while fasting before Easter is an ancient Christian observance probably inherited from Judaism, the great fast of Lent developed between the second through to the fourth century. His history suggests that Lent began as a period of preparation for catechumens³³ who would be baptised at Easter. This sense of preparation and remembering remains and the theologian Webber claims “the Lenten journey is a baptismal spirituality” (2004, p. 112). For Webber, Lent:

calls us back to God, back to basics, back to the spiritual realities of life. It calls on us to put to death the sin and indifference we have towards God and our fellow persons. And it beckons us to enter once again the joy of the Lord—the joy of a new born life born out of a death to the old life.
(Webber, 2004, p. 99)

Lent is traditionally a fast from rich foods, but contemporary tradition often involves the voluntary giving up of a wider range of modern things: chocolate, alcohol, coffee, social media, or television. In a report on Lenten traditions in Australia for the ABC (see Image 6) Heuzenroeder and Gunders ask Reverend Robert Paget of St Luke’s

³³ i.e. students of the catechism; someone preparing for baptism

Anglican Cathedral, who is Lent for? He replies, "It's for anybody that wants to engage in the process of self-examination, and realigning of priorities" (2017). Lent starts with Ash Wednesday, commonly remembered as a day of repentance. It is called Ash Wednesday after the tradition of marking the forehead of worshippers with ash. The day before Ash Wednesday, Shrove Tuesday, was a day to use up rich foods and in some European traditions this meant cooking pancakes. In other traditions, it was a day of celebration, Mardi Gras, literally 'Fat Tuesday', before the sombreness of Lent descended.

Image 6: Screenshot of ABC online news item about Lent in contemporary Australia



This Lenten practice of sacrifice is a ritual and anthropologists have plenty to say about sacrifice as ritual action. Drawing on early work of Hubert and Mauss, Bloch argues sacrifice is:

a matter of going towards the divine via the death of the victim and then coming back to the profane. This may be done for two reasons. Communication may be established through sacrifice in order momentarily to enter into contact with the divine so that sins may be forgiven or other benefits obtained. Hubert and Mauss called these 'rites of sacralisation'. Or communication is established with the sacred so that unwanted contact with the supernatural may be brought to an end. These

sacrifices were called by the two authors ‘rites of desacralisation’. (Bloch, 1992, p. 28)

Sacrifice is a “going towards” and then “coming back”—it is a repeated ritual with a beginning and an end. However, Bloch is careful to point out that sacrifice ought not to be delimited to a particular, distinct type of ritual. Rather, he wishes to explore sacrifice as “very many manifestations of a much wider range of phenomena” (1992, p. 25). And he points out that Hubert and Mauss’ work has been criticised for the emphasis their understanding placed on Vedic and Judeo-Christian traditions. Sacrifice, for Bloch, while multifaceted and of many different types, remains in the realm of ritual action—opposed to ordinary everyday life. And because sacrifice is a ritual act, it is passed through. Turner, too, has much to say about the way in which ritual sees a person pass through a stage of liminality to return to the mundane (2002 [1969]). But he also describes the life of the Christian as being perpetually caught up in liminality (Turner, 2002 [1969]).

The Judeo-Christian tradition certainly has a long and complex relationship with the concept (and act) of sacrifice. From Abraham’s thankfully aborted attempt to sacrifice Isaac, through to the Passover, and Crucifixion, sacrifice is central to the Judeo-Christian narrative and its understanding of how humans relate to God—only through the forgiveness granted by pure blood. The Christian New Testament repeatedly argues that the need for ritual blood sacrifices was finished with Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross. Yet, the sacrificial life of the Christian is ongoing; the Apostle Paul says Christians are to “offer their lives as living sacrifices”. In the Anglican tradition, these words of Paul’s are taken on the lips of congregants after the Lord’s Supper in this communal prayer:

Father,
we offer ourselves to you
as a living sacrifice
through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Send us out in the power of your Spirit
to live and work to your praise and glory.
(Anglican Church of Australia, 2010, p. 144)

Although the Christian might perform the ritual of baptism, metaphorically dying with Christ through immersion and emerging ‘born again’, Martin Luther, in his small catechism, says that this is just a sign that this dying is ongoing:

It means that the old Adam in us should be drowned by daily sorrow and repentance, and die with all sins and evil lusts, and, in turn, a new person daily come forth and rise from death again. He will live forever before God in righteousness and purity. (Luther, trans. Smith, 1994, Part 4:IV:)

Like in baptism, there is a sense in which this ‘dying’ and sacrificial living is something Christians can be perpetually caught up in, perhaps in small ways, and which may play out in more dramatic ways in different seasons—of the calendar (such as Lent) or of life (such as the process of leaving home). Different Christian traditions think differently about the function of the Lord’s Supper as either primarily an act of symbolic remembering (e.g., the Adventist’s speak of ‘memorial’ and ‘commemoration’ through their Ordinances³⁴), or an act of re-offering and re-enacting the sacrifice of Jesus (e.g., Roman Catholic belief in transubstantiation), or something in between (e.g., the Lutheran belief in consubstantiation). But they are united in seeking to bring into present experience the implications—if not the substance—of Christ’s sacrifice. However it is looked at, the Lord’s Supper further embeds the themes of Lent in the rhythms of ordinary Christian experience.

What these details about Lent offer us is a way to start thinking about how many Christians in Australia practice and re-enact the habit of a ‘wilderness experience’ and participate in practices that are characterised as sacrificial. Wilderness and sacrifice are, of course, connected; the taking on of voluntary sacrifice is one way in which we mimic the wilderness experience. But the burden of this chapter is to provide a more nuanced understanding of how Christians then behave when they are required to live through times of great sacrifice. How has this practice—done through remembering, retelling and re-enacting a wilderness experience—prepared them for a life in which sacrifice is a reality? I do not at all want to insinuate that migrants pass through a wilderness on their way to a ‘promised land’ in Australia—indeed, I hope to show you ways in which

³⁴ See, for example, Chapter 15 “The Lords Supper” (p194–205) in *What Seventh-day Adventists Believe... A biblical Exposition of 27 Fundamental Doctrines*, Ministerial Association, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 6840 Eastern Avenue NW, Washington DC 20012.

life in Australia can be a part of an ongoing wilderness experience only to be resolved when Christian migrants reach their heavenly home. As a result, this chapter starts with the stories of my participants and examines the way in which life decisions (such as leaving one's beloved home) can be thought of as 'sacrificial'. These experiences of wilderness and sacrifice may be liminal. Yet I will explore how they provide ongoing narrative frames for the Christian life—not passed through or resolved, but persistent.

5.2. Arab Christians in Australia

According to the ABS, more Australian residents born in the Middle East and North Africa who live in Australia identify as Christian (42%) than Muslim (36%) (ABS, 2016g).³⁵ Within that forty-two percent, there is great variety of Christian denominational affiliation. Christians in Australia who were born in the Middle East or North Africa predominantly identify as Western Catholic, Coptic, or Maronite (see Table 3). Just over ten per cent of Christians in that place of birth category identify as being Protestant Christians (ABS, 2016h). Christians from the Middle East and North Africa belong to some of the most ancient Christian communities in the world. The Assyrian Orthodox church still uses the Aramaic language—the language Jesus is thought to have spoken colloquially—in their worship. While their churches are often impressively large and ornate, they are somewhat invisible in Australian public discourse, in which Christianity is typically White and Arabs are imagined to be Muslim. Daniel Nour, a young Egyptian Coptic Catholic who participated in the 2019 SBS program *Christians Like Us*, writes that “the lack of diversity [on an ABC panel of Christian leaders] would lead you to believe that Christianity didn't begin in 1st Century Palestine, but in the moors and grasslands of Ireland and England” (Nour, 2019).

While Christians are a minority in most of these Middle Eastern and North African home countries, they represent a significant proportion of people born in those countries that reside here in Australia. That could demonstrate a few things: first, Christians from the Middle East and North Africa may be more likely to leave their country of birth than their compatriots of other religions (mostly Islam); second

³⁵ There is no Australian Census category for 'Arab' so, as a proxy, these statistics use persons born in North Africa and the Middle East. For further discussion about this please refer to Kenny et al. (2005, p. 40).

**Table 3: Top 20 Religion Categories in Australia
Among Persons Born in North Africa and Middle East
Source: ABS, 2016h**

Religion (ABS 4 digit classification)	Number of persons	Percent of total persons from North Africa and Middle East
Islam	135632	36%
Western Catholic	56400	15%
No Religion, so described	36520	10%
Not stated	18844	5%
Coptic Orthodox Church	17162	5%
Maronite Catholic	11989	3%
Christian (not further defined)	11983	3%
Greek Orthodox	10907	3%
Assyrian Church of the East	7817	2%
Anglican Church of Australia	7498	2%
Chaldean Catholic	7434	2%
Baha'i	6924	2%
Judaism	6907	2%
Mandaeen	5494	1%
Armenian Apostolic	3978	1%
Baptist	3589	1%
Antiochian Orthodox	3377	1%
Presbyterian	2120	1%
Syrian Orthodox Church	1938	1%
Pentecostal (not further defined)	1725	0%

Christians may be more likely to be identified as under religious persecution in their home countries and therefore more likely to obtain humanitarian visas; third, it may indicate that Australia is more willing to welcome people from the Middle East and North Africa if they have a Christian background. A. Odysseus Patrick (2017) writes in a New York Times opinion piece about Australia's track record that, "78 percent of the approximately 18,563 refugees from Syria and Iraq granted entry from July 1, 2015 to Jan. 6 [2017] identified themselves as Christian. This figure is significantly out of proportion to Christians' presence among the region's displaced peoples." Patrick suggests that this is cultural discrimination and not reflective of differing experiences of persecution. A number of my interviewees spoke of identifying Australia as a good

destination country because they understood it to be a Christian country. They expected to be able to worship here without persecution or discrimination.

The Arabic Baptists church I worked with is predominantly attended by Egyptian- and Iraqi-born people. According to Kenny et al. (2005), the Egyptian community in Australia grew rapidly during the 1950s and 1960s when Coptic Egyptians were displaced by social upheavals following Egyptian independence in 1953. Egyptian-born residents have a high rate of Australian citizenship (96%) and are well-educated. While seventy-eight percent of Egyptian-born Australians speak a language other than English at home, eighty-eight percent identify as speaking English well or very well (Kenny et al., 2005). More than a third of Victoria's Iraqi community arrived between 1991 and 1995 as refugees as a result of the First Gulf War. Many Iraqi migrants who have arrived since have done so under family reunion and skilled migrant schemes. The Iraqi-born population is also quite proficient in English, with 70% of migrants speaking English well or very well (Kenny et al., 2005). They are, however, disadvantaged compared to Australian average with respect to levels of educational or occupational qualifications and rates of unemployment (Kenny et al., 2005).

Few of the Arabic Protestants I worked with practice Lent in the way I described in the introduction, but many of them have shared this experience of being hollowed out, possession-less, alone, holding onto their faith in a time of scarcity and persecution. They re-tell and remember the narratives of wilderness experiences and sacrifice. While the Adventists choose imagery of the risen Jesus for their slide shows of hymn lyrics, at the Arabic Baptist church there are many more images of the wounded, crucified Lord. Often depicted with his crown of thorns. Bleeding and broken. This wounded Lord is one who has shared their pain.

5.3. The Long Way Home

Pastor Joseph arrived in Australia with his wife and children in the 1970s. In Egypt, he had been a Protestant pastor and he set to work establishing an Arabic speaking Protestant congregation in Melbourne. He is non-committal about being a Baptist as such, but he is grateful for the welcome the Baptist church gave him and its willingness to accommodate him and his church within its denomination. Most of the congregants I spoke with were relatively ambivalent about a denominational identity,

rather they think of themselves as 'born again' or Protestant. For those with Egyptian heritage, this is in contrast to Coptic Christians and for those from Iraq, it is in contrast to Chaldean Catholic or Assyrian Orthodox traditions. The church has had a number of physical homes over the years, in Carlton, Brunswick and now in Preston.

The current location is a red brick church that looks like it dates from the 1960s or 70s. Inside the main building, the church has pews that would seat approximately 100–150 people. At the front, there is a lectern and three highbacked seats on a platform where Pastor Joseph, the song leader, and any visiting dignitaries sit. On an arch above the platform is the formal name of the church "The Valley of Beracah": it is a reference to a story from the book of 2 Chronicles chapter 20 in which the Israelites gather together after military victory and call the place of their gathering the Valley of Beracah (which means 'blessing'). The reference "2 Chronicles 20:26" is written in both English and Arabic on the arch. And a banner with the quote "The bridegroom is coming—go out to meet him."³⁶ To the side against the wall, are a few seats perpendicular to the pews for additional vocalists. An electronic keyboard is set up in front of the first pew facing the lectern where the song leader will stand. There is a sound board behind the last pew and behind that is a glassed-in foyer, where I often sat when I had my active almost-two-year-old Benjamin with me.

In addition to the church space, there is a hall that is used by Pastor Joseph's son, David, to run a contemporary service in English aimed at the youth and children in the congregation. While he preaches a sermon to the youth and young adults, the children are taught in adjoining Sunday school rooms. There is another hall with a kitchen that is used after the service to serve food and drinks, and also houses Pastor Joseph's office. The property is large and strategically placed on a main road with easy access to public transport, but it needs serious renovation. Many of the congregation live further to the north in newer suburbs. While white hipsters are driving up the property prices on heritage California bungalows in the surrounding streets, my sense is that most of the people I talk to here prefer new housing. Between the land value of the current property and the pull of the congregation's residential centre of gravity to the north, it makes

³⁶ This quote references the parable of the Ten Virgins in Matthew 25. Jesus speaks this parable to his disciples as a way of teaching them that they will not know when he is going to return, but they must be ready; he will be like the bridegroom, and they like the virgins (like bridesmaids) keeping watch at the door. Only those who are ready for his arrival will enter the wedding feast (a metaphor for the kingdom of God) (cf. Hauerwas (2006) p. 208–9)

sense to the congregation to relocate again. When I worship with them, they are in the process of purchasing a plot of land in an industrial estate in a developing suburb to the north.

The first people I am introduced to at church are Pastor Joseph's youngest son, David and his wife Istir. In my field notes, I have described Istir as "excruciatingly beautiful". Like at the Adventist church, people dress themselves very well for church here. The women's hair and make-up are thoroughly professional and I frequently feel rough around the edges in comparison. I am very warmly welcomed by David and Istir and would call them friends, even though we struggled to move our friendship from church to our lives beyond its walls. This is the congregation where I am most clearly an ethnic outsider, but it is also the one I am closest to in terms of my own theological commitment, and we share a fraternity that was less obvious in the other congregations I worked with.

The music was loud. So loud that little Benjamin could hardly stand it—we often had to go out into the courtyard to play when the congregation is singing. The songs are contemporary or popular in their musical style. For example, when I took Ben to the local Arabic patisserie, *Abla's*, for baklava, and he heard the Arabic music on the PA system, he declared "It sounds like Arabic church!". The first time I visited, there was a visiting Arab-American singer-songwriter. I asked Istir whether she knew the songs the performer was singing, because everyone seemed to be joining in. But she told me no, it's just that Arabic songs are easier to sing than Western songs because "you just know how it goes; what's going to happen next. Not like Western music." (fieldnotes 09/07/2013). Meanwhile, I was bamboozled by the chord progressions and thrown off balance by the fact they all clap on one and three.

During morning tea, an elderly Iraqi woman called me over. She did not speak much in the way of English, so she asked a young woman to translate for her. She wanted to warn me not to let Muslims migrate to Australia. She told me they are dangerous and started to describe, in Arabic, some of the things she witnessed Muslims do to Christians in Iraq. The young woman started translating stories of beheadings, but then turned to me, looked me in the eye and said very seriously, "I am not translating everything she is saying because it is too horrible". I am a bleeding-heart leftie, concerned about promoting a multicultural and tolerant Australian community and I still struggle to sit comfortably with this experience. I cannot ignore the reality of her

experience, and the genuineness of her concern for me and ‘my’ country (she sees me as ‘Australian’ in a way she doesn’t count herself). But I have Muslim friends. And I am not convinced that religion is the source of violence for Muslims any more than it has been for Christians. This elderly woman came to Australia for protection—this Christian woman chose a ‘Christian’ country—and she aligns the two of us as Christians, over and above herself and Muslim Iraqis as fellow Arabs, all the while acknowledging the distance between the two of us in the way she tells me to protect ‘my country’ (not ours).

In order to understand the Arabic Baptist church, I felt I needed to understand the something of the Orthodox faith it contrasts with and that the congregation have chosen it over. A few weeks later, at my request, Istir organized for me to visit the large Chaldean Catholic church a few suburbs to the north. It is enormous, my quick mental calculations estimated seating for upward of one thousand people. There, the atmosphere was much more serious and contemplative. People still greeted one another, but the service has an ancient feel. It is liturgical, with chants rather than congregational song. I sat upstairs with a young relative of Istir’s who answers my whispered questions. At one point, I reflected that the space must be quite spectacular for a wedding. She said, yes, it’s nice, but it gets really full for funerals. Marianne, a congregation member at the Arabic Baptist church reflected on this with me later, saying:

Yes, it’s different in Arab culture. There’s a saying in Arabic that it’s better to go to a funeral and give condolences in a time of sadness than it is to go to a wedding. For them, to go to be for someone who’s lost, you know, it’s more important than to be there for a happy moment. It’s hard to translate but that’s the gist of it. (Interview with Marianne, transcript lines 858–861)

I share with Marianne that I recently went to the funeral of an elderly relative and only a dozen immediate family were there. And that that seemed to be the way they wanted it; this funeral was a time for private mourning. She says:

It's different, like with us if you know someone who knows someone and you've met them even once, you gotta go to the funeral like even if you've just met them. Just to give them your condolences. (Lines 886–888)

The contrast between Australian and Arab sense of community and connection is apparent in the story of Samara (Story 7).

Story 7: Samara

Samara is softly spoken and has an easy smile for newcomers like me. She is also highly educated, articulate and multi-lingual—and incredibly hard working. When I meet her, in addition to running a household and caring for two school-aged children, she is working and studying for translation qualifications, a diploma in childrens' services, and training and assessment to train others. She often sits next to me in church and translates for me during the sermon. She is a great help to me, both in terms of understanding and just in making me feel welcome. Samara is one of only two people who take up the offer to come into my home to talk about their story. She doesn't seem entirely at ease, perched on the edge of my couch, but the fact that she came at all is a measure of her courage. This is her story of growing up in Egypt, finding unexpected community in Dubai, and starting life all over again in Australia for the sake of her children.

Samara was born and grew up in a Christian family in a district of Cairo called Chubra. Most Egyptian Christians are Coptic but a small number, including Samara and her family, are born again. She laughs as she says they are the “minority of the minority” (line 41). She was the youngest of five children. Her father passed away when she was in her final year of high school. Her mother is deeply involved in church life. Samara says her mother ministers everywhere, especially with people who are not from a Christian background.

After finishing high school, Samara studied engineering at university. Samara and her future husband, Fadil, met on a church camp. She was working on the administration of the camp and was one of only a few women there. They started talking and spending time together. They went out together without an official commitment until they were both sure that it was a good fit. Samara says she and

Fadil both prayed about their relationship, to make sure that it was God's plan. Samara turns a soft shade of pink and gets a bit giggly as she remembers, "we started to know each other and we talked together, hang around together, then the story continues". They dated and decided to marry. They obviously married for love. Both their families were supportive. They were engaged just before Fadil first went to Dubai for work. A year and a half later they were married and she followed him there. Fadil is an architect and it happened that he got a job in Dubai and they moved there to take up the position. She says they thought maybe they would stay for one year or two years, make some money, and come back. But, she laughs, "it's never happened; we never came back."

Samara did not grow up imagining that she would leave Egypt, she tells me she thought, "this is my place, I will stay there" (lines 74–75). She then tells me that Christians, however, are not treated fairly. As a minority, she tells me they are not allowed to have good positions in the country. Samara tells me that at university, if there is an oral exam, once they know you are Christian, sometimes they will fail you just because you are a Christian. They know this in a face-to-face exam because Christian women are not veiled, while most Muslim women are covered. The consequences are even worse if you are wearing a cross. This, she says, would be like a disaster; maybe someone in the street would insult you, or someone would hit you. But still, she says, we felt that this is our place. In Chubra, the residents were mostly Christian and there were many churches around so "we felt like this is our area and felt free in there" (line 83). She tells me she loved Egypt a lot and had her community there: "I had my friends, my family".

When she and Fadil moved to Dubai, Samara expected it to be for only a few years. She just didn't expect to make another Christian community there. It is an Islamic country—even more so than Egypt—so she felt like the only purpose for going there was to work:

I didn't imagine to have a good church there but actually that was all wrong and I found a very good church. An amazing church. I do miss it until now. I made lots of friends and life there was amazing. (Lines 142–144)

Her voice lights up with excitement when she starts describing her church in Dubai. Everything was so comfortable. Everything was available and the church was so much more open than in Egypt. In Dubai, the Governor gave the church the land on which to build for free. It was a large compound where all the churches could build for free. Samara says the church just paid for the construction. She was amazed at how free they were to practice their faith; it was possible to hire a room or hall in a hotel in which to pray and worship and sing to God:

It is a very tolerant country. They don't have any problems. We used to take the Bibles in the streets, and we just sit around and read the Bible, it's alright. Of course, you cannot preach, but you can worship. (Lines 149-151)

If you were to do the same in Egypt, Samara tells me people will look at you differently and quite likely harass you. But in Dubai, people were more open-minded. She believes the harassment in Egypt means the church is more fervent:

You know when you have problems, and you have ... it's not easy to worship, and I don't know what you call it ... they don't give you the freedom and you face many troubles, you become more fervent in spirit. You become more strong in spirit. So, this is what's happening in Egypt. (Lines 163-166)

While in Egypt the church is made up mostly of Egyptians, the church in Dubai was made up of Arabs from twenty-five different countries (as well as hosting an English church, a Persian church, and an Indian church). Samara says, "it's very rich and you learn to deal with people and accept people from all backgrounds" (lines 174-175). Because people come from very different church backgrounds—from Orthodox to Pentecostal—in the service different people will be jumping and clapping while others sit meditatively. But Samara says the best thing about the church was that "we all accept one another" (line 178).

Not only was Samara's Arab-speaking church diverse, but they would meet together with the English-speaking and Indian congregations to celebrate events like the anniversary of the church. They would invite one another to special events and

she enjoyed the openness. Sometimes Muslim friends would come to an event just to look, but Samara never heard of any Emirati people converting to Christianity. They pray for it, though.

While evangelism to local Emirati was not possible, Samara and Fadil were involved in evangelistic outreach to foreign farm workers. Fadil would go every Tuesday evening with some other Christian men, taking food prepared by their wives, and lead discussions and worship in the farmers' homes. Eventually the ministry grew sufficiently that they hired a hall to meet in and for occasions like Christmas and Easter the church hired buses to transport the workers to church. The workers are poor, unable to bring their families with them. Even communicating with their families is often too costly. Samara says they are very isolated. The wealthier foreigners who were part of Samara's urban community would donate gifts for the workers and their families; it was a "very good service" recalls Samara (line 252).

I foolishly mention meeting as a church on Sunday. Samara laughs and corrects me; the weekend in a Muslim country like the UAE is Friday and Saturday. Church would meet on Fridays. Other branch meetings would happen during the week. Much more than in Egypt, in Dubai, Samara shared her life with her church community; "relationships were very easy to grow" (line 295). In Dubai, Samara says the members of the church "have everything common" (line 283):

We are in the same age group almost because people who come to Dubai are from the 20s until their 50s, so the same age group, and all have the same circumstances; we all work, we all have kids at the same age almost, and we live next to each other very close. (Lines 284–286)

While some families had been in Dubai for 30 years, and Samara and Fadil were there for fifteen, Dubai was a place of transit; families would come and go:

That's the worst thing in Dubai, that once you get close to some people, after a few years, they just leave; because it's like a transit, no one stays there forever; not like Australia, you come and it's your home country, and you stay. (Lines 301–303)

Even though Samara loved Dubai, and she and Fadil had good jobs with good managers, they never felt secure there. If they left or lost their job, they only had one month to find a new one before they would be kicked out of the UAE. This rule weighed most heavily on Samara, but she also mentions that the rules keep changing. The Sheik can change things at will and foreigners just have to co-operate. So, they never felt secure, and from very early on, they started thinking about migrating to Canada or Australia. They applied to go to Canada and were accepted quickly, but they thought about it and prayed about it and “suddenly me and [Fadil] felt like, no, that’s not the right place” (line 336–337). She just didn’t feel peace about the decision. Partly it was the cold. She feels Canada would have been gloomy for large parts of the year and she loves the sun—needs the sun. She says, “I think it was God’s plan for us to just give us feeling that this is not your place” (line 343).

They rejected the offer and applied to Australia. The first time they applied, their application was denied—she says they were told they were not qualified enough and did not have sufficient points. But then her sister married an Aussie and migrated. Ten years after their first application, they applied again and the family connection boosted their points sufficiently that they were accepted. Samara comments that they were not in a hurry to leave Dubai. They loved it there and the kids were happy. But the kids love Australia even more. They have been here for just under two years and the kids have said they don’t want to go back—not even for a holiday! Samara is eager to go back and visit, but thinks they will wait to get Australian citizenship before they go. That way they don’t need a visa. But Australia does not feel like home yet for Samara, “I need some more time” (line 377), she says.

Samara and her family moved straight to Melbourne, where her sister also lives. And everything about Australia surprised her, “I didn’t expect it to be like this at all” (line 396). Her sister had given her the impression that Australia is a very relaxing country; they wouldn’t feel any pressure, no stress at all. Samara has realised that this is true for her sister because she doesn’t have kids and her husband already owned a home so she doesn’t have a mortgage and, while she works, it’s mostly for fun.

But for Samara and Fadil, life is very different. It has been very hard for them to find employment. Their qualifications and work experience seem to count for nothing because they were gained overseas. Employers want local experience, so they

have had to start from the beginning, “and the older you are”, says Samara, “the harder it is” (line 402). Samara’s last position was as a regional coordinator at a bank. She was managing two branches in one of the biggest banks in Dubai. Fadil was the operations manager in a construction company. They were powerful and responsible positions. Coming to Australia and having to take simple jobs just to survive was not just financially stressful, but psychologically difficult and physically taxing:

After some time, I had to accept and as long as I see my kids happy, then it’s worth it. I have to do it. (Lines 410–411)

At the time I knew her, Samara was working four days a week and doing three different training courses; she was studying to be certified as a translator, she was doing a diploma in children’s services, and doing training and assessment so she can teach others. Fadil, an architect, had obtained his builders’ license and was starting his own company. She says, “he was very supportive this year actually, and the kids also very understanding. I don’t know how this year passed, it was very hard times but now it’s getting easier” (lines 452–454).

They came to this church through family connections; Pastor Joseph is Samara’s sister’s brother-in-law. It was not really an active decision to come to church here, they just found themselves there because of all the family connections. It is very different to the churches she knew in Egypt or Dubai: “the spirit of the church is different” (line 481). She says she is used to a “higher standard of teaching and spirit”; it feels simpler here. She seems to struggle a bit to find the words that capture what she means, but her words are powerful nonetheless:

People are more cold. Like in spirit, I mean. We’re used to the fervent atmosphere, you know? We are hot in spirit, like, Pentecostal way somehow. And my background is from Pentecostal, like Protestant way. So here is more Presbyterian, and then people are more like calm and quiet and [pause] we’re used to different level of spiritual relationship. (Lines 485–489)

She desperately misses the deep friendships and shared life she had in Dubai. Here, friendships are shallow, based more on family connection than like-mindedness.

People live so far away from one another and so far from the church premises that dropping in on one another and sharing a meal is so much more out of reach. Everyone has their own lives during the week, she says, everyone is busy with work and only meets on Sundays. Samara and Fadil have some other friends from Dubai here in Melbourne, but they go to a different church and live an hour and a half's drive away; "even when you have some relationships, they get broken because of the distance" (lines 504–505). She mourns the loss of intimacy she had with her friends in Dubai:

Socially, the relationships in Dubai was amazing. We used to sleep over with each other, my friends used to come over to my house and go to the shower and give the children a bath in my house, and we just open the fridge and take it out like at my sister's, you know? Very open to each other. We don't have this here at all, and I miss it. (Lines 506–509)

Because Samara and Fadil struggle with the 'Presbyterian-ness' of the Arabic Baptist Church, they have thought about moving to another church. But it is a struggle. They might find a good Australian church, in which they are satisfied spiritually, but she fears they would lose their social relationships. It's not that she minds making friends with Australians:

but, you know, they're different. When you go to another community and all of them in the same community, you are the one who is different. You don't feel like welcomed a lot; it's not easy to make that relationship. (Lines 539–541)

At least in the Arabic church they have some social relationships, and can talk to each other about the same problems because they are from the same background. She doesn't feel like she is the kind of person who can make friends easily. She needs people with similar backgrounds and experiences, who think and feel like her. But she says it is a struggle. They are still struggling. People tell them good things about other churches. Churches like Hillsong or Planetshakers or CrossLife—big Pentecostal churches. They have visited a few times, but there's never been any social connection—they feel like strangers in a crowd. But she doesn't feel like it would be

hard for them to leave; she wouldn't feel guilty and no one would be troubled by their decision. She wouldn't hesitate to relocate if she found a local church that met their spiritual and social needs and that the kids liked. But they haven't found a church like that and she feels like they have only just relocated from their church in Dubai to this church and she doesn't want to move around from church to church. They don't really have the time for visiting other churches anyway. And even though they have Christian TV and radio channels on hand at home, again she doesn't really get the chance to watch or listen because life is so busy.

I ask about how they think through raising the kids and their faith life. I know that their eldest, a boy in early high school, goes to a youth group at a local mainstream Australian church. They send both kids to a Christian school "so at least [in] their daily life they learn something different and the values should be different" (line 533–534). Since her son joined the youth group, he "doesn't feel like he's Arab" (545), which makes them happy. She says:

He doesn't feel he's belonging to us at all. So, he doesn't have any problems to communicate with any nationality, any background. He is already a mix. Most of them are a mix, so he is so happy in his youth group and he learns a lot, So, I'm happy with his spiritual life; he's on the right track. Of course, he needs to form a personal relationship with God, which we are praying for God to prepare for him, but at least he's on the right track. (Lines 546–550)

Their younger child, a daughter still at primary school, is happy at the Arabic church. Samara teaches her Sunday School class, so she feels up to date with what her daughter is thinking and learning. But "when she grows a bit more, when she can join youth group, I will let her go" (line 557).

If finding a church that satisfies is so hard, I ask Samara if she thinks there's scope for their Arabic church to become more like what she hopes it would be? But she says no, "I don't feel that; I feel rather that we became more like them" (line 615). She can't really tell if maybe the church is changing a little bit, or maybe she and Fadil are just becoming more used to it, starting to accept it a bit more.

Samara longs for “a vision from God” she feels like if she had that, “then we can do things” (line 618). I ask her what she means by a vision and she explains:

It’s like a passion that God puts on your heart about certain ... a vision about, like for example, let’s say, the labourers meeting; it starts with one person feeling passion for these people, and how can we help them and see their needs? God gives me like an idea, a dream; daydreaming about these people; how can we help them? And how they might look like if they join this church; after two or three years, how their status will be? And God keeps talking to you about the same subject over and over again until you feel like you cannot stop moving. You have to take action and you have to do something. This is how it is. (Lines 629–635)

But here she feels adrift:

But up till now, I didn’t get any vision, I didn’t get any clue; is this my place? What should I do? Yes, I’m serving the Sunday school because it’s a need and I used to serve in the other church in Dubai, so I feel like I can serve; but I didn’t get a solid vision from God (Lines 619–622)

and:

I feel like, is it my right place? Am I in the right place? Or just because this is the easiest thing I found and sister is there and I have to just join the group. That’s me and Fadil’s question nowadays. We are not sure if we are on the right track. But where is the right track? I don’t know. (Lines 660–663)

It is not obvious to me at first, but the more weeks I am present at church the more I realise how significant the bonds of kinship are to this congregation. Despite the fact that many of them have ‘left’ family in the Coptic or Orthodox traditions, many within this congregation are connected by blood or marriage. I ask Abdulla, an Assyrian Iraqi (see Story 8), whether he’s ever been to a mainstream Australian church. He tells me no:

Going to church, part of it is social. So, it's, you get more connected to a church where you can socialise with people and the people closer to your background it's much easier to go to that church. Because normally your family, your friends, the people you will spend most of your time with, they will be from church. (Lines 1172–1175)

Story 8: Abdulla

Abdulla often greets me with generous smiles on Sundays at the Arabic Baptist Church. He seems to have a bit of a cheeky streak. His wife Fadia is a stoic beauty. I am drawn to her incredible elegance, but find her intimidating at the same time. I feel like she has her world completely in her control. Their three children are in upper primary and high school. Abdulla works as an engineering consultant and he is very bright, very quick.

I visit their suburban home in the northern suburbs of Melbourne one weekday evening after my little Benjamin is bed. When I arrive, the outdoor table is full of family and friends. Children are running around playing games. Later in our conversation, Abdulla will tell me that this is quite normal. I comment that among my friends, I wouldn't feel comfortable to just turn up at their house in the evening—I would always organise things beforehand. Abdulla says of the Arab way of hospitality:

It's bad and good at the same time. It's good because you don't feel like— always you feel like you are welcome, whenever you go and visit somebody. And nobody will tell you, "No, I can't today because ... " If you call somebody, they will always see you anyway. No problems.

(Transcript lines 699–702)

Abdulla and I retire to the lounge room so he can tell me his story.

Abdulla is the youngest of eleven children. His family is Assyrian and from Iraq. He tells me that generations ago—perhaps one hundred and fifty years ago—his family lived in Turkey and were Assyrian Orthodox. But violence against Armenians and Assyrians meant they fled to Iraq and converted to the Chaldean Catholic church.

Assyrian Christians—even if they live in Baghdad or Basra—can all trace their heritage back to villages in the north of Iraq.

Abdulla grew up in the Chaldean Catholic faith, speaking both Assyrian and Arabic. The Assyrian Orthodox and Chaldean Catholic churches are both ancient and many of the congregation here who speak Assyrian are proud of their connection to Jesus through this language. A number of people tell me that when they speak the Lord's Prayer, they speak it as Jesus would have.

At about seventeen or eighteen, Abdulla left home and went to university in Baghdad. He lived with his aunty for three years before moving out with friends. While he was studying there, a colleague told him about a radio station broadcast from Monte Carlo, that preached about Jesus in Arabic. This was completely novel to Abdulla; he had heard Jesus spoken of only in Assyrian and never in Arabic before. He used to listen to this radio station every day. The theology it preached was more Protestant. Abdulla reflects that in the community he grew up in:

once you are born from a Catholic or Christian family, there's a mentality that you are by blood Christian. And then you get baptised when you are very little. You are already Christian. But never [do] you have to have faith and believe in what Jesus did on the cross for you, so that you become Christian. (Lines 83–86)

This idea, that “after you repent and believe in Jesus, that's a time when you become Christian” (line 86), was a radically new and exciting idea for him. He says, “that was a turning point for me, when I was listening to the radio” (line 91). He kept going to a Chaldean Catholic church until a friend noticed him reading a religious book and said that if he wanted to read more, he could take him somewhere he could borrow some more books. The friend took him to one of the very few Protestant churches in Baghdad.

And at that church, Abdulla found preaching like he had heard on the radio. The pastor was Egyptian and preached in Arabic. But now, Abdulla said, “instead of just listening to radio, listening to the same thing, I can now meet people with the same belief, the same faith. And then my life started to change from that point.” (lines 118–119). It changed, he says, for the better. In his words:

Normally when you are born in a Christian family, you always think that you are Christian. So, to go to heaven, you have to do the good things; you get saved by your good deeds basically. But after I believed that the good deeds would not get you anywhere because you had to believe in the blood of Jesus that was shed for you and the new life you live it for him, not for yourself. ... And before that, I always was trying to, to do my best, you know? Doing your best, you know, to be Christian but you always struggle you know? You always know that you are not perfect and you always do ... well you try to do the good things, but you always fall into bad things to do in your life. That was why I was struggling and struggling. And I had some deep fear in my life from eternity but when I believed all that fear went because I know that when I die I am with Jesus forever. (Lines 123–136)

While Abdulla was discovering these new ideas about Jesus, he was also serving his compulsory time in the Army. It was 1991 and the first Gulf War was underway. At first, he was stationed in Baghdad, and he said, even though

it was the worst time in Iraq, because of the church and the faith and I was going to church, I was finding it very nice. I didn't feel the life around me. I was going to church and having new faith, I had found Jesus in my life and I was having a good time. Even though the time of army was the worst. But because of the Christian experience on my life, it was positive. (Lines 155–159)

About a year after he started going to the Protestant church, Abdulla was deployed to Kirkuk, north of Baghdad. Abdulla says that historically, there have been good relationships between Christians and Muslims, because they have known each other for a long time. Christians have a reputation for being trustworthy and honest. He found another Protestant church to worship at in Kirkuk. It was very active, meeting four or five times a week; on Friday, Sunday and during the week for Bible Studies and groups for specific age groups.

After a few months, Abdulla deserted the army and returned to his home. In 1992, the country split in two; the north was under Kurdish control and the south under Saddam. Abdulla was a northerner, stationed in the north, but deployed as part of Saddam's forces. He was in a precarious position. He says he had to go to his family. But he could never return to Baghdad—he would have to stay in the north.

In 1993, his oldest brother left Iraq with two of his sisters and they found their way to Australia. They went from Iraq to Jordan, from Jordan to Iran and from Iran to Australia. They reported back that life was good here and Abdulla organised for his parents to follow them.

He got a job teaching in a high school and worked for the next three and a half years in the north. There was no Protestant church to go to, so he returned to the Chaldean Catholic church, where he started to learn to read and write Assyrian. Abdulla tells me that for most people, Assyrian is just a spoken language, but in order to serve in the church, he had to know how to read and write it as well. He was reading the Bible himself, but he says “the gap between me and God was becoming larger and larger” (line 270).

In 1995, despite the fact that the borders were closed, Abdulla and three of his sisters started organising their paperwork to leave Iraq because the situation was getting worse and worse. There was very little police presence and there was the threat of raids from the PKK Kurdish fighters from Turkey. Abdulla was deeply worried about the safety of his sisters. When the border opened in 1996, they acted quickly.

They had visas, he says to get from Iraq to Turkey. His sisters had proper ones, but because he could not return to Baghdad, “I had to get a ...” he pauses “... an improper one”. But to get from Turkey to Greece was difficult. They did not have visas for Greece and needed to employ people smugglers to get them across the border. They were a group of six; himself, his three sisters, a brother-in-law and two children. He was separated from his family in the first attempt to cross the border. It took Abdulla three attempts before he finally made it to Greece. The smugglers would take them down to a river by night, after walking for a few hours, they would inflate boats for the river crossing and truckdrivers would be waiting at the other side to transport them on to Athens. Once you reach Athens, Abdulla says, “you are safe—nobody will ask you anything” (line 356–7).

When he reached Athens, he was reunited with his sisters. They had already found a Protestant church. It was led by a missionary from Assyria and Abdulla says his time there was the best time in his life. “I met Fadia in Greece, basically, at the church” (line 418). His face lights up when he speaks of her; he still seems madly in love, and remembering those early years brings light to his eyes. They met and married in Greece. But it wasn’t just about Fadia. Abdulla takes a deep breath, and slowly starts to explain:

When we went to Greece ... you find a totally different world. You left a country that is always thinking about war, thinking about killing, getting killed, to a safe place where you can work, go anywhere, nobody will ask you, you will not be questioned. [You can] worship anywhere, in any way. Nobody will do anything to you. (Lines 463–470)

Abdulla found it easy to learn Greek, it was structured in a way that made sense to him. Pronunciation and grammar were consistent, and within a few months he was working comfortably in Greek. He says Greek people find it difficult to pronounce foreign names, “so you pick a Greek name”—to some people Abdulla was Petro and to others Dimitri. Once, he recalls, he was speaking to his landlord on the phone and she mistook him for a different Greek Petro, because his language skills and accent were so good.

They lived there for three years and two months before they relocated to Australia on a humanitarian visa. When they travelled to Australia in 1998, Fadia was pregnant with their first child. Abdulla says that seeing his family again after so many years—“it was one of the best days of our lives when we came here” (lines 481–2). “Thank God everybody is out of Iraq now” he says (line 413); his whole family has managed to leave, two sisters in Sweden and the rest of the family is here in Australia. Some of Fadia’s family is now in Australia and part of her family is in Canada. But when they arrived, she knew no-one here. Abdulla and Fadia lived with his parents for the first few months, but got their own place when their child was born.

Abdulla found—and still finds—English very hard. It was difficult to return to primary school level language skills, he tells me. There are so many irregularities. The

children are all fluent in English, and he and Fadia speak Assyrian to the kids at home. They pick up a little bit of Arabic at church, but they are not fluent in it as he is.

So, Abdulla speaks Assyrian, Arabic, Greek and English, but feels most comfortable reading Arabic. When he reads the Bible, it is usually Arabic. A couple of times he's read the Bible in English, but mostly it's in Arabic. For some Assyrians, the linguistic connection to Jesus' Aramaic seems spiritually significant, but Abdullah tells me that once he became a born-again believer, he became less convinced about the holiness of a particular language. He says that "when you believe, you are more open to other people, to other traditions, other languages than when you are not" (line 678-9). Some older Assyrians, Abdulla says, don't like it if you pray in Arabic, because Arabic is not a Christian language. But Abdulla is happy to pray in Arabic. He prays in Chaldean at home and with his children, but he is happy to be flexible depending on where he is and who he is with.

Abdulla has never visited an Anglo, English-speaking congregation. He says:

Part of it is the tradition or the culture. I feel more connected to people from an Arabic background than from a white background. And language wise, when you have a language and you pray and preach in it, I believe it is the best experience that you can get. I like listening to it in English, but when I listen to it in Arabic I get connected to the speaker more. Or to the Arabic culture more. (Lines 1160-1164)

I say that's not unusual and ask him if he has visited other kinds of churches here? He replies:

To be honest, not at all. We had a couple of times visitors who were preaching in English. Which I have no problems understanding them. And I like it, and also when I listen to my TV, to English preachers. But going to church, part of it is social. So, it's, you get more connected to a church where you can socialise with people and the people closer to your background it's much easier to go to that church. Because normally your family, your friends, the people you will spend most of your time with, they will be from church. (Lines 1170-1175)

Abdulla loves that Australia is clean and organised, that you don't have to be rich and know people in order to manage bureaucratic matters. But he reflects that in Iraq, because the people around you were rough, you really had to own your identity as a Christian. Here, it is easier to go astray. In his words:

I think what keeps us, in the Middle East, close to God is the people around us—because they are tough, they are rough, they don't treat us well—so that we stuck to our religion, to our God. To our Lord. Although maybe some of us, we are not really Christians, but in the background we are Christians, our background is Christian. We get to our God and our Lord and our church because of the people around us. But here there is freedom and I can say anything, and I can do anything and there are no problems and that's why people are relaxed and going astray. (Lines 736–742)

His parents chose the name Abdulla for him because its meaning (servant of God) and history makes it acceptable in both the Muslim and Christian communities and they hoped it would mean he would face less discrimination than an explicitly Christian name. Abdulla comments that Mohammed's father was Abdulla, so the name, while Arabic, pre-dates Islam. It is an Arabic name, he says, not a Muslim one. Coming to Australia, however, most people assume that with the name 'Abdulla' he must be Muslim:

I feel like everybody thinks that I am a Muslim. I have a bad feeling about it. But sometimes that gives me space to talk about Christian faith or Islam ...

So, I was on the lift somewhere, sometime at work and going downstairs. It was Ramadan and one of the Muslim guys in the company, he was saying that—because he knew that my name was Abdulla and he was assuming that I was Muslim, because Abdulla from Iraq is Muslim. There is no question about that. He was saying, "Come, Abdulla, thank God we are sawm—we are fasting—because it is Ramadan." I said, "Sorry brother, I am not fasting. I am Christian. I am

your brother but I am Christian.” Then we started a conversation.

(Lines 846–857)

While Abdulla told me earlier that being reunited with his family was one of the best days of his life, he later reveals that his preference for Protestantism over the Chaldean Catholic church complicated their relationship. His parents had already heard rumours that their children had started attending Protestant church and, he says, people had deliberately said bad things about the Protestant church and Protestant people to them. His uncles in Australia broke off all connection with them for “three, four, maybe five years” (line 991). Even though earlier in our conversation, Abdulla had shared how he learned new things from Protestant teaching about how forgiveness comes from Jesus rather than from being good, he holds that together with a sense that all Christians share the same faith. He says:

My parents were angry, not happy about it, you know. If a few of your children are coming from overseas, you haven’t seen them for a long time ... They just kept ... they would speak to us sometimes, but they kept all their feelings within themselves. But I believe it’s better because now the understanding of the Protestant faith is much better in Catholic communities. So, they would know it’s the same faith. Whatever ... the difference is only the external things. What do you call the internal, the main faith, is the same. Whether it is Catholic, Orthodox, or Protestant. Like everybody believes in Christ, the Saviour, who died on the cross for our sins. We believe in the Father, Son and Holy Spirit—that is, I think that is the foundation of the faith. So, everybody, everybody believes in the same thing.

The only difference is how to worship. But it doesn’t matter, that thing. So that change in understanding of the Protestant faith helped us a lot because ... and also the interaction with Protestant people. So, when we came here we went to Arabic Baptist church and my parents and family and get to know these people and they would see them as faithful, good people. So, things were starting to slowly change their mind.

So now there is a prayer meeting at my parents' house, or my brother's house. There is a prayer meeting at my sister's house, so most of them, they are still going to Catholic church but they are to some extent, I would say, they would call themselves new born believers. So, yeah. That's very nice. (Lines 996–1015)

Abdulla's face relaxes into a smile as he finishes this story. There were hard years, he even mentions a conversation in which he said he and Fadia would take the kids and move to Sydney so they could worship wherever they liked, but he is pleased now that even though his family still goes to the Catholic church, that they are at peace with one another.

Abdulla has never returned to the Middle East. It continues to be far too dangerous. He balks at the idea of his children going to visit—"it would be impossible for me to allow them to do that; that's one thing that. I would not allow them to do if I can" (line 1050–1051). He worries that the next generation think that his generation are stupid, they don't realise how much he knows:

They don't realise that always you have more experience and that you have experience of people from different backgrounds, from different places. You've had, you went to different places, and you dealt with different people. (Lines 1073–1076)

But when I ask him if he has shared his story with them, he says he has not shared much detail. He knows his kids will grow up with some kind of hybrid identity. But he hopes they keep the family-oriented socialising, the "mentality of getting together" (line 1105) that is characteristic of his Assyrian way of life. At the time, I was experiencing profound sleep deprivation. My toddler fought sleep and I felt constantly guilty that my kid might not be getting the 'right' sleep. So, the fact that this late-night Tuesday interview feels like a party keeps astounding me, but Abdulla says "Who cares? Who cares if there is school or there is work? They're ok!" (line 1110). I push back about the kids staying up again, but he replies:

All the kids! Everybody, having a good time. Yeah, I believe that that is a good thing because I was reading something somewhere that families

don't have a social life with other families. Always their kids would have problems during their youth because there is so much time being taken by that social life, that the youth will not think about bad things, they will have no time ... So that part of their emotion will be taken up by other families. They will have less problems in their lives in terms of emotional problems. Which I believe is really in our community. (Lines 1121–1126)

He finishes by reflecting that even though he is safer here, his faith is weaker:

I think my faith—if I measure my faith between here and Greece—I would say that it was stronger in Greece and the Middle East, in Iraq, than here. Because here it's a relaxing time. Well not relaxed, but you are in routine—work, work, work, busy, busy work. So, faith gets, somehow, the Western life takes you away from God. So, the journey strengthened your faith, but living in the west is dangerous to the faith. (Lines 1152–1156)

Years later, when I am writing up, I hear that Fadia has been diagnosed with cancer. I pray for her and Abdulla and their children. Their children are still so young. And my heart breaks when I hear she has died. I pray the faith of this family is strong enough to see them through such heartbreak. I remember what Marianne has told me about the significance of funerals and, though I feel my Western discomfort with invading another family's private grief, I go to mourn her with them. It does not matter to me if Abdulla knows I am there or not, but I want to honour this incredible woman and her family, to add to the overflow of people coming to remember her.

I arrive only a few minutes early and slide into the back row of an already full church. I am greeted with tears and hugs from Istir and David, and greeted by Marianne and Issa's wife. The Arab penchant for lateness means people keep arriving for the next half an hour—many older people too. I give up my seat in the church proper and go to sit in the foyer. There, I find myself sitting next to a man who identifies himself as Abdulla's uncle. He points out his own wife and adult daughter who, he says "were loyal" unlike Abdulla (I assume to Chaldean Catholicism). He asks me if I speak Arabic and, when I say no, he expresses surprise that I would sit through

an entire service that I could not understand. I say it is a way for me to show love and respect for Abdulla and Fadia, to which he nods solemn agreement. He shakes his head and mutters about how things the new young preacher says are wrong. But nods and mutters in agreement when Pastor Joseph speaks. He doesn't like the way they stand to sing and so refuses to stand. He comments later that he hopes no one else dies so he doesn't have to come back to the church.

Abdulla's daughter speaks (in English) in desperate lament for her mum, but still speaks of her trust in God. It is absolutely gut wrenching. The whole congregation heads outdoors after the service to continue on to the interment or wake. It is raining and everyone disappears pretty quickly. I feel like a third wheel and walk up to a local cafe to wait for Chris to pick me up. Parenting responsibilities and my Anglo awkwardness about not being close enough to Abdulla's family to share their grief keep me from continuing on.

5.4. The Tyranny of Distance³⁷

In this section, I will explore how the stories of Samara (Story 7) and Abdulla (Story 8) reveal a Lenten disposition. That is, how the foundational narrative of Lent can be heard echoing through their stories. These two stories do not specifically mention 'wilderness' in their exposition, but they do talk about distance—about times of feeling more directionless. Interestingly, it is often in times of hardship that Abdullah and Samara have felt stronger in their faith. Abdulla lost his homeland and he has no intention of returning or encouraging his children to return. Iraq has been exchanged for Australia. War and killing have been replaced with cleanliness and bureaucracy. And Abdulla thanks God that no-one is left in Iraq. When Abdulla is in the midst of suffering he feels closer to God. In the story we have just read he says that his faith "was stronger in Greece and the Middle East, in Iraq, than here." The journey strengthened his faith, but he thinks "living in the west is dangerous to the faith." The times when he has

³⁷ This is the title of a famous history of Australia (Blainey 2001). The 'distance' Blainey explored is Australia's distance from the rest of the world. I use it ironically here in reference to Australian migrants and how they experience distance (or proximity) to God.

struggled most are the times he feels his faith has been most vibrant. Early in his story when he describes the contrast between the hardship of serving in the army with the excitement and beauty of his blossoming faith he said that while it was “the worst time in Iraq, but because of the church and the faith and I was going to church, I was finding it very nice.” Similarly, Samara speaks of how persecution in Egypt makes the community there “more fervent in spirit”. Whereas Lent is a time of voluntary sacrifice with the intention of drawing the Christian closer to God, these involuntary moments of suffering and distance serve to do the same in Abdulla and Samara’s recollections and interpretations of their experiences.

Samara’s decisions—about whether to marry Fadil, about whether to move to Canada or Australia—are made with much prayer. Not every decision is a sacrifice, but every decision carries the risk of loss. Samara looks for a feeling in response a sense of what God has called her to. Even though they were accepted into Canada, they did not feel at peace with the decision and decide not to go. For Samara, the loss of her homeland, and her beloved church community in Dubai is felt keenly. While the decision to leave Dubai was made for ‘worldly’ reasons like security and a better life for her children, it was a decision made in prayerfulness. It is not apparent that the benefits for which the sacrifice was made have come to fruition. Indeed, the sacrificial nature of the decision—the purposeful loss of something valuable—has perhaps only become apparent to Samara in the two years of trying to find her feet here in Australia. Although they sought visas to Australia, Samara does not feel like she has much of a vision for what comes next. It has been a struggle—her own and Fadil’s qualifications have not earned them the kind of work they have had in the past. She is happy that her children are happy, but she is wandering, and wondering if she is on the right track.

Both Samara and Abdulla are happy for their children to be growing up here. Like all migrants before them, they are bracing themselves for the challenges of raising second generation children—the shift in their priorities, the changes to their culture. While Samara expresses a sense of peace about the fact that her son “doesn’t feel like he’s an Arab” and relief that he is happy in his youth group with friends his own age, Abdulla speaks of the elements of culture that he hopes his children will hold onto—the commitment to family and hospitality, the priority of relationships.

It seems unlikely that Abdulla’s family would seek to relocate to another country again, but there is an unsettledness to Samara’s story that seems open to other

possibilities. Abdulla told me that once he became a born-again believer, he became less convinced about the holiness of a particular language. This gave him freedom to be “more open to other people, to other traditions, other languages” and perhaps, too, to the prospect of moving to different countries. Samara has the temperament of a wanderer in the desert, a sense of continuing to look for something. For Abdulla, his journey out of Iraq and through Greece to Australia strengthened his faith, but living in the West, he thinks weakens it; it is a wilderness in the sense of feeling further from God. In different ways, both Abdulla and Samara have a ‘lenten’ quality to their faith and their migration experience.

5.5. Conclusion

Michael Banner discusses the place of suffering in the imagination of the Christian in his significant book *The Ethics of Everyday Life* (2014). He points out that the suffering of Christ was ‘discovered’ in the Middle Ages, pointing out that early iconography and the writing of Augustine tend to focus on Jesus’ impassibility. He is curious about the implications of this discovery for our moral imaginations and compares this discovery of the suffering of Christ with the turn to suffering in social anthropology (cf. Robbins 2013). He proposes that attending to Christ’s suffering produces a Christian humanitarianism that is shaped through Foucauldian ‘technologies of the self’ and that this attentive humanitarianism helps shape a compassionate gaze which sees the ‘face of the Other’ (p. 98). What Banner identifies as ‘technologies of the self’ are similar to what Smith would call ‘liturgical practice’ and what Bourdieu might frame as habit forming activities, he suggests this includes ascetic practices such as the Stations of the Cross or the Rosary, but also:

perhaps more fundamentally still, they include also such practices as the daily, weekly, and yearly memorialisation of Christ in the Christian year, which seek to insinuate Christ’s life and time into our life and time. These practices are the form which the self-forming activities take. (Banner, 2014, p. 100–101)

My Arabic Baptist participants do not say the Rosary or perform the Stations of the Cross. They do read the Scriptures, they sing songs, they remind themselves of the

suffering of Jesus and take comfort in it. He knows and understands their pain. They are certain he has a plan for them, whether they can see and understand that plan or not.

Australia is not the promised land. Neither Samara nor Abdulla describe Australia as the place they are most happy or at home. They have found safety and security, but the Australian experience has been cold in comparison to the warmth they experienced in Greece and Dubai respectively. The journeys of Samara and Abdulla reveal to us that their vision for flourishing is the chance to live in peace. They have both sacrificed beloved homes to live quiet lives here in Australia. They also long for closeness to God, and despite this desire for peace both of them identify the way in which times of struggle have produced in them that feeling of closeness and passion. Their sacrifices—of place, home, family, and status—are ongoing. Even though their physical journeys have been hard, they have brought them close to God. While this relatively peaceful and abundant destination leaves them longing for something deeper.

6. Easter

6.1. What is 'Good'?

Easter is a season of both sorrow and joy. Good Friday may be 'good' to Australians because it signals the start of an extra-long long-weekend, with public holidays on both Good Friday and Easter Monday. I wonder, though, how many Australians are still familiar with the awkwardness of calling the day 'good'; this day on which Rome quelled a perceived insurrection by condemning its leader to brutal death. In churches like Sacred Heart, the mourning is palpable. Decorations are stripped from the sanctuary, the building left empty like the forsaken Messiah. In this death and pain and betrayal, Christians practice finding 'goodness', and the goodness that they find here shapes the way they interpret their own pain and betrayal and loss. This chapter will introduce you to three women I worshipped with—one from each of the three congregations—and offer you a glimpse of the way they interpret their often grief-filled stories and how they hold that together with deep joy and thankfulness.

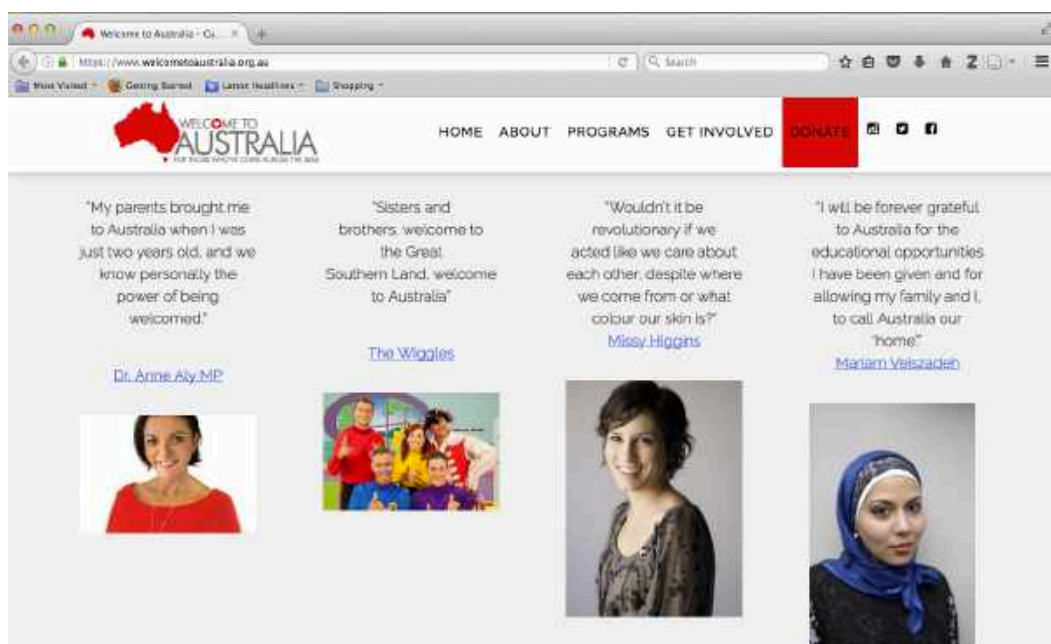
This practice of holding together joy and grief is one that contrasts with the narrative of gratitude presented in Australian public discourse. Like any settler society, Australia faces an ongoing challenge in negotiating migrants' memories of past homes and forging a national vision that is something new. There is, however, a pretty common, and quite ugly, response to the sorrow and loss that accompanies migration in the call for 'grateful' migrants. For example, on the right-wing of Australian political discourse, you can hear people like David Oldfield declare that "they should be glad they came here and embrace the good things we have here. They should embrace us a little bit more than we embrace them" (Oldfield, quoted in Walker, 1999, Oct 24). In response to the perceived terror threat, Tony Abbott declared that "You don't migrate to this country unless you want to join our team" and "everyone has got to be on team Australia" (Abbott, quoted in Cox, 2014, Aug 18). A couple of years later, he advised the Alliance of European Conservatives and Reformists:

Too many are coming, not with gratitude but with grievance and with the insistence that Europe should make way for them. Over time this becomes an existential challenge. (Abbott, quoted in Remeikis, 2016, Sept 19)

Then there are editorials in publications like the Herald Sun that suggest that “recently arrived migrants and their children should feel grateful ... for the second chance at a decent life that Australia provides” (Elliott, 2016). A ‘good’ migrant is a grateful migrant.

This is true in the antagonistic, politically right-leaning examples I have just shared, but the political left buys into this narrative, too, when it highlights the gratitude of the migrants it supports. Image 7 shows the homepage of the non-profit organization Welcome to Australia, which features a quote from the prominent Muslim lawyer and writer, Mariam Veiszadeh, which reads, “I will be forever grateful to Australia for the educational opportunities I have been given and for allowing my family and I, to call Australia our ‘home’” (Source: www.welcometoaustralia.org.au). Ms Veiszadeh’s a role-model migrant here, and it is her gratitude to which attention is drawn.

Image 7: Screenshot of the homepage of Welcome to Australia
(Source: <https://welcometoaustralia.org.au> accessed on 07/12/2017)



The danger of this call for gratitude is that, too often, it seeks to stop people complaining, struggling, or recounting loss (unless, perhaps, it is replaced by incomparable gain in life in Australia). Furthermore, there is a sense in this attitude that the gratitude of migrants should look like happiness. This call for gratitude is not limited to Australia, and migrants are themselves critiquing this particular political assertion. Dina Nayeri writes of her experience growing up as a refugee in Europe and the United States:

Grateful. There was that word again. Here I began to notice the pattern. This word had already come up a lot in my childhood, but in [my teacher's] mouth it lost its goodness. It hinted and threatened. (Nayeri, 2017)

There is plenty of research in the psychological sciences to suggest that gratitude does promote happiness (see, for example, Emmons and McCullough, 2003; Fox et al., 2015; Watkins, 2014). But I think it would be a stretch to suggest that this call for gratitude has at its heart the best interests of migrants, rather as Nayeri suggests, it carries the hint of threat—a sense in which loss and sadness need to be buried and hidden from public display—that echoes through the public discourse. As Hage observes with respect to Arabic migrants. He says:

Clearly, there are some who believe that migrants ought to be grateful for the 'right' they acquire in societies that are not initially 'theirs'. Inevitably, such people think that some do not 'deserve' what they've got. (Hage, 2002, p. 2)

Sara Ahmed, too, suggests that, migrants are compelled to demonstrate happiness:

Migrants are increasingly subject to what I am calling the happiness duty, in a way that is continuous with the happiness duty of the natives in the colonial mission. If in the nineteenth century the natives must become (more) British in order to be recognized as subjects of empire, in a contemporary context, it is migrants who must become (more) British in order to be recognized as citizens of the nation. Citizenship now requires a test: we might speculate that this test is a happiness test. (Ahmed, 2010, p. 130)

There is plenty of debate over whether Australia is a 'Christian society' (e.g., Robinson, 2017) and in what way Christian values (such as thankfulness) might shape the moral fabric of this country. But this two-dimensional view of gratitude-as-happiness, does not actually mesh with an orthodox Christian understanding of joy or gratitude, and it is not reflected in the way my participants interpret the stories of their lives.

The people I have spoken to work at demonstrating gratitude ‘in’ all things—not ‘for’ all things (cf. 1 Thessalonians 5:18). They echo the words of James who suggested that trials and temptations ought to be “considered joy” because of the way they produce endurance and maturity (James 1:2). This quotidian practice of thankfulness which holds together pain and joy, is practiced through rehearsing stories like Easter, and echoed in the stories people told me about their migration journeys. It reveals a picture of human flourishing that is more complex than success or abundance, and instead focuses on mature character and the well-being of others.

6.2. Stories of Grief and Gratitude

This chapter has so far set the scene for the way we talk about migrants and gratitude and the way we value this gratitude-as-happiness in migrants. I now want to share with you three stories from my research participants; three women, one from each of the congregations I worked with. For it is in these stories that we discover complexity:

Migrant memoirs and fiction give texture and complexity to the migrant experience, to the different ways in which hope, fear, anxiety, longing, and desire shape the decisions to leave one’s country as well as the experiences of arriving and becoming familiar with a new country.

(Ahmed, 2010, p. 154)

This first story is from the Catholic church, Sacred Heart. Jessy’s story is indicative of the way trauma and migration can be interwoven even when migrants are administratively classed as moving for ‘economic’ reasons. In her story, the church plays a much smaller role than her own personal prayer life and the input of a few faithful people, such as her father, and the Mother Superior at her high school. Although she speaks warmly of this church, trusts the people here, and contributes actively to congregational life.

I had seen Jessy around Sacred Heart well before I met her. She was regularly seated up the front of the church at the audiovisual desk controlling the PowerPoint display of the service order. But even if she was not seated in such a conspicuous location, it was impossible to miss such a beautiful, well dressed and carefully groomed woman. She would regularly dress in traditional South Asian clothing and I assumed she

was Indian. Her tall, handsome, teenage son regularly helped serve at the altar. She smiles and laughs in conversation with her friends in the congregation, emanating warmth. Father Bill introduced us and she quickly agreed to tell me her story.

Story 9: Jessy

It was a miserable, cold and rainy day—but Father Bill had put the heater on in the large meeting room in the Presbytery for us. Jessy’s son, Ashish (Ash, 17) joined us in the room, but pulled out his iPhone, popped in some ear buds and seemed to absent himself virtually, if not physically for the duration of our interview.

It was Mothers’ Day and I felt somewhat guilty about interviewing Jessy on a celebration day. As we sat down to start, I commented that it had been quite a long service today. Jessy agreed and laughed saying that Father Stephen got a bit excited today. Mothers in India are much revered—not like here in Australia. When Indians come to Australia, they are young and they leave behind the values of home. Most migrant communities suffer the same fate, she thinks, although she notes that the Italian community seems to have avoided this inevitability. Perhaps, she surmises, it is because they have generations of family here now, and so family can assert more power over the individual.

Jessy was born in 1967 into a Catholic family in Madras—Chennai, she corrects herself—Mum, Dad, an older sister two years her senior and a younger sister 12 years her junior. All of them are in the medical profession—her Mum and Dad were senior medical professors and both her sisters went on to become GPs. Jessy is a nurse. Her family lived in their own home with two housemaids. Her family was very comfortable—rich, even, and moved in elite circles. She and her sisters were sent to the best convent school, with celebrities as class mates. Her parents loved their daughters without limits.

Jessy’s father was more spiritual than her mother and it was he who “sowed the seeds of religion in her heart”. When Jessy starts to talk of her father, she has to fight back tears. It was he who taught her to laugh and he who taught her to see the good in people. He taught her that all people are basically good and that it is the good you need to search for in people. Jessy refuses to let go of this attitude, even though

she believes it is this tendency that has meant she's been used during her life—she calls herself “a used person”. But her faith, she said, despite all this, is unshaken. She won't desert God for anything.

In particular, Jessy tells me, her Dad taught her to love her little sister. Jessy was terribly ashamed that her mother had had another child so long after she and her sister. I am confused because it doesn't seem at all strange or embarrassing to me. Jessy tells me it's “a cultural thing”. It took her Dad six months to overcome Jessy's shame and teach her to love her little sister, but eventually she loved her as her own daughter. She became more of a mother to her than her own Mum, changing nappies and looking after her. The rapport between the two sisters was such that in times of trouble, her sister would run to her rather than her Mum.

Her Dad, Jessy tells me, was the role model in her life; he was “God that I could see”.

In 1982-84 Jessy's parents sent her to boarding school for her higher secondary education. The move was meant to shake loose some of the indulgence that had shaped her childhood—at home, she remembers, she and her older sister would simply leave an emptied glass of milk wherever they drank it for a maid to clear away later. Her first year was hard. Jessy was used to being able to wear different outfits each day (in fact her parents would bring a fresh set of eight dresses for her each Sunday visiting) and here she rubbed shoulders with girls who had three dresses for an entire year. At boarding school Jessy learnt how to relate to people from lower socio-economic backgrounds and accept what was good about them. She also became convinced that she wasn't good, but that she longed to be. She decided she wanted to be a nun.

Jessy was totally devoted to Our Lady: both Our Lady of Vailankani (Our Lady of Good Health) and Our Lady of Lourdes. She wanted to be as pure in body and heart as Our Lady. Knowing her parents would disapprove, Jessy wrote to the Fatima Convent for an application form. The form they sent arrived, but unfortunately reached her Mum before it got to her. Her Mum tore it up in front of her. Both her Mum and Dad were of the same mind—the sisterhood was not for their daughter. Her Dad was perhaps a little more sympathetic, suggesting to Jessy that she could serve God wherever she was. She, he said, was the pillar of the family and the only person

he trusted to look after the family when he was gone. He had a second sense, Jessy believes, that he wouldn't grow old with his family.

Jessy honoured her parents' wishes and did not pursue becoming a nun. She has regretted this decision her whole life and still regrets today. She refused, however, to do exactly as her parents wished and become a doctor, opting instead to pursue a career in nursing. She believed she could serve God better as a nurse than a doctor. But nursing is not a career that is acceptable in Indian high society and the decision aggrieved her parents. They were so angry that they didn't come to her three-day nursing entry exams as other parents did. Jessy was thrilled to get into nursing school—it was very competitive; 1600 students sat the exam, 600 received an interview and only 50 were accepted into the training program. Most of the competition came from students from the neighbouring state, Kerala, where nursing was a sought-after profession. Many of the students from Kerala sought a career path that would take them to the Middle East, where they could earn a generous income. Her delight at gaining admission was marred by the fact that she needed to pay \$28000 up front in order to secure her place. All the other students had parents with them ready to fork out the cash—but Jessy's parents weren't there. When she called them, her father said he could not come to pay that evening as it was two hours travel by train. He requested that she go and ask the Mother Superior at the school she had attended to extend her the fees and said that he would arrive the next day morning to pay Mother Superior back the money. She did, and the Mother provided her with the full fee without question.

She undertook four years of nursing training at CMC (Christian Medical College) Vellore, a hospital that is renowned worldwide. Jessy recounted a story which had a profound impact on her; while she was looking after an old farmer his wife gave her 50c to go and get herself a cup of tea. Jessy got angry, gave the money back and rebuked the old lady, telling her that her father had enough money to feed her whole village. But after the event, Jessy dwelt on this exchange and decided that if she was going to work in a serving profession she needed to have more patience and to be more of a servant.

In 1988 Jessy finished her nursing training and went home. Her family, however, couldn't accept her as a nurse. When out in company, they would introduce her as a doctor. She never confirmed or denied this claim, but when acquaintances of

her parents in the medical world would ask her about her lecturers, she could accurately report the same staff who would have taught her had she been a medical student. She couldn't defy her Dad by speaking up about being a nurse, but she couldn't continue living the lie either. So, in 1989, Jessy left for the Middle East.

In the Middle East, she earned an excellent income and was very comfortable. In December 1991, she invited her Dad, whom she adored, to come over and spend a month with her. It was the first time she had managed to separate her Dad from her Mum. He came over on the 27th November and stayed to the 28th Dec, returning to India to spend New Year's with her Mum. At the time, her Dad was a cardio patient—he had already had two myocardial infarctions—and she took good care of him. During this visit she vented to him about her past. He confessed to her that he loved her more than his other two daughters. He believed that she would be the one to carry on his name. Despite all the sharing that happened during this visit, her Dad was still sad that Jessy never became a doctor, which upset Jessy because she desperately wanted him to accept her as she was.

On June 21st 1992, her Dad was admitted to ICU. Her sisters were with her in the Middle East on a three-month holiday, but they all returned to India after only 3 weeks to be at his bedside. During his stay in hospital, Jessy cared for him. While he was in intensive care, her Dad suffered from excruciating constipation pain—he described it as being worse than the pain of the heart attacks he had suffered. While her mum and sister, who were both doctors, waved the pain away with diagnoses, Jessy felt his pain. When all her family had left, she asked the ward nurses if she could care for him by doing a manual evacuation. After she had, her father reflected that this moment was why God had led her to nursing instead of being a doctor—so that she would understand the needs of others and care for them in their most vulnerable state. On June 25th, he had another heart attack. There was about forty minutes in which he held on to life after the attack and Jessy could sense his agony at leaving his twelve-year-old daughter without having seen her grown and entered into a profession. Jessy could tell and reassured her Dad that she would look after her little sister. Her Dad joined the two sisters' hands and passed. Her Mum was hurt that her Dad had entrusted their youngest daughter to Jessy in this way. Jessy was terribly angry at her father's death and realised that she loved her Dad more than she loved

God. She loves her son, Ash, and her family now, but no longer loves anything more than God, including them.

Later in 1994, she submitted to her Mum's organisation of an arranged marriage. It didn't last. Most of her marriage was spent separated from her husband, including some time spent in the Middle East. In 1995 she had Ashish. Ash was in her custody for nearly the whole time she and her husband were apart. In 1997, her husband refused to return him after a visit. Jessy convinced her little sister to spin a story about taking Ash to visit Jessy and then bringing him back, but she and Jessy never brought him back. Her sister still struggles with guilt over this lie, despite Jessy's reassurances that she did the right thing. In 1999, her husband joined her in the Middle East and confessed to having tried to kill her on three occasions. Jessy had been unaware of these attempts and sent him back to India following this confession and filed for divorce. The court case lasted for three years, one year of which her Mum wasn't supportive (she had organised the marriage after all). But she had family friends who had known her Dad and who supported her through the court proceedings. She believes they knew it was what her dad would have wanted. She didn't see her husband again until 2003 in court. Because he had failed to show for three years, the court awarded the divorce. Her husband didn't contest custody and Jessy has sole custody for Ash. She hasn't seen her husband since.

Following the divorce, she returned to the Middle East to work. But children of single parents can't obtain a family visa, so Ash was left in boarding school for 5 years (2005–10). He would visit her for his holidays in Muscat. His whereabouts were kept secret because Jessy was scared that his life was in danger. Only Jessy's Mum knew where Ash was in school. Jessy was desperate to be with him; as a paediatric nurse, she spent all her time caring for other peoples' children and just wanted to look after her own child.

In August 2008, Jessy was ready to commit suicide. She spent a whole night on her knees in tears desperate to hear Gods voice; just wanting to know that He was there. She didn't want to hear his voice through the Bible or through a Pastor—she wanted to hear it. At 3:00AM she collapsed into bed and at 4:00AM, with eyes so heavy with exhaustion she couldn't open them, she heard a voice call her name. Three times it called "Jessy" and the third time, when it called her, it identified itself, "I am who I am and I am the only one who can give you peace".

Jessy resolved not to end her life. Instead, she pursued immigration to the US. Jessy applied for a visa to the US four times, each time being foiled by an administrative failure (for example, transcripts not being sent on time). A friend told her about Australia, but Jessy wasn't all that interested. She did, however, apply for a New Zealand visa and nursing licence. When she visited New Zealand to get her licence, she saw that people send their kids to Australia for a better education, and given that the driving force behind this move was to be with Ash, decided that would totally defeat the purpose and so sought to transfer the New Zealand nursing licence to an Australian one.

It took a remarkably quick month to transfer her licence. On Feb 28, 2005, Jessy applied for Australian permanent residency. It took only five months for her application to be approved. Friends and acquaintances can't believe how quickly her application was processed and she often has to show them proof. Jessy arrived on Jan 19, 2006, with \$2000 to her name. She spent months looking for a nursing job, which was totally disheartening. She experienced a great deal of bullying and racism. After six months of searching for an appropriate nursing job, Jessy realised that despite giving up her family, her home, nearly everything else that mattered to her, she was still holding onto her identity as a nurse and a career in nursing. When she realised that, and released her career to the Lord, she was suddenly offered a job. God, Jessy believes, demands—and deserves—everything from us. Giving over control and desire for a career in nursing was what allowed a job to open up for her.

In 2007, Jessy got a job at the Royal Children's Hospital as a clinical nurse in the chemotherapy unit. With a post-graduate degree and loads of experience, Jessy spent a long time applying for managers jobs. She watched while all the positions she applied for were filled by people without postgraduate qualifications or her experience and the only conclusion she could come to was that she was being discriminated against because of her background. It got to the point where she just wanted an interview to know if she is eligible to fit into the criteria of a manager role in Australia and then wanted to be able to decline the job if the shifts did not suit. She got exactly that opportunity at Peter Mac. She applied for a shift job (which she knew she couldn't do because of her caring responsibilities for Ash), got an interview, and thoroughly impressed her interviewers. When they offered her the job, she asked if she could work straight shifts, and when they said no, she turned down the job. The

interviewer promised to hold her application on file and contact her if another more appropriate position became available. Jessy thought she was just being polite. When a Paediatric Nurse Coordinators position became available, Jessy was called and invited to apply. She got an interview and discovered that her previous interviewer had spoken very highly of her. She impressed this interviewer in the same way and was offered the job. It has been marvellous. Jessy's been able to do so much more than nursing; she's been able to counsel patients and their families. She offers them a small piece of her faith by saying to them "God bless you" at the end of their treatments. Even those families who are initially stony-faced about this blessing, soften to her over time as they discover that this is a large part of who she is.

Jessy spent six months begging banks for a loan so that she could buy a home, but was turned away from all the major banks. She tried them all a second time and this time, somewhat miraculously, a Westpac manager agreed to lend her 100% finance. Her experiences of the rapid processing of her visa and licence, the acquisition of work and a home loan have all led her to believe that this is the place God wants her to be; He closed the door to the United States and opened them to Australia. She still doesn't love this place, but Ash does and this, together with her belief that this is where God wants her, makes the decision to come here worthwhile and bearable.

Jessy chose to come to Melbourne, rather than another Australian city, because a friend from her nursing training lived here and offered to help find accommodation. When Jessy and Ash first arrived, they lived just around the corner from Sacred Heart. They didn't have a car and just walked here. She can't really believe how lucky they were to find this place. When she arrived here, she swore that she wouldn't have any friends other than those she made in God's house. She's been very happy with this decision—people at Sacred Heart have been a blessing to her and she's confident they won't use or hurt her. Bernadette (Bernie) was the first person who embraced her here in Australia and Jessy loves her and her family as her own—even calling Bernie and her husband 'Mum' and 'Dad'. In October last year, when Jessy had surgery, it was the community of Sacred Heart that gathered around her, made meals for her, and looked after her. Nothing will keep her from coming to church. People are often amazed that she can get Ash to come to church with her. Jessy, though, thinks it makes sense; she gives him total freedom over 95% of his life (school subjects,

clothes, music, etc) except for the 5% that is church and values. She could always assert control over the other part of his life, but is pretty certain he'd prefer it this way.

When they first arrived, Sacred Heart had a congregation of 35–50 people on a Sunday morning. Jessy's not really sure what's changed to make it grow so much. When she moved into her own home, a good drive away, people thought she might relocate to her new parish but she loved Sacred Heart and keeps coming here despite the distance. She's been nominated to the Parish Council and is the Secretary. When she first arrived, she was a bit confronted by church practice. At home in India, you kept silence in church—kids too—whereas here, people talk all the time. It took her a while to realise that if you can't talk in God's house, then where can you talk? She's embraced this part of Australian culture and now finds it hard to keep silent when she goes to church in India. When she arrived in Australia, Jessy expected everyone to be Christians because all the white people she had known in India had been missionaries. Now, she believes that Christians from the West go to developing countries because they know that people there will be more responsive to the gospel. In the developing world, people are always in a deficit, always in want of something, and so they turn to God. In the West, people have everything they could ever want or need and so there's no need to seek out God. Here, she looks forward to church every Sunday because she gets to see all the people she loves.

To finish, Jessy tells me a story about her relationship with Sister Sheila. Sister Sheila worked in Madras for thirty years and when she met Jessy she embraced her as a fellow country-woman. Jessy found it to be both a surprising and delightful bond. When Jessy returned home for a visit, Sister Sheila asked her to take some cards back to the orphanage where she had worked. Jessy was delighted to. When she arrived with the correspondence, word spread round the orphanage that a friend of Sheila's was there and people flowed in to see her; indeed, they saw Sister Sheila in her. Despite all the differences between them—not least of which their skin—people at the orphanage saw Sister Sheila in her and Jessy found it to be a profound blessing.

Jessy's joy and grief centre around when she feels known and seen by the people she loves. Her family does not understand her desire for service. Her desire to join the

sisterhood is denied and her nursing career carries shame. Until, that is, she can serve her father and he comes to understand. He understands not just her heart, but her purpose, and when he sees that a weight seems to lift off Jessy. When, on his deathbed, he recognises the intimacy of her relationship with her little sister and binds their hands together, she feels validated. When her mother, however, fails to acknowledge the pain Jessy experiences in the marriage she arranged, Jessy is pushed to despair. When she is denied proximity to her son, she contemplates suicide. It is the voice of God, reaching out to her by name—biblically, an expression of intimate knowledge (for example, see the stories of Moses in Exodus 3 or Samuel in 1 Samuel 3)—that delivers her from this decision. In her work life, it is not her salary that seems to matter, so much as being seen to be able to do what she knows she can do. And finally, when she returns to India with messages from Sister Sheila, she is overjoyed to be seen and known through her. Jessy can withstand the grief of her situation because ultimately, she feels known and loved by God. She can withstand her disappointment in Australia, because here, Ash is flourishing and she can know him fully.

While worshipping with the next congregation, the Seventh-day Adventists, I interviewed Mariam. Mariam had come to Australia as a young bride from Lebanon. Her story is one of searching and yearning, that seems to have found resolution in this particular faith community. Mariam tells her story with a strong linear narrative. She describes her life experiences as a path that has led her to her present relationship with God and church. Her current reality is the pinnacle of all that has come before. Jon Bialecki talks about the ways in which this making sense of past experience works to provide certainty and clarity, he writes:

Giving a name to this surprising experience was not merely a closing down of a sort of indeterminate openness. It was also a retrenchment of the experience, a grounding of it that made it no less weird but easier to keep alive ... There was a loss of possibility, but as those alternatives receded, there was also a gain in clarity and the seeding of a new space of potential. (Bialecki, 2017b, p. 4)

Mariam can look back on her life and call it a blessing, she can identify how even the hardest times were bringing her closer to God.

Story 10: Mariam

Mariam and her husband Mark strike me as highly involved in the ministry of Preston SDA church. Mark, a gentle bear of a man, greets people at the front door almost every week as part of the welcoming team, enthusiastically shaking hands and wishing arrivals a happy Sabbath. Mariam and her almost-grown daughters are actively involved in teaching Sabbath School, participating in youth events, and leading the singing. They are always beautifully presented in smart clothes. While I do my best to blow dry my hair and slick a bit of lipstick on while I wrestle Ben to church, they seem to take such care in the way they present themselves. The girls always sit together with their parents as a family. So much like their mother, with long hair falling down past their shoulders, but dark, like their dad.

When I speak to Mariam about her story, though, I discover that they are relatively new arrivals at Preston Church; they have been part of the congregation for about three years. And while, like all their past experiences with church, Preston is not perfect, it has become more like home than any of the others:

I feel like I belong there now ... I do I feel like I belong to the family there, yeah. It's when you get involved with the kids and get involved in serving and get involved, having something to do, that made a big difference. You do feel like you're a part of it now and you belong to it.
(Transcript lines 1124–1128)

Mariam was born in Lebanon and grew up in Beirut. Her family were Antiochian Orthodox— “my father was a very fanatic Orthodox all the way” —and she grew up going to Orthodox churches for Easter, Christmas and formal occasions. But the Orthodox church was some distance from home and they would more regularly go to a local Catholic church. She was educated at a Catholic school, where she participated in the movement of Marian youth, and in some ways was more familiar and comfortable in the shorter Catholic Mass than the much longer Orthodox service in which she felt “you don't have much of a part of it” as the priest and the singers carried most of the service. She loved participating in the choir at school and the band at the Catholic church. Mariam is trilingual; she grew up speaking Arabic and French

(school and work were conducted in French), and started learning English in Grade 5. She could understand formal English, but could only speak a little before moving to Australia. When she got here, she struggled to understand the Australian accent and slang.

While her family was religious, Mariam does not remember religion being a subject of reflective conversation “other than ‘must’ and ‘you have to’ and ‘don’t’ and all that stuff” (lines 78–9). Going to Orthodox church, “meant nothing other than wearing new clothes and going with all the family and having a celebration after with my mum and dad” (lines 83–85). As Mariam describes the church of her youth she starts identifying things that never quite sat well with her and made her uncomfortable, like kissing and bowing to icons, or kissing the hand of the Bishop. As our conversation continues, she paints a picture of her journey to Christianity as a search for a truth that she has been yearning for and sensing from the very beginning of her story. She says “it’s sort of like I was led, a step at a time, all the time” (lines 74–75).

While she was a teenager, her sister married and then converted to become a Jehovah’s Witness. Mariam is deeply concerned with theology. Her sister gave her tracts and books, but Mariam carefully explained to me how the Jehovah’s Witness view that Jesus is fully human (and not divine) was problematic for her and unpersuasive.

Her husband Mark had moved to Australia with his family when he was eight. His family was even more closely connected to the Orthodox faith as his uncle was a priest, conducting services at St Nicholas’ church in East Melbourne. Mark went back to Lebanon to visit when he was 26. Mariam says everything was different for him. It was at that time that they met and were married. I ask if it had been a whirlwind romance, but her answer is simply “I don’t know ... no. It was very fast and it just happened” (line 133).

Almost as soon as they arrived home in Australia, Mariam fell pregnant. But it was complicated. It wasn’t a normal pregnancy, but a molar pregnancy. A molar pregnancy is a tumour rather than a foetus. Mariam felt pregnant and had morning sickness. She did not understand much English and was subjected to many medical procedures; a curettage and operations and six months of chemotherapy. Mark and his uncle attempted to help with translating doctors’ advice, but they were unfamiliar

with all the terminology and no one really understood what was happening to her. Although she says Mark's family thought she was going through a normal miscarriage, Mariam also recalls that Mark was "so good at that time ... and we got sort of attached to each other at that time" (lines 160–161). Mark's family was supportive but no one really understood that she was receiving chemotherapy and so she continued to work in the family shop. The treatment and experience were brutal, she questioned why these things happened to her and what had caused it. Her body was weak, she describes herself as both anaemic and anorexic (lines 166–167). And through it all, she says, "all these things, I just hid in me, never got it out, never spoke about it to anybody about all these feelings" (lines 188–189).

At that time, her mother-in-law encouraged her to do some study. So, Mariam did an English course at Myer House and then a Working in Australia course at RMIT. Mariam was twenty-five and waiting for clearance from her doctors for permission to get pregnant again as the treatment had made pregnancy dangerous. After studying, she and Mark bought a takeaway shop in Malvern. It wasn't what Mark wanted to do, but it was what they could do. During this time, Mariam says she wasn't really thinking about God, she didn't pray, but she says she had faith in a way. Her first child, a daughter, was delivered prematurely and the delivery left Mariam in the Intensive Care Unit for three days after the birth. Her daughter weighed only 1.82kg. She calls her survival a miracle (line 217);

That really shook me, what happened with V because that same thing happened to a customer of mine and we used to always stand and talk about our pregnancies and about babies. But to see that she had lost the baby and mine had survived, it was something like—it had to be an act of God. Not that God killed her baby but that God blessed me with mine. (Lines 220–225)

At this point in her life she says she came to realise that "someone is looking after me in a way" (line 227). When she describes what life was like for her, it sounds incredibly hard. She and Mark ran a shop, for which she did all the cooking. Working together was hard on their relationship. She described anger building inside her, always looking at the negatives and nagging Mark all the time. With her background

in war-torn Lebanon, she found his obsession with football to be a completely foolish priority. The gap between them “created more and more anger” (line 253). When a customer at the shop offered her part-time work at a transport company she jumped at the chance. It turned into a one day a week position and the time away from the shop and Mark was restorative. She fell pregnant a second time and just before going on maternity leave, the transport company offered her her dream job as the Import Manager, which she turned down because of her family commitments and the shop.

After their third daughter was born, Mariam said Mark started whinging. They had owned the shop for ten years. The repetition of routine and customers was soul-destroying. So, Mariam’s brother found Mark a position at the bakery where he worked and he started working there on Sundays. As he started taking on more days at the bakery, Mariam had to control the shop more. She did so much cooking; breakfast and lunch in the shop, then cleaning up the shop, and returning to run the whole household, cooking and cleaning, looking after her children. She had her babies while working this way, and remembers timing her babies on and off the breast so that she could serve in the shop.

A few years later, when Mark came home from work one day and turned on the television, he stumbled across a Christian channel. He talked about it with Mariam, both of them surprised that ‘Christian’ did not mean videos of Mass, but talking and praying. Mariam was fascinated and took to watching it at night in the shop. She remembers her astonishment at realising “these people are talking to someone that they know is answering” (line 291). She grew attached to the channel and she wanted what they had. She prayed for time to read the Bible and admits to me that she started reading it on the toilet, praying “Forgive me, Lord, that’s the only place I have peace and quiet” (line 306–7).

Not long after, one of the preachers from this channel came to Melbourne, and Mariam and Mark went to see him speak. The church was packed and the music and the message “was unbelievable” (line 320)—not, of course, in the sense that the content could not be believed, but in that it was unlike anything Mariam had ever experienced before. She goes on to explain how she prayed about a back injury she had been suffering from and which no treatment was improving, after which she felt better. She remembers laughing with Mark about how different they seemed from everyone else there. While the rest of the congregation had their eyes closed, singing,

Mariam and Mark were looking around at everything; “It was quite funny, but it was so good” (line 332–3). They answered the altar call in tears and “felt so good after that” (line 336).

A few days later, Mariam attended an Alpha course³⁸ the church was running as follow-up to the speakers’ visit. In retrospect, she can identify the church as Pentecostal, the music was “like country music” and very loud (line 345). She says that she found it difficult to grasp what they were teaching, but also remembers being troubled by their teaching on the gift of tongues, debating with her friend about the interpretation of the gift and what it ought to look like; that is, is it glossolalia? Or speaking in real translatable languages?

While they were going to the Pentecostal church (she remembers the exact date, because it was her wedding anniversary), Mariam recalls praying to God, “I want that anger out and I want get rid of that anger and I want to live for you. Help me. Teach me how.” (lines 360–361). At this point in her story, Mariam gives me a detailed description of a moment in which she was sorely tempted to get angry, but throughout which she maintained calm—even laughing in response to setbacks and describes how God was guiding, protecting and then talking to her through the Scriptures. What follows is a summary of that story.

At that time, she had a cousin who was also becoming a believer helping her out in the shop. But the week after praying about her anger, his wife called and said he couldn’t come to work at short notice. She hired another worker who would start the next day. She opened the shop and started frying the felafel. By half past ten she started to realise that her new employee was not going to show up. While juggling service and cooking, Mariam had an accident with boiling oil. She does not describe being injured, but does describe damage to the floor of the shop. She got hysterical—but with laughter:

I said, I’m not supposed to get angry, I’m supposed to laugh. And that was the first thing that I thought. It was such a funny day. But I looked

³⁸ The Alpha course is an evangelistic course that describes the Christian faith. It was first developed in the UK by Nicky Gumbel of Holy Trinity Brompton and has been translated into 112 languages and is used in many countries. It consists of a talk (either delivered by the local minister or a video of Nicky Gumbel), followed by discussion. For more details see australia.alpha.org or run.alpha.org.au

at it, finished what I was doing. I thought, I'm not going to get angry with this. I don't know what's happening, something's happening but I'm not going to surrender to it. (Lines 415–418)

She was so nervous about lunch service, but for the first time in the shop's ten-and-a-half-year history, she says the customers came in two-by-two. It dragged on, but she managed by herself, thanking God that He was looking after her. She describes her understanding of the event as a test; that she was being tempted to anger, but she was determined not to fail. And when she finished service, and an additional catering job, she remembers going upstairs, kneeling down, opening the Bible randomly (as was her habit) and falling on "the Epistle of James, where he says that God does not tempt anybody and he does not tempt in bad things", instead He "allows a test to bring patience" (lines 436–439). The passage is James 1:12ff:

Blessed is anyone who endures temptation. Such a one has stood the test and will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love him. No one, when tempted, should say, "I am being tempted by God"; for God cannot be tempted by evil and he himself tempts no one. But one is tempted by one's own desire, being lured and enticed by it; then, when that desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin, and that sin, when it is fully grown, gives birth to death. Do not be deceived, my beloved.

Every generous act of giving, with every perfect gift, is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change. In fulfillment of his own purpose he gave us birth by the word of truth, so that we would become a kind of first fruits of his creatures. (James 1:12–18, NRSV)

When she read this she remembers starting to weep and saying "Lord, you are even talking to me", and that this was the start of having a relationship with the Lord (lines 440–441).

Two months later, after Mark had completely extricated himself from the shop, he was diagnosed with cancer. While for many people this might be the kind of event

that leads them to question “where is God?”, Mariam instead reflects on what a blessing it had been that she had slowly been taking over the shop from Mark. She imagines what it would have been like if she had been thrown in the deep end, forced to take on the shop in the wake of his diagnosis without the slow preparation she had undergone. And she sees blessing.

At this point in her story, she pauses and reflects on the whole of her journey:

[In Lebanon] I lived in a way where I had to sometimes run from one building to another to hide from a bomb ... and nothing happened to us. One night we had to spend the whole night under the bombs. We were six kids, we had a very small house in Beirut where we [were] in the middle of the battle ... There was a cupboard in there and the bottom of the bed is here and we had to be lining up, six of us, just in the distance of the bed, on this side of the bed, and hiding because my parents weren't home and we got stuck in the house by [ourselves]. And we were saved from all that. Bombs were coming on the house and we were filled with dust but where we were hiding was safe and we didn't get killed. Things like that come back to your mind and you think, there is a higher power is protecting you all the way but who is he? And you're starting to know him and you get so attached.

When I had the kids, I missed my parents so much. I come from six kids, a big family where I never left home before. I come to a strange country where you have to go through all that with no-one with you, nobody except with Mark, nobody was with me. When I had V, I got my sister to come and help me but when I had the others, his mother would come and help maybe for a week and then that's it. So it was hard, it was really hard. ... But the thing is, when Mark got sick, the people were amazingly supportive. It was like, wowee, the new era of something. We started hearing that people are praying. Never heard that before!
(Lines 484–508)

Despite this confidence that God was at work, Mariam was not entirely comfortable in the teaching she was receiving at church. After Mark recovered, they sold the shop.

The workload was too heavy and Mariam's heart was not at ease with selling cigarettes any longer. They lost a significant amount of money when they sold the shop, but Mariam still felt the decision was a good one.

While they were renovating their home and staying with her in-laws, she remembers one strange morning when she couldn't sleep, she got up and put on the TV at 4:00AM. She describes this as way out of character. But the program she turned on was a religious program talking about Herbert Armstrong. Armstrong founded the Radio Church of God and was an advocate for keeping the Sabbath. She was fascinated by the story of this man. So, she ordered his book and got it delivered and reading it was the start of her persuasion that Sabbath worship is critically important. She was so convinced by his argument and her own reading of the Scriptures, especially the Ten Commandments, in which Sabbath worship is laid down as the fourth commandment, that she started keeping it herself. She says she stopped washing and started to relax on Saturdays.

They moved to their current home and started going to the Baptist church in the neighbourhood. Mark stopped going after a couple of weeks, but Mariam persisted. At this new church, she was troubled by the teaching she received about forgiveness and repentance. It all seemed too lax, too easy. She could not comprehend how the idea she was confronted with—that her future sins are already forgiven—could drive her to have “an overcoming life” (line 573):

I know sin breaks up my relationship with God ... And then I sinned, I lied. That week, I lied. And after I lied I thought, like, my goodness. I went on my knees and I was crying. I said, “Lord, I'm going easy on myself and I don't want that. I don't want anything to break me up or to separate me from you. I might not be breaking up but I don't want anything to separate me from you and that teaching is making me weak. I don't want that.” (Lines 575–581)

So, they stopped going to that church and started attending an Arabic group “where they are a bit more like the Methodist teaching” (line 583). This group shared a lot of similarities with Adventist teaching, but was very conservative about gender roles and Mariam felt like she kept being put down. As Mariam describes her journey, she

references so many different sources of input to her Christian understanding; from internet chat rooms and other resources, like Christian television. She found a faith community online, in a chatroom. But the chatroom was frequently inhabited by conflict and disagreement and Mariam and Mark lost interest. A couple of years later, Mark's mother introduced them to a new chatroom on the same site, and "straight away we got attached to it", with Mark even becoming a group admin (line 621).

A few years later, in one of these chatrooms, they were introduced to Adventist teaching. She explored in detail an issue that was troubling her about the angel Michael and his relationship to Jesus (i.e. that they could be one and the same). The teacher that guided her through this issue then announced he would visit Australia. When he visited they went to Adventist churches together on Saturday and to the Essendon Arabic fellowship on Sunday. Mariam describes the reception he received as being 'attacked' for his commitment to the Sabbath during the sermon; not explicitly directed at him, but four weeks of preaching against the Sabbath, which was highly unusual. After the service, there would be overtures of friendship, but also some debates that Mariam found rude, and during which theological points were raised which she found unpersuasive. Mariam said that the pastor of the Arabic church helped drive a wedge between her and Mark by maligning their visiting friend and the things Mariam was starting to learn and believe. They stopped attending and for the next two years did not participate in a church. The disagreement they were in about matters of faith was hard on them as a couple.

One of the Adventist churches they had visited was Preston. And during those two years without a church, and while things were hard, a congregation member kept in touch. Florice is a gently spoken woman of middle age, and is herself an immigrant. Mariam said she called every Friday night:

Hours she would spend on the phone just for me to talk. And I would talk and talk and talk. (Lines 833-834)

Florice also gave her copies of the quarterly bible study materials that Adventists read and discuss in churches around the world every Sabbath. Mariam used them as devotional material with her girls and they all really enjoyed them. The girls eventually asked if they could go to Preston church with Florice again. Mariam

encouraged them to go, but felt she could not go herself because Mark was frustrated by the frequent changes in churches and it was causing tension between them. One week, when she arrived to collect the girls after church, she met a woman from Syria with a similar background and who had also been to the Arabic church, although they had not met there. This woman showed her the Preston church library and invited her to borrow some DVDs. Mark loves DVDs and documentaries and avidly consumed them at home. Mariam had brought home three DVDs from a series of thirty-seven. He was keen to watch more. And so, they visited the church together as a family.

Mariam had been baptised at the Arabic church (disappointingly, she says, it was in a bathtub instead of at the beach as planned because of the weather). Although Adventists do not insist on re-baptism, nor do they discourage it, and Mariam and her family were soon baptised at Preston. Their Egyptian-American teacher from the chat room came out again from the States and baptised them. The Sabbath School, which is the small group bible study that happens before the Divine service, was the part of church life at Preston that most appealed to Mariam. She loved the questioning, searching, and studying. Since being baptised, Mariam has led the children's Sabbath School as well as the Summer School (a holiday study program for the adults). It has been confronting and empowering, she says of leading the adult Sabbath School:

It was good, yeah, it was good. It's a bit hard. It's a big difference between teaching kids and talking to men. And from my background, I'm a bit—I might look like agile and strong but deep inside, I'm not. I'm a bit like—they asked me before to teach summer schools and I'm "it can't be me, I can't." But this time I said I'm going to go for it. (Lines 910–914)

She acknowledges that Preston is not a perfect church, but she feels at home there now, like she's part of the family. She may have been drawn there by her interest in Sabbath worship, but she finds the energy of Adventism in its commitment to the possible return of Jesus at any moment and the sense of needing to be ready. And while it would be possible to imagine that needing to be ready involves lots of preparatory activity, Mariam says quite the opposite:

[To be ready is] To be always watchful for myself, for my salvation. I know I'm not going to lose my salvation because I believe in Jesus and he is my saviour. And I believe what you need to do to be ready is to be more waiting, like waiting in the Lord, like, not to get too busy, to get involved in other things. And I have such blessing in my life. I'm not rich but I'm not poor and I don't have everything but I sort of don't need anything. Praise the Lord, I'm so blessed in my life and I don't seek earthly stuff a lot. I might buy stuff here and there, this is to make me happy, but it's not where my heart is, if you know what I mean. Yeah, I'd rather be—what can I say? To me, I'd rather be there than here. I'd love to be there more than to be here because I know that there's no war, there's no nothing, what is happening now. My brother just missed a bomb that happened the other day in Lebanon and my cousin got killed in Syria just because it happened that she walking on the street and a bomb just [trails off] This world, we've lived in it all our lives, war, killing. What do I need to do to be ready? Just believe in Jesus, that he is the saviour and he's coming to take us. And that's all he said for us to do, to wait and believe and wait. (Lines 1164–1178)

While Jessy's joy and grief centred around being known, Mariam's joy and grief pivot on feeling confident in being provided for. It is not that she seeks after wealth, but rather that when she finds a confidence in God's provision for her, she finds relief and comfort. I do not get the sense that Mariam has finished her searching journey, her continual striving for more and more true expressions of her experience and her reading of Scripture, but her story carries a sense of having found a momentary peace in this Adventist congregation with its focus on the return of Jesus.

When I tell Mariam that the next church I hope to visit is Preston's Arabic Baptist Church she tells me of the people they know there. People who, like themselves, have left Orthodoxy, who share in the experience of being outside the heritage they were born into. She has affection for them, even though she knows that she has chosen the better way. In many ways, the three congregations I worship with seem so distinct, so

disconnected. But there are these moments in which a fragile web is spun between the nodes.

Story 11: Istir

Istir is my first and closest friend at the Arabic Baptist Church. When she tells me her story, I realise she is only a couple years older than me, but her children are a decade older than mine and her life experience is so complex that I sometimes feel like a child in her presence. Although, to balance out this feeling, she is stunningly beautiful and looks more youthful than I. I end up feeling like some weird underdeveloped adult. Or overdeveloped child. But she is also warm, welcoming, and helps me navigate language and culture with amazing generosity. We sit down to share her story one week after church in the library she administers for the congregation.

Istir was born into a Chaldean Catholic family in Iraq, in a city south of Baghdad called Diwaniyeh. She is one of five children; she has an older brother and three sisters. Her father was a very well-respected doctor and they lived a comfortable life first in Diwaniyeh, and then in Baghdad.

Her family was living in Diwaniyeh because of her father's work, but after a while there, Istir says they couldn't handle the distance from family and they returned to Baghdad in 1985. The family home in Baghdad was a 'mansion'.

There were not many Christians living in Diwaniyah and so it was not until her family returned to Baghdad that Istir had her first communion in a Catholic church. Istir tells me that even though church and Christian community were now part of her life, "There was no relationship between me and God; it was just something that I had to do. It was like a routine, an obligation, that I had to go to church and be a good girl" (lines 23-24).

Mass was conducted in her mother language, Chaldean Assyrian. She tells me that she did not understand much, but had to stay for the whole two-hour service. She laughs about how, as a child, this was boring, but because her parents went, she had to follow. As a child, she sometimes felt that God was with her even though she "never used to read the Bible or anything like that" (line 43). But then she tells me that she

did, sometimes, open the Bible—but just to the book of Revelation. She was in love with the book of Revelation, maybe, she suggested, because at the time she found it “mysterious and scary and stuff” (line 45). But, she reports:

we’d been told we’re not supposed to read the Bible at that time, by some priests, that it’s too holy for us to hold the Bible and read it, something like that. But it’s changed now, thank God. (Lines 45–47)

She is thankful that now the Chaldean Orthodox church holds that every Christian should read the Bible and know what’s in it. But then, she says, “it was just for the priests, they are the ones who can hold the Bible, because it’s too holy, and we’re too sinful” (lines 52-53). Looking back, Istir recognises God starting to work in her life when she went through her first communion and the priest started teaching her from the Bible, from Jesus’ life and words, and about how to live and act as a Christian. Some of these things, she says, are still “stuck to my head until now” (line 57). But still, she would tend to call on God for help with exams and tests at school rather than fostering a relationship with him. Before exams, she would pray, and then come home and cry and blame God, asking Him “why did you let me down?”, but then, she laughs, she would end up getting eighty or ninety per cent. She doesn’t think this way of relating to God was unusual; it was the same for her brothers and sisters.

Despite being well-educated and relatively well-informed about contemporary issues, we’re five minutes into our conversation before I realise that these first years of her life are marked by war and the constant threat of missile attack. The Iran/Iraq war finished in 1988 and it’s at this point in her story that she says she and her family felt “Wow! You know, now we can live, like normal human beings” (lines 72–73). But peace would not last long.

Istir’s family was wealthy; they had cars, a big home, they went to good schools, and they “were very happy” (line 87). Just before the Gulf War started, Istir’s dad decided that the family should relocate to the USA. Her extended family started to leave. Her immediate family had obtained visas, booked their tickets, and was in the midst of selling their house and belongings. But before they could leave, all air traffic in and out of Iraq was terminated. They heard on the news that war was expected to

start in a matter of days. Her father decided to leave everything behind and get out of Baghdad:

So, my dad decided, "I don't care about the house and whatever we have here, as long as my kids and my family are safe, let's just get out of here. It might not be even a war, just something people made up and made a big deal." (Lines 99–101)

And so, they drove seven hours to the north of Baghdad, to Istir's aunty's home in the north. They took a couple bags and expected to be gone for a few days. She was about twelve. When the war started, and they saw footage of Baghdad, they thanked God that they had left. But the north was not safe either—the gas attacks Saddam waged on the Kurds were close to where Istir and her family were. Her aunty made a safe room by putting plastic wrap around all the windows and doors of the house in case the gas came to them too.

Food and water were in short supply and her family relocated closer to the Turkish border. Her family were welcomed in by extended family on her aunty's side, who were honoured to have a doctor stay with them. They could not return to Baghdad. Her dad decided they should leave Iraq completely. Istir was young and wasn't privy to all the details of the plan, but she knows her father paid money to some people to help them cross the border into Turkey.

Together with her family and her aunty and her family—about eight people in total—Istir said they got dressed in all their clothes (literally, they wore five pairs of pants and five jumpers) and prepared for the seven hour walk through snow across the border into Turkey. They had to walk and move silently, because the border crossing was illegal. Her little sister was only a few months old:

they used to give her drugs to keep her quiet, something, I don't know
... my dad used give her Panadol—not Panadol, something stronger
than Panadol—to keep her quiet, and that's what we've been told.
(Lines 162–163)

She tells me what happened next, identifying real fears and disappointments but balancing them with moments of unexpected grace. They started their journey at

night, in the dark, with no torches to draw attention to themselves. It didn't feel to Istir like they knew where they were going. Her sister started to cry and drew fire from Turkish soldiers. They threw themselves to the ground and managed to quieten her. The shooting stopped and they continued walking for hours. Eventually, they found a cave in the mountain and they decided to stop for the night. She could hear mice and other animals in the dark:

I don't know how—when I remember now, I don't know how we survived [stifling laughter]. So, we stayed there overnight. (Lines 179–180)

At the time, she and her siblings wanted to show her parents that they were strong and that they didn't need to worry about them. They could see their parents were worried and they wanted to show them “we're fine, we are enjoying this, this is an adventure [laughter]” (line 189).

When they woke in the morning, the view from the cave was incredible: “the mountains, the fog around the mountains, and the water, just natural, you know nature is amazing [with much emphasis]” (lines 191–192). And they kept walking. The snow was very hard to walk in, especially for Istir's mum, carrying a baby. After a few hours, they noticed helicopters overhead. There was no cover—no trees, no rocks:

And we just prayed, “God, protect us please, don't let them shoot us or hit us or anything” ... And we thought that was it. The Turkish government now is flying over, they knew that we were escaping, they could do anything. But nothing happened, they just passed us—it was so low, but they just passed us. (Lines 202–205)

After the helicopters passed, they were approached by Turkish soldiers who told them to return to Iraq. They said that it was a celebration day in Turkey and if they were discovered, they would be killed, because they don't want any refugees. After all those hours walking, they had to turn around and go back. They were hungry, thirsty and tired.

Then, Istir says, all of a sudden, they came across some people sitting on the side of the road, who invited them to sit and eat with them. They gave them bread and cheese. She thinks maybe they were soldiers? But they weren't in uniform. Istir's mother believes to this day that they were angels sent by God to encourage them and tell them not to worry.

Two days after making it back to the home they had been staying at in northern Iraq, Istir's dad decided they should try to cross into Syria. He gave more money to different people to get them across the river into Syria. As they left for Syria, they saw lots of dead bodies on the roads. There were bombs shaking their house:

Every time a helicopter would go on top of our house, we would just scream, and hold—we would sit in a circle, and hold each other's hands, and we would just think, this is our last—you know, time together—God, if you take us, take us all together, we don't want to stay here by ourselves. (Lines 848–851)

So, to Syria they went; they were shuttled across the river in small boats—only two or three people crossed the river (about the same size as the Yarra) at a time. Istir, her mum, and her sister crossed first. Before they saw her dad and brother make it across, Iraqi military started bombing the refugees. There were hundreds of people trying to cross the river at that time and people started running everywhere.

Istir and her sister held hands and started running like crazy. They were separated from the rest of their family. All of a sudden, they noticed pick-ups coming—Syrians driving pick-up trucks—they loaded refugees into the backs and drove them to safety. Istir was in a pick-up with her sister and aunty but didn't know what had happened to the rest of her family. They were terrified and crying and she remembers some Iraqi boys who threw them into the pick-up, holding them and saying “don't worry, you'll be fine”.

Istir is laughing as she remembers the story and I can't get my head around how she is making jokes. The memories, she says, are “like a dream” (line 272). The trucks kept driving through farm land and Istir and her sister were weeping. They had no idea how they would be reunited with their family, they had no mobile phones: “nothing, we had nothing” (line 275).

Eventually, they pulled into a little town. The Catholic church there took in refugees and gave them food, water, clothes before they were relocated to refugee camps. As soon as they arrived, they found their mum and dad, brother and baby sister. They were so happy to be reunited, and so happy to be out of Iraq, that Istir says they didn't care any more about all the things they had to leave behind.

As a relatively new mum myself, I gasp "your parents must have been beside themselves!" and Istir agrees, reflecting that she thinks the heart attack her mother suffered very soon after they arrived in Syria was due to the enormous stress she had been under.

While they were waiting with the other refugees to be relocated to the refugee camps by bus, Istir's father was approached by a Syrian man:

All of sudden, this man comes up to my dad, out of nowhere—he's Syrian—and he says to my dad, "Who do you have here with you?" and he says, "Oh, my wife and my children. And my wife's sister and her family." And he says, "Okay I want you all, I'm going to take care of you." And my dad says, "Oh, but you don't know us—why would you do that?" He says, "Oh, I want to." (Lines 310–314)

This Syrian man had a wife and two children, but he vacated his own house and went to stay with his parents so that Istir's family had somewhere to live. Her family were amazed by his generosity. They wondered if there really were people like this in the world? That night his family prepared a feast for them and his whole family came. Again, Istir and her family were left wondering at their generosity. They stayed in his house for a couple of weeks. They received food and clothes and shoes from the church; "they just took care of us completely" (line 333). They didn't know that this church was any different from the ones back home—in her experience the only churches were Chaldean Catholic ones. She says, they didn't even tell them about the church:

They were just showing us love, that's all. And we were so amazed by this love, we were like, wow, we want to experience the same thing, you know, what they're experiencing right now. (Lines 336–338)

But after a few weeks, they were given instructions to go to the refugee camp. They spent two freezing nights there. But their patron managed to negotiate their return. They were returned to a different house, just around the corner from the church. The church helped them furnish it and they stayed there for about a year. Istir and her sister started visiting the church. Unlike Chaldean churches, the walls were bare—there was only a cross. This one had Bibles everywhere and the women covered their heads in an unfamiliar way. She really enjoyed the service because she could understand what was being said. She remembers hearing here for the first time that Jesus was going to come back—and she was a bit worried about that!

Their neighbours warned them not to go to this church, telling them that they were Jehovah's Witnesses. But Istir said they had no idea what Jehovah's Witnesses were. And she thinks they just wanted to keep them from the church. Her parents were going to a Catholic church, which had a lovely minister who spoke Arabic even though he was from another country. While they went to the Catholic church they also went to the new one with Istir and her sister,

and they experienced the same thing, they just loved it. And the more we got contact with those people, communicated with them, the more we loved them and we got attached to them. And they just showed us love. They didn't judge us, they didn't do—they just helped, and they showed love, you know, practical—in practical way. So we felt very comfortable there. (Lines 376–380)

When her mum had her heart attack, the kids did not really know what was going on. Their dad did, but he did not tell them so as not to worry them. Somehow, despite the fact they didn't have transport he got her to the local hospital and despite the fact it was a tiny hospital they helped her through a major heart attack. Everyone at church was praying for her. Afterwards, they started her on some pills and she was received home with a big party. Istir was still scared for her mum, though. But the promises she received from the Bible as she read it gave her strength. She would write it down:

God, this is what you said, that you would never leave us or forsake us, you'll be with us, you are Healer (Lines 5709–580)

When Istir's dad worked as a doctor in Iraq, he studied in English. In Syria, if he wanted to practice he had to do so in Arabic. So, he returned to study and got a degree and started working as a doctor. His work was good and he was successful. They moved to a better house and stayed for two years. It was there that they gave their hearts to Christ and got baptised in the river. They were so happy there. They made friends that were like family.

The day they received their visas to come to Australia "was like a funeral" (line 413). They were so attached to the people there and wondered how they would ever live without them. Her family had applied to go to the USA, as all her mum's family were there, but they were not accepted. Her mum had one cousin here in Australia, and the very first time he applied for them to come, they were accepted. While they had been happy in Syria, the children hadn't been allowed to go to school and so moving to and settling in Australia seemed like a good idea. They left Iraq in 1990, and arrived in Australia in 1993. Australia was different, the roofs were pitched instead of flat, it was green everywhere, you couldn't smell pollution, and people would greet you even if they didn't know you. When they arrived, they spent two months attending a language centre and were then thrust into normal school.

Istir was eighteen and sent to Brunswick Secondary; she had missed two or three years of school and was studying in a new language. She really enjoyed school, though. In Iraq, corporal punishment was the norm—you would get hit for suggesting a wrong answer. School in Australia was completely different. Even though she was eighteen, she was entered into year ten with her sister in the same class. She completed years ten and eleven, but did not push on to year twelve. Her teacher came to her house and spoke to her parents and encouraged her to do year twelve. But she left to do a Certificate in Office Administration (Medical Reception) at TAFE. It was a mistake, she says. She was twenty, she had met David and was engaged, and she was eager to get on with adult life.

When they arrived in Australia, they stayed with her mum's cousin until they found a home of their own. They asked if the cousin knew of any Arabic evangelical churches in the area and were greeted with shock: "you're supposed to go to the Catholic church, you know, Chaldean church" (lines 463–464). But they persisted and eventually the cousin introduced them to Pastor Joseph. Her dad spoke to Pastor Joseph and David came to pick them up for church on Sunday, "and that's how I ended

up marrying him!" she laughs (lines 469–470). In order to leave Syria, Istir's family had to pay about \$14,000 in airfares. When they came to Australia, they had nothing, again. The church here helped them a lot, providing a car and helping with food.

Her dad started studying medicine again for the third time. She remembers that her parents would keep it secret, but they were often down to their last five dollars. She and her sister got work at a pet food factory and her brother worked at a chocolate factory and somehow, with some help from Centrelink as well, they survived until her dad got his degree and started working.

Istir tells me she believes they left Iraq for a reason. And that she and her family still believe that even though they lost everything in Iraq, that God has another, better, plan for them. During those two years in Syria, Istir and her family were able to study the Bible. They had no idea what was written in the Bible before that, she says, they had no idea who Jesus was. She knew that Jesus came and dies to save the world, but she didn't take it personally—that he came for her and that he's coming back again. That was new. Her mum had a dream one night in Syria that someone gave her a black leather-bound Bible. They didn't have a Bible—they had left everything behind except the clothes they were wearing. The next morning, the man who was looking after them came and gave her the exact same Bible from her dream. This Bible became very special to her family—they still have it but the pages are falling apart. They used to take turns reading—Istir would read for two hours, then her sister, then her mum, then her brother. They were hungry for God's word.

I tell her that reading the Bible for two hours would be highly unusual for an Australian teenager. She replies, "I know, I know! You tell me now. I know my kids!" (line 522). But she started at the gospels and finished them within days: "And I was like wow, all this stuff that Jesus' done, and I've never heard of it? I was such a fool!" (lines 525–526). She thought life was about weddings and parties and dancing, but she says as she was reading the Bible she thought "this is where my life starts: now" (line 530).

I do not recall having met the rest of Istir's family at church and ask her where they go. Her brother and sisters all married Iraqis of the Chaldean Catholic faith and go to the Chaldean Catholic church with their spouses. Her mum and dad, too, go to the Chaldean Catholic church, but they do so with an ulterior motive to encourage them to read the Bible and know Jesus as their personal saviour. Some years back, her

family got kicked out because they were “so full-on, on fire for God” (lines 621–622), but the Catholic church has changed and they are more welcome now. Her mum teaches Sunday School and her brother has been working with the youth and got them organising church camps.

Istir was the only one of her siblings not to marry an Iraqi, and I ask her if that was a challenge. To her parents, she says, it was fine, because they knew him, he was a Christian, and he spoke Arabic so he could understand them and they could understand him. They didn’t care where he was from. But relatives used to come to her parents and question whether she should marry him. She had had a lot of proposals from Iraqis too, but David was her friend—her best friend. They would hand out evangelistic pamphlets together in the city and became close. David’s family was more understanding. He had been in Australia since he was six years old, he spoke mostly English and they knew he wasn’t the type to travel back to Egypt to find a bride. They also knew Istir—she was serving in the Sunday School and was heavily involved at church.

Istir has no desire to return to Iraq—even for a holiday. She does not want to remember what happened to her family. She says she wouldn’t trade a single day here for a thousand over there. Iraq isn’t liveable anymore, and most of the Christians have fled. All of her family has left now, except for two cousins who can’t afford to leave. But she does share her stories with her kids, especially when they complain about things, like being bored. She tells them how lucky they are to be here. The kids are surprised when they hear her stories and David really appreciates them too. He often asks lots of questions. She says she doesn’t understand how people complain about life here.

Now that she has her own children, Istir says she understands better what her parents went through and why they sacrificed everything to save them. She says she would do the same for her kids. She appreciates her parents more, how hard they worked to get them here. She thanks God that everyone is healthy, that her dad is working, that they have a home.

Life isn’t easy for Istir in Australia at the moment. For the last five years, she and David and their two primary-school-aged kids have been living in her in-laws home; the four of them share a bedroom and a living space, their clothes are still in suitcases. The kids have slept on the floor for five years. They had invested everything

in building their dream home, when the builder went bankrupt and left the house with severe water damage and flooding. And some people around her think that it's a curse—that if you were blessed you would not go through this. But she says that this time has reminded her of Syria, but ten times better. At least they have somewhere safe. It is hard, but she still appreciates it. Knowing that there are others living through much worse situations gives her strength. God's promises keep her going. And she and David believe God has something better for them. David has faith and is sure they won't lose anything—if anything he's certain they'll gain more.

They were due to move into the house in 2009, the house was finished and full of new furniture. Just before they were due to settle, it started to rain and the basement filled with water: "like a swimming pool" (line 992). The builder declared bankruptcy and left the country. They haven't settled. The bank retains ownership and they're stuck in a legal twilight zone:

We're still waiting, and hoping, and praying, that something good is going to come out of this, because sometimes just ask, I do ask, why God, why did you allow this to happen? (Lines 1004–1006)

The first two years were so hard—she would cry all the time and be angry at God for letting this happen. She would look at other people, who hadn't worked nearly as hard as David, who seemed to get whatever they wanted. But she reminds herself of her health, her children, her generous family. But she can't look at the house. She hasn't driven past it in three years. It's a huge mess and she doesn't know how it's going to be resolved:

But I know one thing, that when I think about how I came from Iraq to Syria, from Syria to here, that encourages me, and tells me, oh, remember what happened, you know ... it's the same God. He will—when he saved you then, he will save you now. He will get you out of it. We're still waiting ... yeah. (Lines 1026–1029)

The kids don't complain. They remind her of herself and how she was with her parents, not wanting to cause them additional worry. She loves how they appreciate little things that their peers might not, like how excited they are to have wifi. But this

whole saga has her battling tears. While she laughed as she recalled fleeing Iraq, the disappointment of this housing situation is physically overwhelming. She knows that many people are praying for her, sometimes she used to visit random Christian websites to ask strangers to pray. But she remains hopeful:

I believe this is not a curse, I believe so. I believe God has a plan, and he hasn't revealed it yet, that's all. But it's just us, as people, we don't have ... the patience, I don't know, to, to wait. Maybe in God's eyes five years is nothing, but for us it is hard ... yeah. And He is very—He is quiet, He's been quiet. (Lines 1131–1134)

Istir's joy and grief centre around the bonds of family. When she is separated through physical distance and danger, or through family discord, there is pain. When her family is safe, and gathered together, poverty and loss cannot destroy the relief and joy she has in being with her loved ones. She trusts in God's material provision for her, she is thankful for the way he has brought her whole family to safety.

6.3. Consider it Joy

Each of these stories is deeply moving, and dramatic enough for the silver screen. Yet each of these women lives a life of regular suburban struggle in Australia. Each of these women have a sense that they are meant to be exactly where they are now—that God has used their journeys and the points they are at now for his good purposes, even if they don't quite understand what those purposes are yet. They grieve many things, but each of them also expresses gratitude.

Jessy seems to have had a sense of God's call on her life from the time she went to high school. Although she felt called to the sisterhood, she chose nursing as a compromise between her desire to serve God and people, and her parents' desire for her to have a medical career. While she regrets not pursuing becoming a nun, she identifies in her story ways in which being a nurse has been a blessing, like when she was able to look after her father in hospital. Similarly, while her marriage was traumatic and abusive, her love for her son is intense. She resolved to migrate, but was denied a visa to the USA, her country of preference, instead obtaining one for New Zealand, and

then Australia. But despite these disappointments, she has found a home at Sacred Heart. In her story, she tells me that her experiences of the rapid processing of her visa and licence, the acquisition of work and a home loan have all led her to believe that this is the place God wants her to be; He closed the door to the United States and opened it to Australia. She still doesn't love this place, but Ash does and this, together with her belief that this is where God wants her, makes the decision to come here worthwhile and bearable. Later she reflected that in the developing world, people are always in a deficit, always in want of something, and so they turn to God. In the West, people have everything they could ever want or need and so there's no need to seek out God. She can see and be thankful for all the things she has, the love of friends, her son, and her safety even while she mourns the loss of her home, the years lost to her marriage and apart from Ash, and the distance she feels from her family.

Mariam's story is one of loneliness and backbreaking hard work. She had difficult pregnancies, miscarriages, and traumatic birth experiences. As a new mum, I found her resilience to those challenges to be almost incomprehensible. Her search for God seems driven by an underlying search for a better self, a more peaceful heart and more peaceful relationships—like when she prayerfully reaches out for help with anger or anxiety. She seems to have found some of that peace; she is content with what she has. She trusts that all she has to do now is be ready for Jesus' return—and that doesn't mean frantic activity, but to be always waiting in the Lord.

Istir laughs when she remembers the story of her escape from Iraq. It seems incongruous to me. She tells me it's a bit like remembering a movie. But her experience of fraud here in Australia and being caught in financial limbo and housing insecurity reduces her to tears. I wonder whether this is because when she remembers her journey out of Iraq, hope has been realised. Her family made it out, together, to start a new life. While, with her home here, she still has to do the hard work of hope. She can say with her tongue that she trusts the Lord will provide—that the God who saved them in Iraq will also save them now—but hope is a kind of emotional labour. Whether you hope along the grain of the evidence, or against it, to hold out for something not yet realised carries an invisible battle against the possibility of future disappointment.

This habit of being able to hold grief and gratitude together at the same time shows us that for these migrants, their vision of flourishing has to do with the deepening of character, with perseverance through tough times, and with a patient

heart. Even though each of these women have sought safety and striven for prosperity, their vision of the 'good life' is not necessarily one of material blessing. Instead, it is one in which they care for their families and feel that they are fulfilling God's plan.

6.4. Conclusion

Easter and Christmas have lost a great deal of their sorrow in our more secular celebrations of these festivals; they are times to celebrate family, give gifts to loved ones, eat good food together. Perhaps we take time to reflect on our abundance and donate money or gifts to those less fortunate. But they are joyful; in our mainstream Westfield celebrations we have kept the joy of the angels, but we have lost the shock—the horror even—of the idea of a perfect God lowering Godself to take on human flesh; we have lost the sense of what was forsaken in that moment. We have kept the joy of new life (and chocolate) without the heartbreak of being led to the cross, forsaken by the Father. Christmas and Easter are connected; the gifts of the wise men foreshadow the death of the baby they are given to. TS Eliot characterizes this dual sense of this joy and grief in his poem *Journey of the Magi*, in which he tells the Christmas story and looks forward to Easter through the eyes of one of those wise men, concluding:

All this was a long time ago, I remember,
And I would do it again, but set down
This set down
This: were we led all that way for
Birth or Death? There was a Birth, certainly
We had evidence and no doubt. I had seen birth and death,
But had thought they were different; this Birth was
Hard and bitter agony for us, like Death, our death.
We returned to our places, these Kingdoms,
But no longer at ease here, in the old dispensation,
With an alien people clutching their gods.
I should be glad of another death.
(T.S. Eliot, 1974)

When I listen to the stories of people who have left their birth homes and come to Australia, I hear echoes of the question the wise narrator asks “were we led all that way for Birth or Death?”. For all my participants expressed some joy at the birth of new life here, but for many of them this went hand in hand with the death, real or metaphoric, of things that they love. My participation in worship and community with them at their churches did not give me any hint of the nature of their grief. It was only in asking them to tell me in detail about their journey here that the nature of their loss emerged. As I have dwelt on their stories, I keep being reminded of words from the book of James, where he exhorts believers:

My brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of any kind, consider it nothing but joy, because you know that the testing of your faith produces endurance; and let endurance have its full effect, so that you may be mature and complete, lacking in nothing. (James 1:2–4, NRSV)

It echoes the way grief and joy are wrapped up together in Eliot’s picture of the Christmas narrative; that the journey to maturity should be considered joy. Mariam is primarily thankful for who she has become, not what she has materially. Jessy understands it to be God’s will that she is here, even though she is a bit disappointed in her destination.

In Australian public discourse, there is a sense in which we demand migrants to be ‘grateful’ for their residency here and that all forms of remembrance should be happy or celebratory. Like the ‘Good’ in ‘Good Friday’, however, many of my research participants simultaneously express thankfulness and sorrow. In this chapter I have challenged the notion that gratitude necessarily corresponds with happiness and seek to allow space for a joy that is more complex than that allowing space for grief and loss.

The stories my participants tell me—in which they hold together joy and loss, sorrow and gratitude—echo an emotional habit that Christians practice in the remembering, re-enacting and retelling of key biblical narratives such as Christmas or Easter. Despite the fact that Australia is sometimes characterised as a ‘Christian country’, this habit of holding together joy and loss, and sorrow and gratitude together is in some ways counter-cultural; these migrants don’t express gratitude to Australia, but to God. Istir reflects that it was God who saved her in Syria and will again save her from her legal battle, not Australia. And they are not so much thankful for what they

have (although that is part of it), but who God is making them—what they are becoming. This argument does not shatter any academic anthropological or psychological findings, but I hope that it might contribute to re-shaping the way we talk about and ascribe value to the lived experience and emotional expressions of migrants in Australia.

7. Pentecost

7.1. Introduction

My mother would always stress about the flowers. She seemed to be rostered on to do the church flowers on Pentecost Sunday every year. And every year the panic about red flowers reared its head, “Are they red enough?” she would ask about the dark purple-red lilies she had bought. “Are they nice enough?” she would wonder about the appropriately bright red, but rather cheap, carnations. She is more confident these days, mixing red, orange and yellow blooms for the full altar-on-fire effect. The fiery-red adornment of liturgical churches on Pentecost Sunday represents the arrival of the Spirit to the followers of Jesus as tongues of fire.

According to the book of Acts, Jesus appeared to his followers over forty days after his resurrection, before ascending to heaven (Acts 1:1–10). Fifty days after the Jewish Passover, the time when Jesus was crucified, the Jewish people celebrate the Festival of Weeks—also known as Pentecost. So, about a week after Jesus had ascended, his disciples were gathered together in a house, while Jews from across the diaspora gathered in Jerusalem for the festival. While they were gathered there, the Spirit descended as tongues of fire on these first disciples and empowered them to speak other languages, in which they proclaimed the resurrection of Jesus to the multilingual Jewish population in Jerusalem. The Book of Acts describes the scene:

When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability. Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem. And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each. Amazed and astonished, they asked, “Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language? Parthians, Medes,

Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabs—in our own languages we hear them speaking about God’s deeds of power.” (Acts 2:1–11, NRSV)

Jesus’ ascension is also recorded in the gospel of Luke (Luke also being the author of the book of Acts). In that account, when he ascends, Jesus tells his disciples that “repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his [the Messiah’s] name to all nations, beginning in Jerusalem”. In this way, the coming of the Spirit with the gift to speak in other languages enables the disciples to take the first step in fulfilling Jesus’ parting command to take the gospel to all nations. It creates a vision of and takes the first steps towards a multicultural Christian church.

Pentecost—like the rest of the liturgical calendar—is not celebrated on a particular day with all the trappings of tradition in all churches. But for those that embrace the liturgical calendar, such as the Lutheran church I grew up in, or the Anglican church I now worship in, the day is one of celebration. Eight weeks after remembering the resurrection of Jesus on Easter Sunday, the church remembers the beginning of the public ministry of the Apostles. Because the first Pentecost is marked by the speaking of different languages, it is also often a day to celebrate the multicultural nature of the church. In the church of my childhood, like many others, the account of Pentecost would be read in different languages represented by members of the congregation: Hungarian, Finnish, German, Mandarin. The service would often be followed by morning tea or lunch to which people brought food that represented their country of origin. In Chapter 5, Abdulla, who speaks four languages, reflects that once he became a born-again believer, he became less convinced about the holiness of a particular language; “when you believe, you are more open to other people, to other traditions, other languages than when you are not” (line 678–9).

These are small symbols—some may even say petty ways—to recognise diversity in the church. In the face of the pervasive Australian narrative about ethnic difference equating to religious difference, these small symbols were a way to recognise unity and difference *within* the local, mainstream Christian church. Glick-Schiller et al.

recognize that religion in general, and Christianity in particular, can have a cosmopolitan edge:

Although the research contains clear indications that many worshippers emphasize a community in Christ without an ethnic suffix, scholars persist in categorizing the worshippers by their ethnicity. (Glick-Schiller et al., 2006, p. 814–5)

The contemporary church, however, is incredibly fragmented—along both ethnic and denominational lines. Indeed, ethnic and denominational difference are often intertwined. The narrative of ethnic difference corresponding to religious difference runs through the representations of Australia’s religious landscape in the social science literature. Gary Bouma describes the way Australia’s religious landscape is a product of its migration history:

All non-Aboriginal religious groups have found their way to Australia by migration either by being carried by migrating peoples or by 'migrating' as systems of belief and practice transmitted by means of teachers, publications or missionaries. The shape of Australia's religious profile is primarily a function of its migration history and only secondarily a function of conversion or changing religious identification. (Bouma, 1997, p. 1)

Ethnicity is such a significant part of Australia’s church landscape that an interdenominational directory of churches in Melbourne uses ‘Ethnicity’ as one of six search criteria to help users find a suitable church (see Image 8). Abe Wade Ata’s three-volume study of Religion and Ethnicity in Australia (1988, 1989, 1990) demonstrates the way in which Australia’s diverse religious (and especially, Christian denominational) landscape reflects its diverse migration history. The ethnic church is discussed in terms of attendance, cultural activities, and (seemingly) inevitable decline. Departure from the ethnic church is often insinuated as loss of ethnic identity, so that migrants who chose to worship in multicultural or mainline Australian churches are seen as having weaker ethnic identities.

Image 8: Transforming Melbourne Church Directory search engine

Source:

http://www.transformingmelbourne.org.au/churches/index.php?option=com_sobi2&sobi2Task=search&Itemid=541 3rd December 2010

The screenshot shows the 'DIRECTORY OF CHRISTIAN CHURCHES MELBOURNE' website. The page includes a search bar with a 'SEARCH' button, radio buttons for search criteria (Any words, All words, Exact phrase), and several dropdown menus for filtering by City, Postcode, Municipality, Denomination, Ethnicity, and Select Category. A small image of a church building is visible on the right side of the page.

But the vision for a community that can reach out beyond the barriers of ethnicity persists. Derrida (2001) has a vision of the cosmopolitan city, in which they are transformed into places of welcome, and he identifies the Judeo-Christian contribution to the idea of cosmopolitanism. Speaking to *The International Parliament of Writers* in 1996 on the subject of cosmopolitan rights for asylum seekers, refugees, and immigrants, Derrida is overtly political in his agenda, arguing for welcome and justice: “For let us not hesitate to declare our ultimate ambition ... our plea is for what we have decided to call the ‘city of refuge’” (2001, p. 8). In order to do so, he traces a brief genealogy of the concept of cosmopolitanism. Derrida identifies a “considerable gap” between the principles of asylum and hospitality proposed by Enlightenment thinkers

such as Kant (cf. Kant, 1972) and the implementation of these principles in post-war Europe. For Kant, says Derrida, cosmopolitanism is defined as the right to hospitality. And for Derrida, hospitality is not simply one ethic among others, but “hospitality is culture itself”:

insofar as it has to do with the ethos, that is, the residence, the home, the familiar place of dwelling, inasmuch as it is a manner of being there, the manner in which we relate to ourselves and to others, to others as our own or foreigners, *ethics is hospitality*; ethics is so thoroughly coextensive with the experience of hospitality. (Derrida, 2001, p. 16–17, emphasis in original)

In seeking out reference points for this assertion that ethics is co-extensive with hospitality, Derrida first points to the Hebraic tradition of cities of refuge, second he points to the medieval tradition of the sovereignty of the city, and third, he links the cosmopolitan tradition of Greek Stoicism to Pauline Christianity.

It is Derrida’s acknowledgement of the Hebraic and Christian roots of cosmopolitanism which most interests me—the fact that openness to the outsider has long been a theological imperative, and that theology and politics are not easily disentangled. Derrida suggests that the first text in which the “urban right to immunity and hospitality was rigorously and juridically developed” (p17) was the Book of Numbers (citing Numbers 35:9–32, cf. Chronicles 6:42–52, and Joshua 20:1–9). He doesn’t dwell on the detail of this biblical reference, but instead points his readers to the works of Emmanuel Levinas in *The Cities of Refuge* (1994) and Daniel Payot in *Refuge Cities* (1992). Commenting on the contribution of Pauline Christianity, Derrida states:

Pauline Christianity revived, radicalised and literally ‘politicised’ the primary injunctions of all the Abrahamic religions, since, for example, the ‘Opening of the Gates of Israel’—which had, however, specified the restrictive conditions of hospitality so as to ensure the ‘safety’ or ‘security’ of the ‘strong city’ (26, 2). Saint Paul gives to these appeals or to these dictats their modern names. These are also theologico-political names, since they explicitly designate citizenship or world co-citizenship: ‘no longer foreigners nor metic in a foreign land, but fellow-citizens with

God's people, members of God's household' (Ephesians II. 19–20). In this sentence, 'foreigners' (*xenoi*) is also translated by guests (*hospites*); and 'metic'—but see also 'immigrants', for '*paroikoi*'—designates as much the neighbour, from a point of view which is important to us here, as the foreigner without political rights in another city or country. (Derrida, 2001, p. 19)

While Derrida sees this radical opening up of the church to all people as having its root in the teaching of Paul, many theologians would suggest it is foreshadowed in the Old Testament and brought to fulfilment by Jesus in the Gospel accounts (e.g., Blomberg, 2007). Indeed, Paul himself argues as much:

[T]he scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, declared the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, "All the Gentiles shall be blessed in you." For this reason, those who believe are blessed with Abraham who believed. (Galatians 3:8-9, NRSV)

That is, as early as Genesis 12, God promises Abraham that all the peoples of the world will be blessed through him (Genesis 12: 3). Throughout the Gospel accounts, Jesus begins to realise the fulfilment of this promise, drawing to himself the Magi, Samaritans, Greeks, and Romans, among others, and hints that this blessing to the nations was to be fulfilled. The Gospel of Matthew climactically concludes with the resurrected Jesus commanding his followers:

Then Jesus came to them and said "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." (Matthew 28:18-20, NRSV)

Surely this passage is implicated in the worst of Christian missionizing. But it also lays the foundation for Paul's commitment to the universality of the Christian message and the unity and equality of all believers.

Contemporary theological writer, Daniel Hayes, points to the fact that the ancient world, the one in which Christian scripture was written, was multi-ethnic (Hayes, 2003). Israel is described (or at least translated) as an ethnic nation. Despite the experience of severe ethnic barriers, Christian Scripture encourages and predicts that worship of Jesus will lead to profound unity across these ethnic or national divisions, while still acknowledging that difference exists. Hayes writes:

[T]he people of God in the Book of Revelation are portrayed as being from all the different peoples of the earth. They are multi-ethnic, multicultural and multilingual ... God's intention for his people is to be multi-ethnic and multicultural, but yet united in their fellowship and their worship of him. (2003, p. 199)

So, then, if a Judeo-Christian theological anthropology is implicated in the concept of cosmopolitanism, and if there are theological grounds to encourage unity across ethnic boundaries, it seems fair to reflect on cosmopolitan identity and practice in contemporary church life. What I am suggesting here is that cosmopolitanism is simply another way to talk about the liturgical practice of Pentecost in everyday life—a Pentecostal disposition, if you will. However, because the term 'Pentecostal' is predominantly used to reference a particular form of Christian church practice, I will use the language of cosmopolitanism to explore the liturgical disposition to Spirit-filled unity in diversity. But despite the fact that cosmopolitanism can be argued for from Scripture and via Derrida, the reality of church on the ground in Australia is that it is denominationally and ethnically highly fragmented. The stories in this chapter show how movement can help people to cross denominational and ethnic boundaries. Sometimes, this is an incidental function of movement, sometimes it is the result of deliberate missional movement. Following Derrida, it seeks to ask how both the Australian-born and the overseas born “recreate, through work and creative activity, a living and durable network in new places and occasionally in a new language” (2001, p. 12).

7.2. Mobile Subjects

According to Datta, “cosmopolitanism in its most fundamental sense implies openness to difference” (2009, p. 353) and says, “It is a regular feature of the literature that those people who move—migrants, tourists, pilgrims, global elites—are those who ‘become cosmopolitan’, allowing their identities and practices to transform, seeing themselves as less fixed, more fluid. Literally, they become ‘citizens of the world’; *kosmopolites*. This sense of cosmopolitanism was certainly apparent in the people I worked with in churches. I present two different stories on this section, both from the Catholic church.

In Helena’s story, migration to different countries forces her to find Christian community across ethnic and denominational boundaries. Helena has journeyed from India through Malaysia and Brunei and through multiple denominations, finding new ways to express her faith through habits of the different communities she has worshipped with. This was not always comfortable—she found herself challenged by new modes of worshipful practice in a Pentecostal community in Brunei. But over time, her own Roman Catholic worship practice was transformed through this exposure. She adopted the Pentecostal practice of extempore prayer to bring her concerns to God. She still says the Rosary, but she treasures this new way of speaking to and with God. She is not so romantic as to suppose each of these communities is just like the other—she is alert to their particularities, their strengths and weaknesses. But she has also discovered the church is something bigger than she imagined. In her story below, she says it is really only by chance that she is again worshipping at a Catholic church. Denomination has been relativised for her; what matters is the gathering of God’s people.

In a similar way, Sione’s story illustrates the way in which movement can break down strong commitments to denominational purity. While raised in a strongly Catholic family and community in Tonga, Sione’s friendships with Tongans from the Uniting Church and other denominations here in Melbourne have shaped him into an advocate for ecumenical partnership. Sione can see a linearity between his upbringing in Tonga and his openness to Christians of other traditions. But it seems from the full context of his experience in Australia—the support he received from friends in the Uniting church, the opportunities he had to visit Uniting churches without familial constraint—that this

openness was facilitated by his migration experience as much as it might have been permissible in his pre-existing theological schema.

Story 12: Helena

Helena grew up in a wealthy family with a Protestant mother and Catholic father and went to Catholic church every day. But every day at home they would have more 'Protestant' devotions—reading the Bible, singing songs, and praying as a family. So, even as a child, her experience had a kind of diversity. She was a very 'good girl' and had a reputation among her friends for being powerful in prayer. If someone asked her to pray, she would immediately kneel down, cover her hair with a scarf and pray. She and her family were often the only people at morning prayer with the Jesuit novices at the local Catholic college. Her mother trained them to give thanks in the morning and to say prayers before bed. If she or her siblings would make a mistake, her mother would say "Ask God to forgive what you did", and they would have to kneel down and ask her for forgiveness. She would respond "I forgive you, did you tell God?" Then she would say "Don't repeat this mistake again". And, so Helena says, that her faith was "maybe like a childhood faith." (line 28). When she wanted something, her mother taught her to kneel down, and pray to God for it, even though it was something within the power of her mother to provide. She had to ask God first, then her mother.

When Helena finished high school, she left home for a residential nursing hostel to train to be a nurse. She laughs now as she recalls choosing it because of its very attractive 'sexy' uniform (line 67), but when she entered nursing she "really came to see people differently" (line 58–59). She was trained in a clinic where patients suffered from tuberculosis and leprosy. Every time she visited, she would vomit and she felt she couldn't do it. Her mother told her she should put her chin up and look after the sick, but her father was more sympathetic. He had some sway at the college and he organized for her to get breaks and avoid doing some of the things she didn't want to do. She says that at this time, she was not very close to God.

Then, one of the nursing superintendents applied on Helena's behalf for an overseas placement in Malaysia, which she took. A relative of hers there took her to a

Church of Christ, but the distance was too great to make a habit of going there and she worshipped at other closer Catholic and Anglican churches. But her family considered her 'lost' and she herself says that "some of the things I should repent" (line 138). But she was very popular and a representative for Indian nurses at the hospital. She joined a Christian fellowship and started "doing all the things" (line 147), but she really loved her involvement with the kids in the church—teaching them songs and looking after them. There wasn't a priest in this community, "they take turns to pray and worship the Lord" (line 161), and they cooked and ate together like a family.

Helena was counselled not to go to Brunei because it is a strict Muslim country, but the pay on offer was so generous that she could not turn down the job she was offered there. As soon as she landed, she was shocked by the way women dressed in Brunei, with everything covered, even their faces. There was no church, just a big mosque. Then, one day she met a woman who worked in the laboratory at work. She said she was a Christian and invited Helena over for dinner. Helena was a bit cautious and took a friend, who was Muslim, along with her. When they arrived, they saw a lot of poor people coming to her house, worshipping in a Pentecostal style. She did not really like Pentecostals because her experience was that they were very judgmental, condemning people to hell for their sin. For Helena, no-one but God has the right to judge, because only God knows your heart. So, she tells me, she was scared because she thought they "let God go to their mind" (line 216) and was scared they would forcibly baptize her, that "one day they will just put me in the water like that" (line 218). Although she didn't find everything they did persuasive, she was baptized. She happily calls herself born again. Helena speaks in tongues and finds Pentecostal habits of prayer particularly powerful. She prays every morning and night and as she talks you get the sense that prayer is never far from her lips. During the course of our interview, she shared many of the kinds of things she would pray in an ex tempore style. She explained how they pray to me like this,

First thing; what you are and you have to clean your sins like [?], like that's the way the basic thing, so you remember what everything you did "I'm sorry God, forgive me" And after that you go back to the second level of praising God, you know? Clean yourself, and thanksgiving, and praise, then you submit. Then you forget everything like you are

purified because of this. I believe in that, so, that was very important. That helped me in many ways. Every time, even today, I go, I tell God “I don’t care about other people” I tell God “I am the worst. I am the worst. I am the worst sinner in the world! Even in the whole church, I am the worst sinner, God, that’s why you chose me to be here and thanks for your love. I am a very bad sinner, but you cleansed me, to come to this level and you made me” (Lines 264–275)

Helena says that her father told her that wherever you go you should learn the good things. She laughs, “I took many good things from them—I stole things from that Pentecost church!” (line 246). She means habits, but the word choice ‘stealing’ makes it sound as though they are material things.

While Helena was living in Brunei, she visited Australia four times. The first time she visited, she went to Sydney. She heard church bells ringing and thought “Oh! I really want to be here!” (line 306). Later, she visited friends and family in Melbourne and found the people here very friendly. She visited another local church, but found she was much more comfortable at Sacred Heart because she could pray and praise God the way she wanted to here.

Helena moved to Australia and was married. She says when she was first married, she worshipped her husband more than she worshipped God. But her husband treated her poorly. She thought he was a believer, but after they were married she struggled to get him to come to church with her. He lost tens of thousands of dollars gambling. She prayed for him all the time—even praying he might win, though she knew in her heart it was wrong. She says she has learned and changed a lot, and she praises God and thanks him in prayer “for what I am today” (line 366). She discovered he had a girlfriend and asked him to leave. He took everything, including her car. There was nothing and no-one left, but she says “who was with me? God was with me” (lines 400–401). Sometimes, she prays in the middle of the night. There’s a verse that is special to her, she thinks it might be Isaiah 15:6,

For a small moment, I have forsaken you, I hid my face from thee, but with my loving kindness and with all my mercies I am with you” Even last night I shared one of the same verses with one of my girlfriends.

But I told god “Lord, you just mentioned there in the Bible a very small moment you hid, it’s not a small moment to me! It’s a very big thing! Because for God, things are not, for us it is different, isn’t it? That’s what in the Old Testament, years and things are nothing to God. Bible says for a ‘small moment’—no more ‘small moment’! (Lines 403–409)

I think the quote is more likely from Isaiah 54:7–8,

For a brief moment I abandoned you,
but with great compassion I will gather you.
In overflowing wrath for a moment
I hid my face from you,
but with everlasting love I will have compassion on you,
says the Lord, your Redeemer.
(Isaiah 54:7–8, NRSV)

She holds onto this promise, even though it does not feel like she has only been forsaken for a moment. She wants the moment to end. She waits in hope for everlasting love and compassion.

Story 13: Sione

Once a month the worship at Sacred Heart is led by a Tongan choir. Sitting in two or three rows at the very front and led by a quiet giant of a man. This is Sione. Father of six, but father-figure to many more. He picks up the pitch pipe and provides the reference note. The harmonies are beautiful. We meet one Sunday in the Rectory after the 10:00AM service in which the choir has sung. Sione is not boastful, but seems content—one might even venture to say proud—of his family, of the choir, of the things he has achieved in the Tongan community over the last couple of decades.

But these achievements emerge slowly in our conversation. We start at the beginning. Sione tells me he was brought up in a strong Catholic household, even thinking as a young man about joining the brotherhood:

It started with [my] grandparents and then [my] parents and everyone was very strong in Catholic belief. I went to the Catholic primary school and continued through the Catholic high school. Then after that I think I was looking for some sort of—I was—I can say like there's a call from God for me to follow the religious life. I had the opportunity to stay with the Marist Brothers because they—at the time they were the one who runs the high school there in Tonga, I joined them in prayers and sharing in some of their activities and what they do. But after a while, my focus was about becoming a teacher. (Transcript lines 7–16)

Sione studied teaching at university in Tonga and taught high school geography and economics. In 1990, he won a scholarship from the Australian Government to come and further his studies at Deakin University. He undertook a Bachelor of Business in Personnel Management and Human Resources, from which he graduated in 1994. The culture shock for Sione, particularly with regards to modes of teaching and learning, was powerful. As a teacher, back in Tonga:

the students rely on you as the teacher to prepare all the materials, all the readings and write down the notes on the board and everyone's copying the notes from there. That's how they do this. (Lines 62–65)

But in Australia, as a student he was responsible for a far more active role in learning in classes. “It’s so different”, he tells me, slowly shaking his head. Together with the challenge of studying in his second language, English, this made him ask some hard questions and pushed him to some intense study practices:

It was really, really hard, especially my first year here, the language. English as a second language and the way you're teaching things, it's so different. I feel my religious—my belief in God is the most inspirational thing for me, to stimulate me, to give me courage, to give me the courage to go forward. Because in order for me to keep up—because one time in my first year was interesting. I was questioning a lot of questions for myself why did I ever come here? It's hard. It's hard work. My kids were always laughing at me when I told them the stories of

when I started here. At the dormitory at the university I used to put a spanner under my mattress. (Lines 69–77)

I asked whether this was because he was scared, he replies:

No. So I don't have to sleep comfortably. My daughter said, "why are you doing that?" [It is because] once my back is on that, it will remind me that I have to wake up and study and read at two o'clock in the morning. I'd just wake up and sit at my desk. Sometimes I sit there now I don't know what to do but I ask God to give me strength because I aim for something which is bringing a better career for me, not only for myself but for my family as well. (Lines 79–84)

Sione sees this opportunity not as one of his own making, but as an "opportunity from God" (line 184). He prayed, he says, and asked God to give him a chance—to give him more opportunities. He knew, he tells me, that he had the capabilities but he did not have the opportunities. "I believe" he says "that God has been answering my prayer to give me the opportunities to come here. But it's not only the opportunities. There was a time of struggle" (lines 189–191). During these struggles, Sione questioned himself and God, wondering if his Diploma of Teaching was sufficient. But he persisted with his study here, promising God that "if you give me this, I promise I will do my best" (lines 206–7). These struggles with his studies, Sione tells me, he will never forget. He repeats himself, as if reminding himself; he will never forget. Part of this memory-making is that he repeats the story of his struggle to his kids, "because when I look at them, I know that they've grown up in a different environment [and] they sometimes take the opportunities for granted because they're living in Australia" (lines 195–198). He tells them they need "inspiration from God, they need the strength from him" (lines 199–200), and they will find this, he says, by coming closer to God through prayer.

For Sione the support of the Tongan community in Melbourne was crucial to making it through these challenges. There was one particular man, an uncle, who held him accountable for his studies. This man, Sione tells me, was very supportive of students. Sione's habit was to study from Sunday afternoons to Friday night, but

Saturday was a break for him from his studies. On Saturdays, he would drink kava³⁹ with his friends:

But that uncle, if I wanted to come to the kava party on a Saturday then he said to me, “Have you done your homework?” I said, “I’ll be halfway”, he said, “No, somebody will take you back to the university to do your study (laughs), and do the things that you came here for first”. Which for me, even though I want to socialise in that time a little bit but then say look at me, I came here on a purpose to fulfil my purpose, my studies. Not to drink the kava every night. But it’s always my studies which—that’s part of socially supporting me. (Lines 111–119)

In retrospect, Sione appreciates this external discipline as a blessing, a support. But it was not only Tongans of Catholic background from whom he found support, but of all backgrounds, although he specifically mentions friends from the Uniting church, some of whom trained for ministry and now serve as pastors in local churches here in Melbourne. This friendship across denominational boundaries that Sione has experienced in Melbourne, has prompted Sione’s involvement in organising Ecumenical Tongan Services here. Here is how he describes his ecumenical outlook:

My understanding is that there is one God and it doesn't matter how different ... they worship and the way we are. We mean the one thing and it makes me comfortable to be with them [friends from the Uniting church]. We talk. Because most of the time at the kava party the men gather together, like sharing jokes and maybe political talk about political issues. But most of the talk is spiritual sharing which makes a balance of why you want to be there. And for me, when I was involved in the sharing, even those people [who] are already ordained as a minister and still studying the Bible. I don’t feel uncomfortable when I

³⁹ According to Tecun, “the pounded Kava root today is infused with water before drinking and can be considered a soporific, although the effects depend on how much is infused with the water and the type of Kava used as well” and that while “chiefly Kava rituals are performances that mediate the hierarchical power relations”, “Kava Tonga manifests itself in various forms dependent on the type of event, purpose for gathering, rank of attendees, and frequency of getting together, being consumed in each of these settings predominantly, but not exclusively by men.” (2017, p. 54)

share my belief with them. Because I believe that there's only one God we have, we share. ... I said regardless of our differences we need to come together and share what we stand together that there's only one God. So about nearly 10 years now I became the secretary for the Tongan Ecumenical Services here in Melbourne. Then I tried to foster that idea amongst the Christian community here and [in] the Tongan [community]; and some Anglican[s] too, the Uniting, the Methodist and the Catholic. And there's a small minority that are called the Tongan Church ... I became involved there and then I brought—see when I came here the Catholic community was never involved there. Because I can feel we still have a chance of becoming—mixing with other denominations. I have managed to break that ice. (Lines 129–156)

Early in his time in Australia, Sione would worship at both the Catholic church and with his student friends in Uniting church congregations. He says some people were suspicious of that, but in his mind:

My belief, the faith that I've brought up from the beginning back home will never get out from me ever. Wherever I go, wherever I mix I believe that God's people—the most important thing that Jesus said, I know—people they know who you are my people when you return and you share the good things when you do the right things. That's what—all the time I carry around that, of what Jesus said. Wherever you go it doesn't matter who you are, it doesn't matter if you are Catholic, it doesn't matter whether you're Uniting, whatever congregation you are, you are people of God. You have been loved first by God and that love should be to all of you and then you share it with your brothers and sisters in your journey. I think that stuck on me from the beginning, from when I grew up and then my parents kept nurturing that faith in me and then I grew up with that and with keeping an open hand. (Lines 336–349)

Australian life, says Sione is a challenging one for the Tongan Christian, because here there is always the pressure of time and the pressure to do things in

your own strength. In contrast, Sione suggests that whatever he might have achieved is a blessing, it is grace. In his own words:

Because we're living in a very challenging environment [in Australia] it's different from back home. Here they don't have much time for family, really. Do this, do that ... In Tonga all the times we go there—we go to the choir practice, we go to church. But here [in Australia] time is, I think, the driving factor pushing you towards the edge sometimes. But if you don't pause for a while and try to break the busyness of life in this, to come closer to God, that's the most important thing to have. That's what I found interesting in my journeys. I've been in Australia for about 21 years now. I think I'm proud to be a person who has faith in God. I think in many ways that whatever I achieve in life—a lot of things that I achieved here—I thank God for it. I think I've been blessed with a grace I would say. The opportunities that God has given me. I trust him. (Lines 168–181)

Sione continues to talk about the ways in which it is God's actions and not his own that have power. After some years here in Australia, Sione helped a number of people from his community to obtain Australian visas. In reflecting on his success in achieving this feat, he says:

I got the help but the Spirit—God—I believe is the one who guided us to do that, to go in this way ... I trusted him. Because I experienced it in my studies and that's the thing that has deepened my faith ... I believe God gave me the talent to help these people, and not only that family, there were two other families they accepted as well. The same thing. I prayed and I don't view myself as a big man or to boast myself that I'm doing this. I just say, thank you, Lord; bless these people, maybe they are the ones who are going to be [unclear 0:27:36.2] these people, the community, your hands in the community, in whatever ways your hands direct them, they're going to go. (Lines 311–323)

We continue to talk about other things, about the ways in which Tongan culture is lost in younger generations, about Sione's struggle to decide about whether to stay in Australia or return home to Tonga, and his training to become the first Tongan deacon in the Catholic church in Australia. We finish our conversation with a realisation that just a few months earlier we had worshipped together at the Anglican cathedral, where we were both visiting to support friends being ordained in the Anglican Diocese of Melbourne. I offhandedly remark that it is a small world. "It is", says Sione, "The good thing is both churches are coming together, a lot of dialogue, the Anglican and the Catholic churches, and then we follow the same program for the deaconate, it's really good" (lines 694–496).

The migration experience has not made either Helena or Sione a-cultural, or transcultural bohemians—they both retain strong connections to their cultures of origin. But movement has facilitated—perhaps even necessitated—an openness to other ways of practicing the Christian faith. Both Helena and Sione have moved for work, and moved for relatively significant periods of time. Neither of them predicted or foresaw the way the process of movement would change their practice. In contrast, the way some Christians think of and practice Christian mission is driven by the desire to connect across cultures. This section on mobile subjects turns now to reflect on mission at Preston Seventh-day Adventist church.

At Preston Church, the congregation supports long term mission financially and encourages its members to experience short-term mission overseas. Every week at Preston Church as part of the Sabbath School, a video is shown of the week's mission focus. These videos are produced centrally by The Office of Adventist Mission at Seventh-day Adventist Church's General Conference World Headquarters. According to the official Adventist website through which these videos are made available, the purpose of these videos is to "share stories that will show what mission offerings have accomplished, to thank members for their support, and to report on what still needs to be done" (<http://www.adventistmission.org/faq>)⁴⁰.

⁴⁰ A complete archive of videos is available online: <http://www.adventistmission.org/amdvd-archive>

The videos are extremely well-produced and, in keeping with their production by a US communications team, almost always narrated with a North American accent. While they seek to foster a sense of global partnership, there are constant echoes of the American origins (and ongoing American administration) of the denomination. Music is used to evoke a sense of place (e.g. use of kettle drums when introducing African projects, or bamboo flutes for Chinese projects) and the videos provide basic education about different places (geographical location, landscape, etc.) as well as information about Adventist Mission in that location.

Following the screening of one of these videos, a collection is taken for global mission. The church's performance at these '13th Sabbath Offerings' is reported weekly in the notice sheet. The '13th Sabbath' refers to an annual quarter (13 weeks). During my time at Preston Church the target for the 13th Sabbath Offering was \$1200 (i.e. \$4800 pa). This is a significant financial commitment.

In addition to this 13th Sabbath offering, members of the congregation went overseas on mission trips twice during my stay at Preston church. One group was the youth group, who went on a short-term mission to the Pacific, and the other was a pair of twins, who travelled to Cambodia on a medical mission trip to celebrate their 30th birthday. Here is the story Scarlet told me, with a focus on that trip:

Story 14: Scarlet

Scarlet arrived in Australia from China before her twin sister, Hope. She knows that it was exactly 83 days before Hope arrived to join her. The two of them knew no one in Australia. A Chinese friend knew the Adventist minister at Preston church and had arranged for Scarlet and Hope to board with his family. They had grown up in a Christian household, but knew nothing of Adventism in particular. Scarlet characterises herself at twenty-one as "naïve and innocent" (3:35). She felt totally alone when she arrived in Australia—feeling that, if she died, "no one would know, no one would care" (3:47). Nine years later, however, she feels that rather desolate experience was actually a "good" experience because it made her hold onto God. Her relationship with God, she tells me, has only grown stronger and stronger since coming to Australia. Despite her parents working hard to send them to Australia,

Scarlet characterises her arrival here as one into a vacuum: no money, no language, no understanding of the culture, “nothing to hold onto” except for God.

When they first arrived in Australia, Hope and Scarlet boarded with a family from Preston Seventh-day Adventist Church and have been coming here ever since. Even though they have moved a long distance away from Preston, they keep going back there because the hospitality and welcome they received at Preston church has made it home. Many people from church helped them move house and donated furniture that they still have in their home. Scarlet describes that the people at Preston church as family.

While work plays a large role in Scarlet’s life, she also makes time to volunteer. Scarlet describes the “thinking system” in China as “miserable”, with everyone preoccupied with money to “a crazy level”. She says that in contrast, she has learnt in Australia to think of other people and not simply prioritise her own career or financial situation. In China this kind of thinking would be madness. She contends that God wanted her to forget about everything she learnt in China and instead seek to be selfless. So, since last January, she has set herself a goal to volunteer at one thing each month. She was first challenged to be more charitable by a boyfriend who rebuked her for only being interested in herself. She could see truth in his words; she carried bitterness about life and not getting to where she wanted to be as fast as she wanted to get there. Her boyfriend was charitable, and so she thought maybe volunteering was something she could do too. Scarlet comments that she felt encouraged in this decision by her Bible reading, but “can’t remember the verse” that taught her this lesson. Scarlet describes her commitment to volunteering as “spiritual”. If Scarlet only achieved personal success, she ventures that she would feel that she had not “been herself” in this life; if she has not helped others, her life will have been empty

Hope and Scarlet had wanted to have a relaxing beach holiday to celebrate their 30th birthday, but they could not find any good deals for the right time. The two of them prayed about it when, one day while praying, Scarlet had the idea of going on an overseas volunteer trip. Scarlet did not think Hope would agree, so Scarlet prayed that when she presented the idea to her Hope would be supportive. When Scarlet raised the idea, she was delighted that Hope “got totally excited”.

Scarlet and Hope did lots of online research, but felt that most of the programs were overpriced at the equivalent cost of a four-star package holiday. It was not clear to them where the money went in many of the packages they looked at. So, they kept praying about it. They wanted to find something where: a) they would be away for their birthday, b) the package was affordable, and c) the trip would take one to two weeks. They would have liked to do something with kids, but that was not essential. By chance, Scarlet chatted after church one Sabbath with a visiting ex-congregation member. She told him about their plans, and he suggested International Children's Care (ICC), a Christian aid organisation. Scarlet was not aware that Preston church is a partner to ICC and hold it in high regard (despite their many years at the church). The visitor offered to send Scarlet the CEO's email. Within twenty minutes of Scarlet sending off an enquiry, ICC sent through an itinerary for a trip with a mobile clinic in remote areas in Cambodia. It was a fully scheduled two-week program, except for the actual day of their birthday, which was a day off. Scarlet felt God calling her to it.

On top of the costs for food, accommodation and transport, however, ICC asked for a \$1000 donation that was outside their budget and Scarlet was not sure Hope would think the same way that she did. But when she talked to Hope, she had the same reaction to the trip and thought the \$1000 was alright as long as the money went to the right source. It did not matter that they had no medical training. Everything, Scarlet muses, just worked out so well; Scarlet knows that God really guided them on this. Throughout the trip Hope and Scarlet asked God for direction. Scarlet reflects that she was struck by the tour leader's disdain for people who just go to church on a Saturday and sing hymns: "I'm not interested in that kind of Christianity. What I want to do is go out there and action on other people." Scarlet recognised herself as a Saturday church-goer and hymn-singer and felt the call to do and be more than that. She also recounts the fact that she watched three movies on the flight, all of which were stories about leadership and helping people out of poverty. These stories really touched her and, even though for now she wants to be in the business world, what she really wants is "to be a leader" and to lead people out from "any kind of poverty, whether it's finance or health or education or human rights or minds or mentality or love". Before they went, Scarlet and Hope asked God for direction and throughout their journey they learnt that instead of just working hard for personal success, ultimately they ought to want to work hard for others'

wellbeing because that is something God wants them to do and because they see more value in their life in that way.

Being mobile means that each of these migrants has experienced difference and discovered fraternity despite it. It has made them more flexible in their practice and in their openness to others and their practices. Scarlet had her perspective on faith challenged by the other members of her group, just as Helena had hers challenged in Brunei. In each of these stories, the participants reflect on the fact that the lessons they have learned through being mobile—whether it's prayerful practice, or ecumenism, or the value of charity—are all part of God's plan for them.

7.3. Hospitality

For Kant and Derrida, cosmopolitanism is less about the transformation of the self as it is about the openness required to offer hospitality. I am, therefore, a little uncomfortable with the way dwelling on mobile 'cosmopolitans' shifts the focus from the other to the self. It seems to undermine the heart of hospitality; the right for the visitor to be treated as herself or himself—"this right to present themselves to society" (Kant, 1972, p. 137-138). And, in many cases, surely this makes the cosmopolitan the visitor, rather than the host. As discussed in the introduction, Derrida considers the act of hospitality on the part of the host crucial to cosmopolitanism (Derrida, 2001). And this affects how we understand these three churches and the people that worship in them as cosmopolitans. While those who have migrated have often had experiences that have opened up their identity or practice, this reciprocal sense of cosmopolitanism as hospitality allows us to see the ways in which those who are raised locally actively welcome the stranger in all their particularity. I saw this form of cosmopolitan welcome in the churches I worked with in the following four ways: symbolic representations of diversity, in the content of worship services, through the running of events to celebrate diversity, and through deliberate strategies of inclusion.

The church building of Sacred Heart is more elaborately decorated than either of the two Protestant churches I worked with. It has stained glass windows depicting the Stations of the Cross and statues of the Virgin Mary and of Jesus. The Virgin looks

celestial in blue with a backdrop of stars. But the statue of Jesus is grounded, positioned in front of a very Australian landscape. The Australian national flag hangs at the front of the church to the left of the altar and a whole range of flags representing the countries of origin of parishioners line the corridors of the Presbytery. Regarding symbolic representations of diversity, I have already described the striking but uncommented on mural in the sanctuary at Sacred Heart, in which Indigenous Australians in a stereotypical bush landscape look out at the statue of Jesus (see Section 4.3). I also described the way in which diversity was woven into the worship service there. I described a sermon in which the priest acknowledged cultural difference and called on parishioners to identify metaphors for the Kingdom of God that resonate with their cultures of origin. Furthermore, the song choices at Sacred Heart often acknowledge a sense of movement and call.

Diversity is celebrated at Preston Seventh-day Adventist church through the annual International Night. According to the chair of the social committee, this is the highlight of the Preston Seventh-day Adventist church social calendar. Some of the social activities are off-site (e.g., picnics, beach trips), but the International Night is held in the upstairs hall on a Saturday/Sabbath evening. People come representing their country of origin (either where they were born, or where they identify as being from by ancestry) in national dress—even if they don't really have a 'national dress'. When I'm first invited to the event by Juliette, she tells me that in previous years she has variously dressed in a sarong, a borrowed sari, or a specially purchased dance costume. She doesn't feel there is a particular Mauritian outfit she can or should wear, but she tries with her costume to evoke something of her homeland. I am about fifth generation Australian on both sides. I wonder if I can or should wear something Germanic? What on earth could I wear that is an 'Australian' costume without playing on Crocodile Dundee stereotypes? I settle on an outfit that resembles what my grandfather would have worn to work on his farm: denim jeans, a check shirt rolled back halfway up my forearms, work boots and his khaki-checked baker boy peaked cap. As it turns out, these clothes might be meaningful to me, but nobody else finds it obvious; I have to explain myself and my clothes multiple times during the evening.

The year I attend, 2013, the hall was packed. Most people had joined in the spirit of the thing and came dressed in costume. I had permission to set up a table at the back of the event with information about my project, a sign-up sheet to contribute to the

project and a world map for people to place a pin in their country of birth to create a fun and interactive visualisation of where people in the church were born (see Image 9). The map shows a smattering of folk from southern Africa, south India, Eastern Europe, the South Pacific, and Australia. It is by no means a complete representation of the countries of origin in the church, but it provides an interesting picture of the diversity in the congregation.

The main event of the evening was a quiz. As we entered the hall, organisers noted down what countries people were representing and each country was called in alphabetical order to answer a trivia question or complete a challenge relevant to that country. Australia was one of the first countries called, and as I dutifully headed to the front I realised I was alone. No one else considered themselves Australian? I was joined at the last minute by Melissa, who took pity on me, and jumped up so I don't have to face the music alone. In retrospect, I suspect I am alone not because there were no other congregants there who identified primarily as Australian, but because those that do were all involved in organising the evening in some way (along with many others who identify as a different ethnicity). Or perhaps an International Night did not appeal to congregants who consider themselves Australian in quite the same measure. Most likely some combination of these factors. Melissa and I were asked a trivia question about Australia's performance in a recent international soccer match. I had no idea of the answer. Neither did Melissa. I chuckled to myself, thinking that soccer is not a particularly core part of my Australian identity.

**Image 9: World map with pins indicating place of birth from Preston SDA International Night
(Source: N. Swann, iPhone 4S, June 22 2013)**



The Adventist church actively, deliberately incorporates newcomers. Tabitha, a postgraduate student from Botswana is amazed by the freedom she has had to be involved in church leadership, she says:

I find myself being allowed to do more at Preston Church compared to back home. Back home there's a lot of bureaucracy ... it's so hard to do something if they don't really know you. So, that's what I've kind of been struggling with back home. I've wanted to be more active in church but it hasn't been that easy. In that, because I lived in Francistown and then I went to live in a capital city which is Gaborone so a lot of people, they didn't know me, didn't know where I was coming from so, it's very hard for them to actually allow you to take part in church activities. Whereas, at Preston if you're willing, they'll just give you a chance to do that. So

that's what I absolutely love about them. (Transcript of interview with Tabitha, lines 56–66)

When I asked a locally born elder about this, she told me it's a deliberate strategy to help people feel connected and meaningful. It is an act of hospitality.

This chapter has, so far, discussed the way in which migrant believers exhibit the characteristics of mobile cosmopolitan subjects and the everyday ways in which the churches in this study attempt to show a cosmopolitan hospitality. But I also want to share evidence for a kind of reciprocal hospitality. Indeed, Derrida himself questions who the subject of hospitality is, employing in other works (e.g. Derrida 1999) the same term for she who gives hospitality as he who receives it (Anidjar, 2002). A one-sided formulation of hospitality flowing from host-to-guest neglects those moments in which the foreigner/guest serves and edifies the host.

During my time with the Arabic Baptist church, I attended a rally hosted by the combined Arabic churches of Melbourne. There was a visiting musical performer and speaker from Egypt. The height of the preacher's message was that this audience needed to focus their attention on Melbourne. He told them that when they get to judgement, they are going to be held accountable for Melbourne. They will be answerable for Melbourne. They need to serve Melbourne. The church is universal—and this preacher suggested the outworking of this is not that these Arab Christians need to continue to seek the good of the church in the Arab world, but rather they are, in a way, free to serve God in the place He has put them. These Christians are responsible for the particular place they are in.

7.4. Conclusion

The stories and vignettes presented in this chapter reflect the ways in which churchgoers navigate the tension of being united in spite of cultural difference. The migration journey has, for some migrants, opened them up to new modes of worship practice, or produced an openness to other faith traditions typical of the mobile cosmopolitan. But openness is not only demonstrated on the part of the mobile subject, there are also attempts made by the host churches to provide hospitality. This hospitality is shown through displaying material objects, running events, and in everyday forms of speech and song in worship services.

The cosmopolitan migrant, like the Christian, is stuck in a space of ongoing liminality. Migration is typically characterized by a feeling of disconnection, of engagement in “multiple cultural worlds that are dynamically intertwined” (Coleman and Collins 2006). Migration is not like ritual experiences of liminality—there is rarely a promise of a future reconciliation, no easy transition to a new and clearly defined role in the social structure. But, while there are periods of discomfort in the stories presented in this chapter, these participants do not continually live in a state of anxiety. Instead, even when Helena and Sione feel lost—Helena in a Muslim country, or Sione studying in another language—they find community. They experience, perhaps, what Rapport and Dawson call “being at home in movement” (1998).



8. No Longer Strangers

This project has opened up some of the extraordinary stories of migrant Christians living ordinary suburban lives in Australia who all go to church in the same neighbourhood. It has explored the multiple connections and affections of those migrants and shown how their understanding of the biblical story and their vision of the good life echoes through their decision-making and the stories they tell about their own lives. It suggests that this biblical story-telling is 'liturgical', where liturgy is the deliberate act of remembering, retelling, and re-enacting stories from the Bible in order that one's present and future life might reflect their goodness. It has shown how the habits that Christians use as they remember, re-tell and re-enact narratives from Scripture shape community life and an individual's self-understanding.

This thesis speaks into a rapidly growing body of literature that forms a conversation between anthropology and (mostly Christian) theology. In 2014, Meneses et al., wrote a provocative piece in *Current Anthropology* about what Christianity might be able to offer anthropology. It was largely theoretical, and focussed on hermeneutics, but it led one of the respondents, Glenn Hinson, to ask the question "what would a Christian ethnography look like?" This project is my answer to that question. I am trained as a social scientist rather than as a theologian, but I am a believer and I have used a 'native concept' in the form of liturgy as a framework for understanding my interlocutors.

I have not engaged in a 'Christian ethnography' as an evangelistic strategy. I have presented a 'Christian ethnography' because I think it is good anthropological scholarship: being anthropologically rigorous means being open about what I believe and examining how that affects the fieldwork encounter, how it affects my participation, my interpretation, my position. It does this in much the same way as being a woman, or a mother, or white, or middle class affects my capacity to engage with certain others in certain ways. I do not need to shed those parts of my embodied reality, but I need to be deliberate in interrogating them. While this position has made it hard for me to notice some things, it also gave me opportunities to hear and notice things others might not. This model is just one of what I hope are many more faithful ethnographies to come—ones from other faith traditions and ones that apply a faithful framework to something other than faith communities. For example, anthropologists may be able to leverage

concepts such as an orientation to desire from this liturgical framework in other contexts and it may deepen our understanding of what motivates action. This is what James KA Smith starts to do in his examinations of the Mall or the Superbowl, although it could be more rigorously defended with ethnographic data.

This project is more traditionally ethnographic than I first expected. I spent at least six months worshipping with each congregation, and conducted detailed interviews with individuals about their migration journeys. I participated in as much of community life as I could, took field notes, and collected a wide range of written materials and texts. During the first year of the project, I faithfully blogged through the kinds of things that I was reading in an attempt to be open with my research participants about the project. Once I was embedded in congregations, I discovered that my more experimental methods of auto-photography, Bible Study focus groups, and the blog struggled to gather momentum. I still think these methods have potential, and I would enjoy attempting to use them again in another project, but as I was juggling fieldwork with mothering small children I focussed my energy on those methods that were easier to get rolling. Like a good social scientist, I want to let the data speak before theory. But, since I worked with Christians, as a Christian, I could not help but hear echoes of the stories we tell one another from the Bible and through church practice, in the stories migrants told me about their own lives. These echoes drove me to embrace a 'liturgical lens' through which to examine the migrant experience. I hope this is a useful contribution to the discussion around what faithful ethnography might look like; it's something I can offer as an 'insider' anthropologist. Just like Bialecki and Bielo heard echoes of Deleuze's Ancient-Future time crystals, anthropologists are always listening for echoes of theory in our data and when we do, we use that theory to open up the data to even closer examination. While my data collection ended up being more traditional than I had originally intended, I have experimented with non-traditional ways of writing stories and incorporating them into this ethnography.

Theologians like James KA Smith and Michael Banner have been arguing for how the liturgy *ought* to shape the formation of the person. This project provides thick ethnographic data exploring *how* liturgy plays out in the life of believers. It has shown why different liturgical traditions remain important in the lives of believers when they relocate from one country to another. This project does not identify a single ideal liturgy—one that will best shape the Christian. Rather, it shows how Scriptural

narratives are turned into a range of habits which all point back to the same stories. The ways Christians in different churches remind themselves of and re-enact these stories are different, but the stories remain the same. These narratives therefore create continuities between communities even as preferences for different habits create fragmentation. Our commitment to certain habits—particular temporalities and spatialities—affects our feeling of ‘at home’-ness in different churches. Migrants both learn new habits and experience their faith in new ways, and seek to recreate habits that help them to live out a faithful life oriented to God and the good.

Each chapter in this thesis has focused on a different liturgical theme, traditionally a church season, and brought together a reflection on Christian tradition, my participant observation from church life, anthropological theory that relates to each liturgical theme, and the narratives of individual believers. While these themes pre-date the data, it was immersion in the data, and the sense that I was hearing echoes of Scripture that drew me to these themes as a theoretical frame. The chapters have dealt with Advent and waiting, Christmas and embodiment, Lent and the wilderness experience, Easter and the tension between gratitude and grief, and Pentecost and cosmopolitanism. In each chapter I have shown how Christians express their faithfulness in a variety of ways, and sometimes fall short of their own hopes and expectations.

This liturgical framework leans heavily on the work of Pierre Bourdieu on *habitus* and brings it into conversation with a theological understanding of the liturgical formation of the self, principally explored through the work of James KA Smith. It rests on the assumption that humans are creatures formed through habit—that our instinctive reactions and responses to phenomena are not entirely genetic, but formed through the habits of socialisation. Such formation always happens in community; Joseph Margolis suggests that “Cognitive competence of any kind is assignable only to individual agents. *Habitus* signifies the collective fluency of a form of life.” (1999, p80). Theologians would agree (Flanagan, 1996).

At the outset of this project, I was concerned that the social scientific proclivity for limiting studies to a particular ethnic group as a convenient way of limiting scope, meant that ethnicity had come to be regarded as people’s primary organising principle. This was in contrast to the multiculturalism I experienced in many churches, and my sense that for many people their faith identity is stronger than their ethnic one. I

proposed instead to produce an ethnography of Christian migrants in a single Australian suburb—an Australian ethnography, not an ethnic one. I participated in worship at three different churches in Preston, a middle ring suburb in the north of Melbourne; a multicultural Catholic congregation that worshipped in English, a multicultural Seventh-day Adventist congregation that worshipped in English, and an Arabic Baptist church that worshipped in Arabic and was home to people from a range of countries but mostly Iraq and Egypt. The picture this thesis paints of multicultural churches and the intertwined lives and loves of people from different cultural backgrounds is uncommon in the literature. It has shown that ethnic ties remain more important for some migrants than for others, and that the interplay between religion, ethnicity, and cross-cultural community are complex. This complexity deserves more detailed examination in future research.

I relocated from Sydney to Melbourne to undertake this PhD and have lived close to the three churches I worked with for all the nine years since I started this project. Preston has changed a lot in that time. There has been a great deal of high-rise development along Preston's public transport routes. Housing density is increasing rapidly. The commercial High St has been re-invigorated by the increase in density. The Preston market, one of Melbourne's last remaining original undercover markets, is slowly losing its fresh produce stall holders due to rising overhead costs and conflict over Sunday opening, and has recently opened an artists' market targeted at younger, more urban and affluent consumers. Housing prices have skyrocketed.

We have welcomed two children to our family during those nine years and sent our kids to childcare and schools in Preston, we visit the Preston library, we go to the Preston market and High St regularly, and frequent too many cafés for our budget. Only once, in the local hospital emergency room, have I bumped into an acquaintance from one of the churches that participated in my study. I started this project hoping to produce an ethnography that gave us some insight into an Australian locality. I have provided a great deal of detail about the community life of three congregations, but that has not spilled out into a picture of the suburb of Preston. Each of these congregations has delicate links to the other, but their community is more connected along denominational lines than local ones. But the micro-communities of these churches are strong and transcend cultural barriers between members. They are embedded in wider denominational networks that see them serving the community in Melbourne and

abroad. This is likely true of all sorts of social institutions in a car-dependent, wealthy, multicultural city like Melbourne. It leaves me wondering how to foster deeper local connections.

Each of the churches I worked with is multicultural, and all of the migrants I interviewed have practiced their faith in more than one cultural context. Tongan-Australian theologian, Sisilia Tupou-Thomas, poetically describes this as living ‘in the hyphen’;

I am like this hyphen (-), in between the past and the present ... It floats in between the solid presences of my past and the present, between my Tongan culture and my Australian culture/s, touching firmly neither of them. Where I stand, being Tu’u-pou, is where my theology emerges. My thinking about God takes its shape from this floating little dash. Its heart lies hidden away in the hyphen. (Tupou-Thomas, 2004, p. 3)

It’s a beautiful description of what it means to be jointly of two places, and to have your understanding of the world shaped by that. It contrasts a little with what I have described in this project, though. For many of the people I spoke with had already had journeys through multiple countries and for a number of them, Australia may not yet be the end of their migration journey. In many of their stories, we see how their understanding of God transforms as they travel, but their understanding of themselves and the world is also transformed based on the stories about God that they carry with them and enact in their various liturgical habits.

Ursula Le Guin was not anthropologist, but she was raised by two great ones, and all her fiction writing has a sense of the ethnographic. She is also a leading craftsperson when it comes to thinking about how the written word works and in the final weeks of writing I read this description of hers about narrative,

I think this is how a well-written narrative works—through endlessly complex rhythmic correspondences. Its coherence is established by inner references and backward-looking or forward-looking semi-repetitions. If they are pure repetitions, adding no new vision or emotion, the story loses narrative drive (pure repetition is better suited to ritual than narrative). If the rhythms become predictable, the coherence of the story

is mechanical. But if the repetitions vary, echoing and foreshadowing others with continuous and developing invention, the narration has the forward movement we look for in a story, while maintaining the complexity and integrity proper to a living creature or a work of art: a rhythmic integrity, a deep beat to which the whole thing moves. (Le Guin, 2004, p. 94)

She is writing about the use of rhythm and stress in the writing of poetry and prose, but I can feel these claims about narrative and repetition reach beyond the written word into the lives we live and the way we make stories of our lives. This is, I think, almost exactly what I have been trying to capture in my suggestion that Christians tell their own stories with the echo of Scripture. If liturgy is ritual repetition, then the liturgical self is how Christians live lives full of “endlessly complex rhythmic correspondences”. And it is these rhythmic correspondences, the echoes of Scripture, in the stories migrant Christians tell about their journeys to Australia that this project has teased out.

The remembering, re-telling and re-enacting of Scriptural stories brings rhythmic integrity to Christian life. Our liturgical selves are not pure repetitions of Scripture, but our lives are made coherent by “inner references and backward-looking or forward-looking semi-repetitions”. There is a distant beat to which we improvise with melody. Migrants often experience different liturgical rhythms along their migration journey and they seek out churches where the rhythm is one to which they can dance as they continue to find their way home.

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