Faith Development and Faith Deconstruction:
Why some churches help, others hinder and some cause harm.

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Abstract:

One of the contemporary challenges of youth ministry is to not only resource and encourage young people as they develop their identity in-Christ, but also be a resource for those whose faith identity is deconstructing. One of the findings of my PhD research was that faith communities are rarely able to do both tasks well, and furthermore, that the ecclesiological structures and theological 'social imaginary' of each task may well be paradoxically related. This paper will offer a framework for differentiating various forms of faith community and their relative strengths in responding to either faith deconstruction or faith identity development.

1. Introduction

This paper reports some of the interim findings of my doctoral research that is investigating the ways in which young people experience and seek to resolve transitional periods of faith change. One of the areas of inquiry of this study relates to the manner in which the form and structure of the emerging adult's spiritual and religious context influenced the nature of their faith transition. Simply put, I wanted to examine whether it was possible to determine why some communities of faith were able to assist young people amidst transition, some appeared to hinder the process and others appeared to be downright harmful.

This paper will proposes two frameworks. The first delineates the different forms of faith transition that can transpire across the life course, ranging from the faith strengthening transitions that reaffirm ones faith through to the more complex transitions where one completely revises or 'deconstructs' one's faith. The second framework differentiates various forms and structures of faith community (by which I mean differing spiritual and religious contexts) using sociology and systems theory to create a spectrum of types ranging from the relatively open faith community to the relatively closed. These two paradigms are then compared to see how the forms of faith community interact with the forms of faith transition, elucidating the manner in which each has strengths and weaknesses that facilitate and hinder faith transitions.

A central finding of this research is that differing forms of faith transition are best supported by particular forms of faith community. The perplexing challenge that emerges from this analysis is that no singular form or structure of faith community appeared capable of supporting the needs of young people across the range of faith transition. Thus leaders of faith communities wishing to engage and respond to the discipleship dynamics of emerging adults are presented with something of an 'ecclesiological paradox'. Some promise is found in the notion of multi-modal communities - however this appears as an ideal type, toward which much more work must be done to both clarify and instantiate such a community.

2. A Model of Faith Transition

This study has employed the perspective of developmental systems theory to trace the responses young people make, the resources they draw upon and the strategies they employ to resolve experiences of doubt, questioning and spiritual dissonance that accompany a faith transition. Through the analysis of series of in-depth qualitative interviews, this research has developed a systems-based model of faith change capable of tracing such transitional faith experiences. While systems theory is a tremendously powerful methodology by which to analyse transitional change, it does tend to use rather esoteric language. However, for the purposes of this paper I will largely avoid technical language.

This section will summarily outline the systems model of faith transition developed by this study before focusing upon its implications for faith communities.[1]

From a developmental systems perspective, a young person establishes a sense of strong Christian faith when they experience a mutually reinforcing symbiotic relationship between their own spiritual expression and their religious context. That is to say, their belief structures, moral frameworks, spiritual practice and religious expression are aligned with, confirmed by, supported, and authorised by their community of faith. This mutual alignment and symbiotic relation is experienced through a variety of forms: Sermons reinforce belief structures; worship practices uphold shared images of God; corporate religious practice offers purposeful activity; relationships in the context of shared faith expression allow the young person to become socially embedded in a meaningful network of relationships. By corollary, when a young person experiences their faith being challenged or tested, they are discovering themselves as being no longer aligned within their faith environment and thus experiencing dissonance (which the young person would normally experience as questioning, doubt, disillusionment, deconstruction, or even of 'losing' faith). The cause of this loss of alignment is invariably that something new and potentially incompatible has entered their faith-system[2] – thus upsetting what was once stable, meaning-filled and coherent. This dissonance-causing element might be:

- The recognition of a significant and/or irreconcilable contradiction between the truths and values held by respected authorities. Such was the case for Bradon, an interview participant whose senior pastor actively preached penalty substitutionary atonement while his respected small group leader vehemently opposed such a view;

- Compelling experiences and perspectives that originate from outside their faith community, yet seem to hold vestiges of truth, beauty and wonder. Such was the case for Matt, a participant who studied social work at University and found that its vision of a thriving society was more compelling than the vision presented by his church;

- Significant and sometimes difficult or traumatic events that call into question the veracity of norms, values, beliefs and spiritual practices upheld by their faith community. Such was the case for Jeremy, a participant whose sense of calling to be a Christian and an elite athlete was quashed by a significant injury received on the cusp of breaking into the professional leagues. With his leg in a cast, laid up on a couch, Jeremy was filled with doubts about his calling and sense of God's benevolence and protection; or

- A growing capacity to reflect, examine and compare one's own operative norms, values and beliefs with that of others. Such was the case for Nichole who frequently

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[1] More details related to this model, together with its theoretical underpinnings and qualitative data can be found at Rowan Lewis, "Changing Faith: Tracing the Spiritual Lives of Australian Emerging Adults Through Significant Experiences of Spiritual and Religious Change," *Conference Procedings: Personal, Practical and Public: Exploring Dimensions of Youth Ministry - International Association for the Study of Youth Ministry, Sydney.* (2017).

[2] By 'faith system' I mean the symbiotic relation of the young person *and* their faith environment or religious context.

found herself wide awake till early in the morning, plagued a perceived sense of inconsistency between her beliefs, values and everyday choices.[3]

In response, the young person's faithing impulse[4] seeks to resolve this dissonance by locating and marshalling resources in order that they might re-establish some form of stability and alignment. Thus, systems theory traces this experience of faith change through a fourfold inquiry entailing:

1. **Original Alignment:** Determining the nature, form and structure of the original alignment (person-environment fit) that existed prior to the experience of change. This original sense of orientation and balance establishes the manner in which the young person was once identifying as Christian, the nature of their relationship to their spiritual and religious contexts as well as the characteristics of these contexts;

2. **Dissonance:** Identifying the source of incongruity that disrupted the experience of alignment. Normally this is found by identifying that which is new and unfamiliar to the system as well as determining the aspect of the system that is most troubled by its presence;

3. **Resources:** Determining that which the young person identifies with as being meaningful and significant in response to the dissonance and from which contexts they are sourced; and finally,

4. **Resolution Pathway:** Identifying the resolution pathway or strategy the young person utilises to restore homeostasis (person-environment fit). This entails identifying how the young person marshals their resources to resolve the dissonance.

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[3] Pargament has extensively studied spiritual struggle, which he synthesises under the categories of 1) Divine Struggle, 2) Intrapersonal struggle and 3) Interpersonal struggle. See Kenneth I. Pargament, *The Psychology of Religion and Coping : Theory, Research, Practice* (New York: Guilford Press, 1997). Pargament's work was developed and extended by JJ Exline, KI Pargament, and JB Grubbs, "The Religious and Spiritual Struggles Scale: Development and Initial Validation.," *Religion and Spirituality* (2014). From an alternative perspective, faith development paradigms, such as those offered by Fowler, highlight the manner in which contradiction and struggle tend to mark a transition from interpersonal to more individuative forms of faith. See for example, James W Fowler, *Stages of Faith: The Psychology of Human Development and the Quest for Meaning* (New York, NY: HarperOne, 1995).

[4] In systems terminology, what I am here referring to as a 'faithing impulse' is equivalent to the homeostatic tendency of a system to achieve a sense of fit within its environment. Within social scientific approaches to faith, the same impulse is located in the human drive toward meaning as a means to resolve dissonance. See for example Sharon Daloz Parks, *Big Questions, Worthy Dreams : Mentoring Emerging Adults in Their Search for Meaning, Purpose, and Faith* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2011), 28-29. and Crystal L. Park, "Religion and Meaning," in *Handbook of the Psychology of Religion and Spirituality*, ed. Raymond F. Paloutzian, and Crystal L. Park (New York, NY: Guilford Press, 2013).
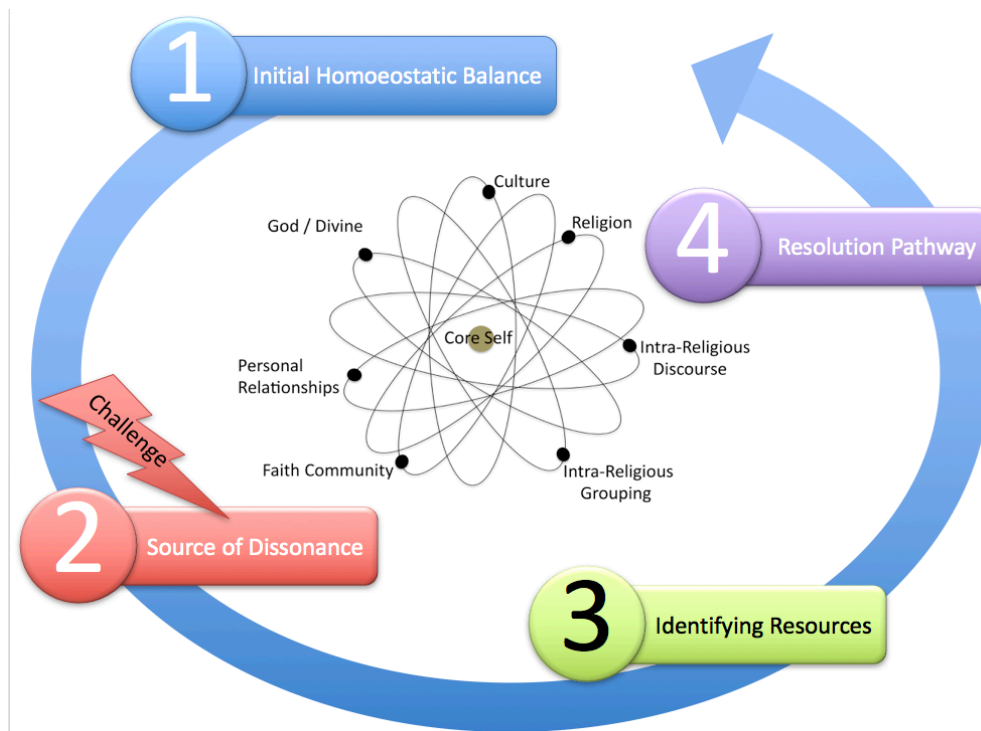
Figure 1. Systems-based Model of Transition

The resolution pathway refers to the particular way a young person resolves their experience of disruption; responding to the source of dissonance and re-constructing their sense of meaning and significance. This study identified four different ways in which interview participants engaged in this reconstructive effort, which are labelled reaffirm, reconsider, revise, reject. The principle dynamic that distinguishes between these differing pathways is the presence and role of old and/or new elements in the resulting faith system. This singular factor, in combination with 1) the young person's development, and 2) the characteristics of their faith context, represented the most decisive influence upon the young person's experience of transition. The four resolution pathways identified by this research are as follows:

1. **Reaffirm: (Re)Embrace the Old / Reject the New** – The young person finds the resources of their existing faith context the most compelling and uses these to reject or repudiate the new/alternative perspective. The result **reinforces and strengthens** their existing faith-identity. Such was the case for Bradon (mentioned earlier) who, after briefly examining his small group leader's alternative perspective remained convinced that Christ's death was intended to be substitutionary;

2. **Reconsider: Old Moderates New** – On balance, the young person finds the resource of their original faith-identity most compelling, yet must modify or reconstruct their original perspective in the light of the new. Such was the case for Jeremy who significantly amended his entire theology of calling and God's will to be much more a general sense of moral living and holy behaviour. Jeremy also came to view his previous sense of calling as simply an expression of his own ambition and ego and has became quite distrustful of his (and anyone's) capacity to discern any sense of vocation;

3. **Revise: New Moderates Old** – On balance, the young person finds the resource of the new perspective most compelling, yet is not willing to entirely let go of the old. The new perspective becomes dominant and thus the new faith-identity, but it is nonetheless modified somewhat in relation to the original. Such was the case for Matt who began to actively pursue social justice oriented activities and advocate for their inclusion in his church's youth ministry. When the youth ministry, church and family continually rejected his suggestions and belittled his motivation, he began to distance himself and question whether Christianity was, in fact, problematising the possibility of a just society;

4. **Reject: Embrace the New / Reject the Old** – the young person finds the new perspective to be more compelling and of greater resource than that of their original faith context.   The young person thus converts / de-converts out of the old faith-identity. Such was the case for Nichole, at least for a period of some years, when her strategy to resolve her sense of guilt was to de-convert by removing herself from involvement in her faith community and immerse herself in the local music and party scene (See figure 2 below).

Underpinning this fourfold typology is a distinction between reconstruction processes that entail the binary dynamics of *affirmation/rejection* versus the integrative dynamics of *moderating/appropriating*. Binary dynamics are evident when, for example, a young person *reaffirms* their original faith perspective and rejects, by-and-large, the new element(s) that caused the disruption in the first place. However, when the new constellation represents some form of mixture of old and new, the non-binary and more complex dynamics of mediation and appropriation are at work. Here, the analytical framework of Robert Kegan is instructive. Kegan's method for analysing developmental transition is to determine the master system into which the other constituent elements are integrated. This process is described as mediation or appropriation because the master system determines the way in which all other elements are organised.[5] Thus, when a young person engages in *reconsideration* activity, the old system remains as the master system, mediating and appropriating the new, in the same way as a renovation alters a house while leaving intact the fundamentals of the original structure. However, *revisioning* activity is akin to building a new house utilising some of the original materials and as such a new system becomes the master system, mediating and appropriating the old into a revised and qualitatively new system.

Note that this framework represents a continuum and as such, the delineation of four resolution strategies is somewhat arbitrary. To observe a young person reaffirming their faith system is to observe that they are, for the most part, rejecting the new and embracing the old. Equally, a young person engaging in revisionist activity observes that, on balance, a new system has taken over, yet vestiges of the old are recognisable even if they have been appropriated by the new.

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[5] To examine Kegan's methodology in this regard, see Lisa Laskow Lahey*, et al.*, *A Guide to the Subject-Object Interview: Its Administration and Interpretation* (Cambrisge, MA: Minds at Work, 2011).
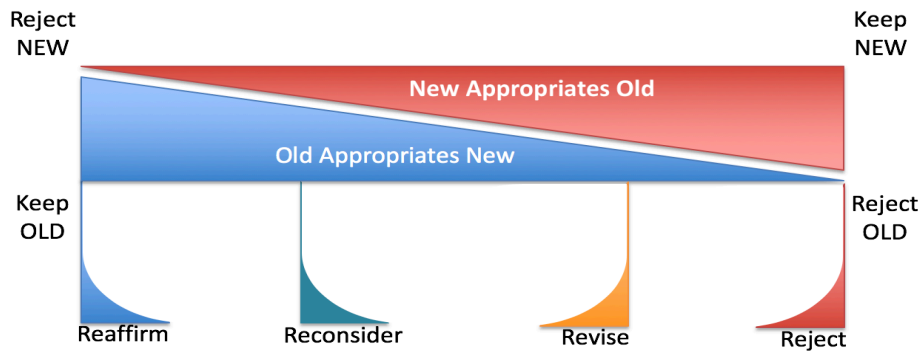
Figure 2. Continuum of Resolution Pathways

To summarise, this research has applied systems theory to trace transitional experiences in the faith of young people. The overall model traces this change through four steps on inquiry (original alignment, dissonance, resources, resolution pathway) and each step is a rich field of investigation in its own right. The final stage of this model – resolution pathways – has been elaborated a little further, as it is the dynamics present at this stage that will inform our subsequent examination of the role of faith communities. In the following section, we will examine the young person's experience of their faith context, and the manner in which they interact with fourfold resolution pathways.

3. Transitional Faith Experiences and Faith Communities

The previous section observed that one of the significant factors influencing the nature of transitional faith experiences was the characteristics of the emerging adult's faith context. By faith context I am referring simply to the overall religious and spiritual ecology that interacts with and influences the nature of an emerging adult's faith. It is made up of the particular social, institutional and mediated resources that support and inform the faith of an emerging adult. This is the environment in which their faith finds fit, alignment and symbiotic relation as well as comprising the setting in which their faith transition plays out. The faith environment might include family, friends, their local congregation, youth group, small group, missional activity as well as literature, personalities, leaders, podcasts, music, and causes where religious engagement and spiritual expression is central. In this section I will explain how the faith context became a central dimension to this inquiry. Section 3.1 examines Angie's experience as one example of a number of emerging adults whose faith transitions derive from disruption transpiring between the young person and their faith community (as opposed to sources that are classically secular or non-Christian in nature). Section 3.2 examines these circumstances further and illuminates how certain forms of faith transition were problematic to faith communities while other forms were preferred and even endorsed.

3.1 Dissonant Experiences of Faith Community

As I attended to the stories of emerging adults recounting their experience of faith transition, it became apparent very early on that these were not stories of isolated individuals experiencing some kind of internalised existential crisis. More often than not, these were stories of young people struggling with parents and congregations and youth leaders and friends … and God. These relationships, institutions and social settings didn't just 'colour-in' the background of their faith transition, they were the very stuff of it. Angie, for example, a 21 year old female reflected upon a significant faith transition in the following way:

> I had grown up in the church and everybody loved me. Everybody just thought the best of me. And yeah – gave me opportunities, encouragement and all that was certainly not lacking at all. But there was just so much questioning in me of, where is this actually going and what is this actually doing in peoples lives? And, how is this church? How are all churches actually encouraging people to be disciples in there everyday lives? And what does that look like? And how can we do that better? Why do we do it this way? What does this even lead to?' I had a lot of frustration around that I guess … and I just felt like I heard all these buzzwords like doubt and vulnerability and authenticity. I'm just like 'Where is the place for that in our church? I certainly didn't see people in the church around me being vulnerable or being open about their doubts or open about their faith or open about their joys. I just didn't get a sense of any of that. And I didn't know if that was just because people weren't experiencing that or if it was really just the culture of our church that was really stifled in allowing that to happen.

Certainly we could analyse and abstract her experience; observing a kind of youthful idealism about what church should or could be. We could observe that, implicit in this narrative is perhaps a theological clash reflecting differing ecclesiological visions. We could also imagine a church that more adequately embodied the ideals she seems to hold. While this may all be true, the element I wish to highlight is instead simply that the dissonance and the frustration is grounded in the concrete reality of these people, these relationships and this congregation. The source of the dissonance was not located outside the community of faith, but instead derived from within it.

Despite Angie working hard to bring about change in her church by getting involved in the worship team, speaking with elders, pastors and even undertaking an internship, she could not resolve the dissonance:

> There have certainly been things about leaving church [pause, tears] – sorry – leaving .... It's hard to say because I feel like that I really have left church – not just my home church… It was really hard in the lead up. It was really hard thinking that I would be leaving … I particularly felt towards the end of last year that if I was to leave church, my whole world would fall to pieces because it's all I've known. And these people I've seen every week for forever.   And I think there was a real leaving of what I know is safe and comfortable. And I think there was a lot of difficulty in that. But when I actually left … it hasn't been too difficult. But there has been a lot – I think what I really felt is that there

has been so much about church that's routine for me. So when I actually felt like a loss, or like I'm missing things about church – I don't actually know if it's church that I'm missing or if it's the routine that I'm missing, if that makes sense? … Like – do I miss worship because every week for my whole life I've sung songs on Sunday or do I miss worship because it's actually that I miss the way that it connects me to God? And maybe, in fact, it is that I am simply missing the routine – because I am connecting with God in many other ways.

Angie, of course, is not alone. Across the duration of the study, story after story piled up. Stories of frustration with the perceived ineffectiveness of church; a fight with a controlling mother who moralised everything; the neglect of a clinically depressed father disillusioned with the mission field; the certainty of a pastor whose sermons made too simple what was obviously complex; the apparent disinterest of a God who has been silent for too long. While these stories are many and diverse I was struck by the fact that it was not the argument of an atheist, or the tug of secularisation, or a growing apathy toward anything spiritual that was the source of the dissonance. These faith transitions didn't arise from anti-faith sources, but from the originating sources of faith themselves. It was these primal faith communities, the very contexts that had seeded, nurtured and grown faith in the young person that were now the source or at least the substantive focus of disruption and disorientation. Thus for Angie, Matt, Bradon, Jeremy, Nichole and many other interview participants like them, their Christian faith context was, ironically, problematising their Christian faith.

It was this recognition that sparked my further inquiry into the nature, dynamics and structure of various faith communities and the manner in which they interacted with faith transitions. Of course, not all faith communities are problematic per se and my attention quickly became focused upon the faith context as *the locus* in which faith transition plays out. In this regard what began to stand out was the manner in which differing forms of faith transition appeared to evoke differing responses from the faith context. This is discussed following.

3.2 The Roles, Responses and Actions of Faith Communities

Returning to the fourfold delineation of resolution pathways (Figure. 2), we can think of these as differing strategies for returning one's faith system to stability and that each of these strategies has their own dynamics that impact the manner in which faith communities respond. Let us consider each of these resolution strategies in turn, beginning with those that were found to be commonly endorsed by the faith communities of this study's participants.

Transitions that *reaffirm* or mildly *reconsider* faith are the stock-and-trade of discipleship. These are the most common forms of transition whereby the young person's faith is intensified and deepened. We can think of ecclesiological practices, ministries and religious gatherings as being strategies to evoke transitions such as these. For example, in times of sung praise the congregation gathers to be reminded of basic truths and declare what is

real and wonderful about God. Sermons and bible studies reassert orthodox beliefs, familiarise those present with various parts of sacred text or perhaps introduce an incremental degree of complexity that encourages a nuancing of belief. Ceremonies seek to recapitulate historic circumstances of faith while rituals confer an consolidated status or role within the community. Camps offer peak experiences in the context of temporary community. Personal practices of devotion and various spiritual disciplines attend to and enrich the known experience of the Spirit. In each of these ways, the individual is drawn to reaffirm or perhaps reconsider their faith in order to give it richer and deeper meaning. And when a wayward young person returns to their faith community to reassert their original faith perspective, they are re-embraced as 'one of us' and rewarded through affirmation; meanwhile their testimony stands as a warning to others who might stray.
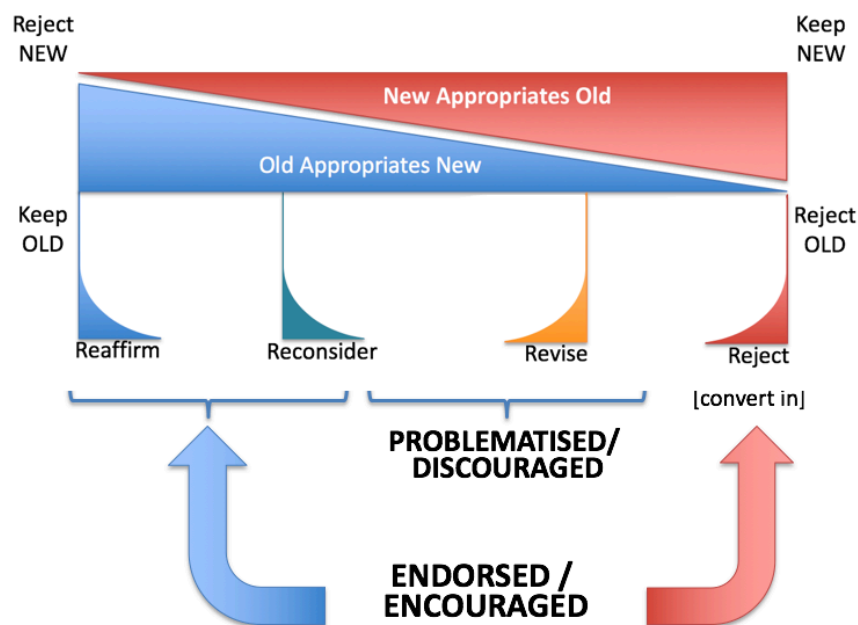

Figure 3. Resolution Pathways Encouraged and Discouraged by Faith Communities

In each of these and many other ways, transitions of affirmation and mild consideration take one's existing faith and make it more so. As such, they are the form of change that faith communities structure themselves to catalyse, encourage and endorse because communities are held together by their common affirmation and practice of faith. This commonality provides members with a real or perceived sense of (group) identity, belonging and purpose. Thus, the option to *reaffirm* this faith is to reaffirm one's identification with the group and by corollary, the group embraces the young person as 'one of us'. When times of choice or a significant challenge to one's faith arises, reaffirmation says to the group, "you were right all along" and this other 'thing' is wrong. A mild form of reconsideration also affirms the faith of the community because it takes any new ideas and reshapes them to fit in with the original faith. By contrast, the option to strongly reconsider, revise or reject runs the risk of jeopardising one's identity, belonging and significance while also representing a direct challenge to the faith systems of others. Such a challenge can open up the possibility of disciplinary action which is normally in the form of distancing or

excommunication.[6] Thus, the reaffirmation and reconsideration pathway (in mild forms) radically reinforces the process of religious socialisation: the faith community is endorsed as true and right all along.

At the other end of this model's spectrum is the resolution strategy of rejection. Here, the young person completely or largely disidentifies with their old faith system (and, by extension, that of their faith community) in order to associate with the new. By doing so, the young person has found a new perspective to be more compelling and of greater resource than that of the original faith context. While this might sound like something undesirable to a faith community, it is important to note that the rejection pathway can be thought of as moving in two directions: 1) from the outside-in through which a young person would convert into the faith community; or 2) from the inside-out whereby the young person deconverts out of the faith community.[7] Conversionary or deconversionary movement is determined entirely from the perspective by which the switch is viewed. As such, rejection pathways that draw the new convert into the community are commonly endorsed, especially in those faith communities marked by evangelistic orientations.

In contrast to these affirmed and endorsed faith transitions, the forms of change that appeared to be most problematic to faith communities were revisionist pathways and stronger forms of reconsideration. Revisionist and strong reconsideration transitions occur when a young person substantially shifts away from their old faith system and constructs an entirely new way of faith, albeit a system that retains vestiges of the old. While this is not a wholesale rejection but an amalgamation of old and new, it can yet appear like a rejection of the faith of the originating community because the new faith perspective is the organising framework into which the old faith perspective sits. The most common form this pathway took amongst interview participants, was that of young people retaining their identification with Christianity *per se*, but no longer with the expression of Christian faith maintained by their originating faith community. Take for example the following reflection from, David, a 22 year old University student:

> I would say that it was a tension … The experience of a lot of people in [my] sort of situation is that they feel that a university education is pulling them in one way and that that is completely antithetical to where their pre-existing belief system is and that they may have a choice between giving up or abandoning their pre-existing beliefs. My perception of progress – and again I feel like I'm using very big words but, anyway I can't use otherwise – but it's very dialectical. And so by encountering these two completely different forces in that I'm at once an evangelical Christian and a relativist, existential post-structuralist. Yeah. That through, I would say, the negotiation between

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[6] Sociological perspectives describe these activities as 'enforcement mechanisms' or 'negative socialisation' or forms of 'social control' where collectives seek to formally or informally direct participants activity and reduce the likelihood of deviance. Chris. Livesey, *Sociology* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge Univ Press, 2014), 37-41.

[7] For further discussion concerning conversion and deconversion, especially incorporating a systems perspective see Raymond F. Paloutzian*, et al.*, "Conversion, Deconversion, and Spiritual Transformation: A Multilevel Interdisciplinory View," in *Handbook of the Psychology of Religion and Spirituality*, ed. Raymond F. Paloutzian, and Crystal L. Park (New York, NY: Guilford Press, 2013) and Raymond F. Paloutzian, "Psychology of Religious Conversion and Spiritual Transformation," in *The Oxford Handbook of Religious Conversion*, ed. Lewis R. Rambo (Oxford NY: Oxford University Press, 2014).

those two forces I'm arriving at something which is more individual, which is more thought through, and which is more personal.

The complexity of this task for the young person is apparent because the young person must not only internalise a sense of authority in order to reconstruct their sense of what Christianity is, but also must renegotiate their relationship with their originating faith community and/or context – a process that was frequently problematised by that same faith community. David once again reflects:

> So I suppose the same sex marriage or same-sex attraction thing – I felt that that was very poorly handled [at my church][8]… my difficulty would be with [name of Church Pastor] who I think is overly dogmatic and aggressive. And so being my natural, relativistic, discursive self – I find that quite troublesome. So that would be my issue. Not necessarily – I still manage to appreciate the theological content of sermons, I appreciate the congregation, I appreciate a lot of the way the church operates but I find that that sort of conservatism troubling… it's not as though I'm going to get kicked out of church for disagreeing with people. So it's not to that extent. But I think that the church in a formal capacity is less discursive than I would like. There was no opposing voice on the same sex marriage one for example. It's always very solid in one particular direction rather than having a more diverse set of views if that makes sense.

Here, David is showing a capacity to differentiate being a Christian from subscribing to the particular representation of Christianity offered by his church. Where young people in this study were unable to make this distinction and renegotiate their relationship to their community(s), they frequently entered into a rejection pathway, deconverting from Christianity.

Another significant finding of this study, was that it was quite common for the revisioning activity of young people to be opposed and resisted by their faith community. In large part, this opposition appeared to be because the faith community found themselves unable to authorise or endorse the alternative faith system being constructed by the young person (being so different to their own). Even more problematic, however, was that this opposition was also commonly due to the faith community objecting to the young person's developing individuation and capacity for self-authorship. Such communities appeared to be uncomfortable with their changing relationship to the young person, accompanied as it is by the reduction of their power, influence and standing. The unfortunate dynamic that results from this circumstance is that the community that once nurtured the young person's faith through mechanisms of belonging, encouragement and affirmation all of a sudden position themselves against that young person. As a result, the overwhelming affective experienced reported by young people in the midst of revisionist activity was one of isolation, loneliness, frustration and of being misunderstood. Once again, David observes:

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[8] Here, David is referencing a period in 2017 where the Australian government surveyed the entire population as to whether the definition of marriage should be extended to include same sex couples. In the lead up to this survey, David's church held a sermon series that set forth their understanding of the Bible's teaching on human sexuality and Christian marriage.

> At this stage I'm intending to leave the church next year … There are certainly differences of opinion that I have made very apparent but much more because I feel that I am called elsewhere and that for my own personal growth I think it would be useful to go. But I have felt particularly in the past – increasingly over the past few months an ideological difference from the church leadership which is increasingly frustrating.

Most frequently, revisionist forms of faith change could not be resolved within the resources and perspectives offered by the young person's originating faith community.

4. Analysis: Differentiating Faith Communities

Thus far we have explored varying forms of dissonance and disorientation that occur between young people and their communities of faith in the process of faith transition. We have also observed that particularly forms of faith transition are routinely endorsed and encouraged by many faith communities, while other forms of transition are problematised. In this section, I wish to examine these circumstances further in order to specify more clearly the dynamics that differentiate faith communities and their endorsement or problematisation of differing faith transitions. Section 4.1 will briefly summarise the developmental dynamics commonly present during emerging adulthood in order to consider how these might interact with differing forms of faith community. Section 4.2 will introduce the sociological theory that underpins the framework we will develop in Section 4.3 and 4.4. This framework differentiates communities along a continuum labelled broad/open through to narrow/closed. The theory that underpins this continuum (presented in 4.2) might be a little tedious to work through, and if you are not terribly enthused about sociology, you could simply move on to 4.3 and 4.4 which illuminates the heart of the framework.

4.1 Human and Faith Development in Emerging Adulthood

Developmental paradigms – both of human faculties and of faith – underscore emerging adulthood as a key juncture of the life course whereby one's critical faculties coalesce around the capacity to engage in self-authenticated convictional action. The developmental

paradigms of Kegan[9], Arnett[10], Tanner[11] and Baxter Magolda[12] in their own way, describe the developmental challenge of emerging adulthood as being that of individuation[13] through self-authorship[14] whereby the developing person progressively differentiates themselves from amidst socialising forces and internalises the capacity to authorise for themselves the manner in which they relate within their social and institutional settings. The same dynamics are observed with in faith development paradigms, such as those of Fowler[15], Daloz Parks[16], Oser and Gmünder,[17] Streib[18] as well as Westerhoff[19]. Fowler's paradigm, for example observes that the movement into individuative forms of faith – that can occur at the earliest during emerging and young adulthood – require two developmental shifts to occur, 'the critical distancing from one's previous assumptive value system and the emergence of an executive ego'.[20] The former shift (critical distance) speaks of a new kind of reflexivity required of the young person whereby they are now able distinguish

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[9] R. Kegan, *The Evolving Self* (Harvard University Press, 1982), Robert. Kegan, *In Over Our Heads : The Mental Demands of Modern Life* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1994) and Robert. Kegan, and Lisa Laskow Lahey, *Immunity to Change : How to Overcome it and Unlock Potential in Yourself and Your Organization* (Boston, Mass.: Harvard Business Press, 2009).

[10] Jeffrey Jensen Arnett, "Emerging Adulthood: A Theory of Development From the Late Teens Through the Twenties.," *American psychologist* 55, no. 5 (2000), Jeffrey Arnett, *Emerging Adulthood: The Winding Road From the Late Teens Through the Twenties* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2004) and Jeffrey Jensen Arnett, and Lene Arnett Jensen, "A Congregation of One Individualized Religious Beliefs Among Emerging Adults," *Journal of Adolescent Research* 17, no. 5 (2002).

[11] Jennifer Lynn. Tanner, "Recentering During Emerging Adulthood: A Critical Turning Point in Life Span Human Development," in *Emerging Adults in America : Coming of Age in the 21st Century*, ed. Jeffrey Jensen. Arnett, and Jennifer Lynn. Tanner (Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2006).

[12] Marcia B Baxter Magolda, "Constructing Adult Identities.," *Journal of College Student Development* 40, no. 6 (1999) and Marcia B. Baxter Magolda, *Authoring Your Life : Developing an Internal Voice to Navigate Life's Challenges* (Sterling, Va.: Stylus Pub., 2009).

[13] Kegan's approach to individuation employs the language of 'subject-object differentiation' in which he specifically identifies both the "evolutionary motion of differentiation (or emergence from embeddedness) and reintegration (relation to, rather than embeddedness in, the world"Kegan, *Evolving Self*, 39. See also Kegan, *Over Our Heads*, 221-22. For a summary of the centrality of individuation to human development see S. Guisinger, and S.J. Blatt, "Individuality and Relatedness: Evolution of a Fundamental Dialectic.," *American Psychologist* 49, no. 2 (1994), and in relation to religion and spirituality, see L. Kuhn, "Differentiation and Integration: Applying an Interdisciplinary Systems Perspective to Spiritual Growth," (A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree Doctor of Psychology diss., Azusa Pacific University, 2009). For an application to youth ministry see M Nel, "Youth Ministry: The Challenge of Individuation," *Journal of Youth Ministry* 1:2 (2003) and Amy. Jacober, *The Adolescent Journey : An Interdisciplinary Approach to Practical Youth Ministry* (Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP Books, 2011) .

[14] Baxter Magolda describes self-authorship as being characterised by "internally generating and coordinating one's beliefs, values, and internal loyalties, rather than depending on external values, beliefs, and interpersonal loyalties. Self- authoring individuals take internal and external responsibility for their think-ing, feeling, and acting … [and] can internally reflect on and hold conflicting or contradictory feelings rather than being subject to these changing emotions." Lisa Boes, Marcia B Baxter Magolda, and Jennifer Buckley, "Foundational Assumptions and Constructive-Developmental Theory - Self-Authorship Narratives," in *Development and Assessment of Self-Authorship : Exploring the Concept Across Cultures*, ed. Marcia B. Baxter Magolda, Elizabeth G. Creamer, and Peggy S. Meszaros (Sterling, Va.: Stylus Pub., 2010). For an application of self-authorship to Christian spirituality see AN Bryant, "Evangelical Christian Students and the Path to Self-Authorship," *Journal of Psychology & Theology* 39:1 (2011).

[15] J.W. Fowler, "Perspectives on the Family From the Standpoint of Faith Development Theory," *Perkins Journal* Fall (1979),Fowler, *Stages of Faith*. and J.W. Fowler, "Perspectives on Adolescents, Personhood and Faith," *Christ and the Adolescent: A Theological Approach to Youth Ministry* Princeton Lectures on Youth, Church and Culture (1996).

[16] Sharon Daloz Parks, *The Critical Years: The Young Adult Search for a Faith to Live By* (Harper & Row San Francisco, 1986) and Parks, *Big Questions, Worthy Dreams : Mentoring Emerging Adults in Their Search for Meaning, Purpose, and Faith*.

[17] Fritz. Oser, and Paul. Gmünder, *Religious Judgement : A Developmental Perspective* (Birmingham, Ala.: Religious Education Press, 1991).

[18] H. Streib, "Faith Development Theory Revisited: The Religious Styles Perspective," *The International Journal for the Psychology of Religion* 11, no. 3 (2001).

[19] John H. Westerhoff, *Will Our Children Have Faith?* (New York: Seabury, 1976).

[20] Fowler, *Stages of Faith*, 179.

themselves and their own faith operations from that of their faith context. The latter shift (executive ego) speaks of an internalisation of authority whereby the individual shifts from a dependence upon external authorities to determine truth, values and behaviour, and assumes responsibility for this task themselves. In a similar vein, Daloz Parks contends:

> It is my conviction that the central work of young, emerging adulthood in the cycle of human life is … *the birth[ing] of critical awareness and consequently in the dissolution and recomposition of the meaning of self, other, world and "God"*. In the process of human becoming, this task of achieving critical thought and discerning its consequences for one's sense of meaning and purpose has enormous implications for the years of adulthood to follow. Emerging adulthood is rightfully a time of asking big questions and crafting worthy dreams.[21]

As such, we can observe that the developmental transitions required of emerging adults represent a profound transformation in the young person's capacity to internalise their beliefs and values, vouchsafe their own capacity to determine such realities and then regulate their own behaviour based on these commitments. In this regard, the examination of the manner in which faith communities engage with these marked developmental shifts becomes less a matter of differences in beliefs so much as differences in the way in which these beliefs are upheld, expressed and practiced. For example, the emerging adult transition toward the internalisation of authority, by corollary, impacts a faith community's authoritative role in the young person's life. Equally, the critical distancing that enables reflective evaluation of multiple perspectives equally affects the manner in which church dogma functions as unifying element in a communities identity. A common memory of interview participants, for example, was being asked to stop asking questions as it was viewed as being being disruptive, or that their questions might cause other group members to also begin to question or shift away from strongly held beliefs that united the group.

Thus it is clear that the manner in which communities interact with these developmental dynamics radically impacts transitional experiences. But the question still remains, are their ways in which we can differentiate communities in order to examine how and why groups respond the way they do? It is this question that we address following.

4.2 Faith Communities and the Socialisation of Faith

Systems theory underscores the profound impact the system's context has upon the nature, form and character of a system. Intuitively we recognise this when we encounter, for example, a contorted and angular tree that has grown up exposed to a prevailing wind. This unique set of climactic conditions, environmental resources and progressive experiences over time come together forge the tree in a particular way. So an individual's faith is systemically fashioned in mutual interaction with its environment and, as such, we must attend to the insight of sociology to determine the nature of these shaping dynamics.

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[21] Parks, *Big Questions, Worthy Dreams : Mentoring Emerging Adults in Their Search for Meaning, Purpose, and Faith*, 8.

The sociological frameworks selected for this task were frameworks that specifically theorised the manner in which the religious and spiritual worldview of an individual was shaped by the constituent elements of a culture's, institution's or social group's structure and organisation. These theories contend that the manner in which a collective lays claim to an aspect of the individual and subsequently curtails (or advances) their experience of freedom, this interaction results in shaping his or her sense of ultimate reality. Collectives vary in terms of the manner in which they proscribe or enhance individual freedom in the light of the collective's *raison d'être* as well as the basis upon which this activity is legitimised. These sociological structures not only determine the nature of a collective's internal organisation and structuring of social relations but also shape an individual member's 'ontologics'[22] and, as such, radically influences their conception of truth, forms of knowledge, structure of authority, indeed their entire worldview and cosmology.[23]

Scholars working in the Durkheimian tradition focus on the mechanisms a culture employs to ensure social solidarity, specifically the social bonds that (1) regulate and (2) bring cohesion to a group.[24] Regulation describes the manner in which established codes and laws organise social life, while cohesion measures the socially enforced pressure to engage in the collective's way of life and norms. Scholars working in the Weberian tradition focus upon questions of power and legitimacy.[25] The focus is upon the mechanisms and perspectives that groups employ to legitimate their existence and their right to determine their own and others circumstance. This perspective presumes a ubiquitous dialectic tension existing between groups as they vie for the right to influence their constituent members and thus derive their legitimacy. This can be conceptualised as ranging between a positive tension, where collectives are more or less working together toward a shared purpose, and a negative tension where collectives are not aligned and view each other as a counterpoint to their own values and ideology.[26] This positive or negative tension exists along two continua measuring their respective social and religious legitimacy.

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[22] There term 'oncologic' is employed by Kegan to describe the structure of meaning making operations that is employed by the individual to interpret sense data and coordinate the mental and behavioural responses. The individual's ontologics thus change overtime reflecting the development of their human capacity. See Robert Kegan, "There the Dance is: Religious Dimensions of a Developmental Framewor," in *Toward Moral and Religious Maturity*, ed. Christiane Brusselmans*, et al.* (Morristown, NJ: Silver Burdett Company, 1980), 423, 433. and Kegan, *Evolving Self*, 11.

[23] Mary Douglas, *Natural Symbols: Explorations in Cosmology*. (London: Barrie & Rockliff the Cresset P., 1970), xxxii. By cosmology, Douglas intends 'the ultimate justifying ideas which tend to be invoked as if part of the natural order' Mary Douglas, *In the Active Voice* (London; Boston: Routledge & K. Paul, 1982), 190.

[24] Mary Douglas has been instrumental in developing this sociological approach through the 'Grid/Group Cultural Theory Douglas, *Natural Symbols: Explorations in Cosmology.*, Mary Douglas, *Essays in the Sociology of Perception* (London; Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, published in co-operation with the Russell Sage Foundation, 1982). For the connection to Durkheim, see James V Spickard, "A Guide to Mary Douglas's Three Versions of Grid/group Theory," *Sociological Analysis* 50, no. 2 (1989). For an application of group/grid theory to the contemporary religious setting, see Lars Ahlin, "Back to the Classics: The Relation Between Social Experiences and Religiosity," *Nordic Journal of Religion and Society* 23, no. 1 (2010) as well as Bruce J. Malina, *Christian Origins and Cultural Anthropology: Practical Models for Biblical Interpretation* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1986).

[25] Weber's classical differentiation of Church and Sect was developed further by Ernst Troeltsch, *The Social Teaching of the Christian Churches* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992). See also the work of Theodore M Steeman, "Church, Sect, Mysticism, Denomination: Periodological Aspects of Troeltsch's Types," *Sociological analysis* 36, no. 3 (1975).

[26] This has been particularly developed by Meredith B. McGuire, *Religion, the Social Context* (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Thomson Learning, 2002).

4.2.1 Narrow or Broad, Open or Closed

While each of the above described sociological frameworks is itself a thoroughly developed body of work, my task was to operationalise and apply these frameworks to examine the faith system of young people. To do so, I worked with various synthetic approaches that enabled these theories to be reformulated into a system-based approach that provided sensitising concepts[27] that I utilised to analyse the interview transcripts of young people and examine their lived experience. The dynamics of regulation, cohesion and legitimacy coalesce around notions of truth or doctrine, authority and structure, boundary and collective identity, axiology, belonging and identification, and finally the religious stance they take toward otherness. As these notions take concrete form in a collective, the collective begins to function in a manner that can be categorised along a continuum of *broad* or *narrow* socialisation[28] which equates closely with the social systems conception of being more *open* or *closed* as an organisational system.[29]

Arnett and Taber apply the sociological notion of 'narrow' and 'broad' practices of socialisation in relation to emerging adulthood.[30] Collectives characterised strongly by narrow socialisation (akin to a closed system approach) hold 'obedience and conformity as the highest values, and deviation from cultural expectations for behaviour is condemned and punished.'[31] Arnett and Taber describe individuals within such collectives as finding themselves 'pressed toward conformity to a certain culturally defined standard' that limits not only the behaviours and activities that can be undertaken, but also the 'routes of development.'[32] Cultures and collectives that instantiate 'broad socialisation' tend to 'encourage independence, individualism and self expression.' Such collectives are more comfortable with individual differences and allow itself to be shaped by this diversity.[33] While this approach can be used to compare across cultures and between collectives, we

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[27] Herbert Blumer, "What is Wrong With Social Theory?," *American Sociological Review* 18 (1954), Glen Bowen, "Grounded Theory and Sensitizing Concepts," *International journal of qualitative methods* 5, no. 3 (2008), 2,3.

[28] Jeffrey Jensen Arnett, and Susan Taber, "Adolescence Terminable and Interminable: When Does Adolescence End?," *Journal of Youth and Adolescence* 23, no. 5 (1994), 518-20.

[29] Social Systems theory applied the General Systems Theory concept of an open or closed organic system to organisations F. E. & Trist Emery, E. L., "Socio-Technical Systems.," *Paper presented at The Institute of Management Sciences,* Paris (1959), Daniel Katz, and Robert L. Kahn, *The Social Psychology of Organizations* (New York: Wiley, 1978). It has continued to develop over time by incorporating a broad variety of disciplines including social psychology, sociological and communication studies Jill J McMillan, and Nickol A Northern, "Organizational Codependency: The Creation and Maintenance of Closed Systems," *Management Communication Quarterly* 9, no. 1 (1995), Daniel B Lee, *Observing Society: Meaning, Communication, and Social Systems* (Cambria Press, 2009), Hans Marius Blegen, "The System Approach to the Study of Organizations," *Acta Sociologica* 11, no. 1-2 (1968) and Roderick P. Hart, "The Functions of Human Communication in the Maintenance of Public Values," in *Handbook of Rhetorical and Communication Theory*, ed. Carroll C. Arnold, and John Waite. Bowers (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1984). It has also been applied to a variety of institutional/collective settings, including that of religion and spirituality Nancy Ault, "Envisioning a Systems-Based Spirituality for Lifelong Christian Education," *Colloquium* 37, no. 1 (2005), Francisca Cho, and Richard King Squier, "Religion as a Complex and Dynamic System," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 81, no. 2 (2013), Ilia Delio, *Making All Things New: Catholicity, Cosmology, Consciousness* (Orbis Books, 2015), 117-48., Mark Graves, "The Emergence of Transcendental Norms in Human Systems," *Zygon* 44, no. 3 (2009), Joseph A. Bracken, *The World in the Trinity : Open-Ended Systems in Science and Religion* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Fortress Press, 2014).

[30] Arnett, and Taber, "Adolescence".

[31] Arnett and Taber, "Adolescence", 519.

[32] Arnett and Taber, "Adolescence". The author's language is quite strong, due in large part to their use of examples derived from historic cultures whose very survival depended on social conformity to particular roles and behaviours. That said, the language of being 'pressed toward conformity' echoes the sociological notion that an individual's ideas, ideology and imaginary are shaped by the manner in which their freedom is curtailed or advanced by collectives.

[33] Arnett, and Taber.

can also think of broad and narrow socialisation altering across the life course. Thus, child-rearing practices in the earlier years tend to be periods of narrow socialisation while the years of adolescence and emerging adulthood are marked by relatively broader socialising dynamics.

The distinction of closed and open systems was classically developed by von Bertalanffy. Simply put, a closed system is one that does not interact with its environment as opposed to an open system that does. However, the implication of this distinction is that open and closed systems develop profoundly differing structures toward their ongoing survival.[34] Systems theory originally developed its insights in relation to the physical / organic world, and it was Emory and Trist[35] and subsequently by Katz and Kahn[36] that began to apply these notions to human and economic organisations, conceiving them as socio-technical systems. Of particular relevance here, is their observation that social organisations can also be thought of as functioning somewhere on a continuum between closed and open and that each form is associated with a differing advantages and disadvantages. Generally speaking, closed organisational systems are advantaged where process, repetition and routine action are required, while open systems are advantaged where agility, responsiveness and entrepreneurship are needed. Closed systems are stable and slow moving which enables them to maintain consistency and predictability. The responsive agility of open organisations also means they can be easily buffeted by environmental conditions and as such can suffer for a lack of definition (because they are always changing) and resilience (if resources suddenly dry up).

Social systems theory, with its related understanding of broad and narrow socialisation, has been applied to a variety of institutional/collective settings, including that of religion and spirituality[37]. These differing organisational forms represent instantiations of the 'ontologics' of truth or doctrine, authority and structure, boundary and collective identity, axiology, belonging and identification, as well as the manner in which otherness is responded to and engaged with. These dimensions are summarised in Table 1. Each form can be understood as an ideal type that collectives more or less approximate. Their respective dynamics are described in the sections following.

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[34] Ludwig Von Bertalanffy, "General Theory of Systems: Application to Psychology," *Studies in Semiotics* 6, no. 6 (1967), 128ff.

[35] Emery, "Socio-Technical Systems".

[36] Katz, and Kahn, *The Social Psychology of Organizations*.

[37] Ault, "Envisioning a Systems-Based Spirituality for Lifelong Christian Education.", Cho, and Squier, "Religion as a Complex and Dynamic System.", Delio, *Making All Things New*, 117-48., Graves, "Emergence.", Bracken, *The World in the Trinity : Open-Ended Systems in Science and Religion*.

	CLOSED SYSTEMS / NARROW SOCIALISATION	OPEN SYSTEMS / BROAD SOCIALISATION
TRUTH / DOCTRINE	• established, singular and incontrovertible • plays dominant role in defining group • objectively known and revealed in its entirety (to this group or reliable interpreters);	• mysterious, plural and contestable • ideologically disparate • may or may not be objectively real • subjectively engaged by the individual;
AUTHORITY	• centralised to those who conform to doctrinal positions • a select few reliably interpret this truth and make it known;	• decentralized and democratised • no single individual can be trusted to reliably interpret truth;
BOUNDARY	• Clear and Solid - the world is divided into insiders and outsiders • Strong collective identity	• Vague and porous - encourages inclusion rather than exclusion; • Reduced particular collective identity tending toward individualism
WORLDVIEW	• Binary - all things are evaluated in relation to the groups truth/doctrine. • That which conforms to accepted doctrine is good and right. That which doesn't is evil and wrong. • No neutral ground. That which is outside the group is automatically anathema	• Pluralised – all things are evaluated pragmatically by their merits. • Relativity that which is good and right is determined by circumstances • Neutrality – that which is outside the collective could be either good or bad. • a fertile place of possibility and new truth;
BELONGING	• Adherence and conformity with the revealed truth affecting salvation; • Belonging follows belief and behaviour	• Non-coercive patterns that encourage constructive participation over orthodox belief • Belonging precedes belief and behaviour
RELIGIOUS STANCE	• Protectionist - seeks to keep unwanted influence out and / or • Evangelistic – seeks to transform or redeem (convert) others individuals and social systems.	• Religion and Spirituality serves social good and human thriving • Inclusive and affirming of diverse positions

Table 1. Closed/Narrow versus Broad/Open Collectives

4.3 Narrow/Closed Socialising Communities

A collective tends toward a closed-system functionality when established *doctrine* plays a central organising role and is considered to be objectively known, singular, fully revealed and incontrovertible. To the insider, this *doctrine* is perceived as superseding and transcending the group, almost as if it is providing the very definition of truth and reality and the means by which all other claims to truth and reality are judged. A collective is more closed the more the doctrine cannot be questioned or challenged, either by members or competing *authority* claims (such as science). *Authority* in such collectives tends to be

centralised to appointed 'clergy' (whether the term 'clergy' is utilised or not). The task of the clergy is to uphold, defend and correctly interpret the established truth, making sure the true gospel is preserved and passed on from generation to generation. In strongly closed groups, neither the doctrine nor the interpreters of the doctrine can be questioned. Closed groups develop a strong collective identity through the creation of a *boundary* that defines the group in social, institutional and psychological terms. Socially, the *boundary* is preserved as members organise their life around the rhythms, practices and events of the collective. Institutionally the collective might have formal membership or specific rites and rituals to provide a pathway of conversion and assimilation. In addition, various rhetorical and communicative practices serve to reinforce a psychological sense of being an insider and that the collective stands in contrast to outsiders and other doctrinal truth claims that are deemed aberrant, wrong, misguided or evil. The *axiological* worldview that emerges in closed settings tends to be binary and dualistic without the possibility of middle ground neutrality. *Belonging* arises on the basis of correct belief and conformed behaviour while the *religious stance* this collective might take in relation to otherness is often a mixture of protecting members from the aberrance and evil found outside its boundary together with an evangelistic / apocalyptic orientation that hopes to redeem outsiders or see insiders ultimately vindicated.

When we consider the way a community forged by these dynamics might respond to differing forms of faith transition, we can conclude that coalesce to shape a community that is only able to endorse resolution pathways that:

1.   Continue to uphold the community's understanding of truth;

2.   Spurns alternative claims as wrong / aberrant;

3.   Remains in line with the requirements of established regulatory codes; and

4.   Submits to a centralised authority structure.

In terms of the resolution pathways developed by this study, such communities are more able to affirm and endorse faith transitions that *reaffirm* or only mildly *reconsider* their faith (as well as those that wholesale reject their old way of living when doing so represents a conversion into this community). By corollary, resolution activities that require a young person to express higher degrees of individuation or a greater internalisation of authority (*revisioning* or strong forms of re*consideratio*n) are generally not able to be affirmed by these communities and thus would most likely play the role of problematising such transitions.
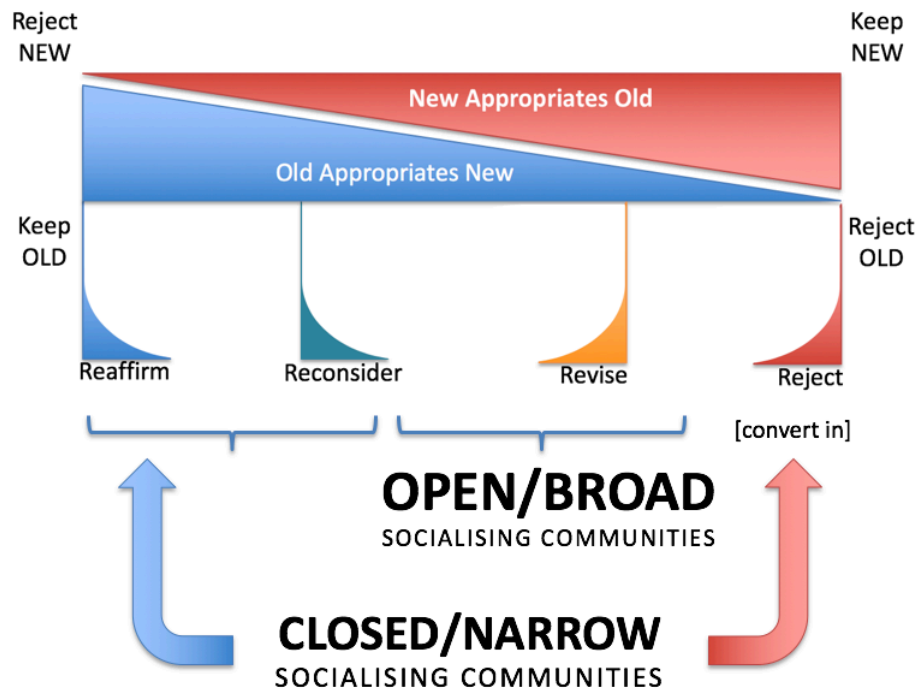
Figure 4. Resolution Pathways Encouraged Closed/Narrow and Open/Broad Faith Communities

The collision between revisionist transitions and relatively closed communities is captured well by Scott, an interview participant who summarised a realisation he had about his journey in the following manner:

> I grew up in the church for literally my whole life. For years, I was afraid of doubt or even asking questions, assuming it was a sin. I guess it was implicitly taught to be so. The biggest issue for me is that surely we can't expect people to arbitrarily and immediately believe the dogma that they're taught, and surely they should be allowed and encouraged to ask questions. God and I are at peace with this as long as I keep genuinely seeking Him, because as I now realise, He knows it's a journey, I don't have to fool Him and He's not angry. But to be too open about this with some of the "religious people" in my life would bring a lot of flak because of their fear and insecurity, which sadly is rife in church circles in this part of the world.

The non-constructive role played by relatively closed churches in relation to more revisionist style transitions is by virtue of two dynamics. Firstly, the worldview that develops within such communities simply cannot endorse new or alternative perspectives being introduced or explored by the young person. The assumptive worldview of these collectives is that truth has already been revealed to this community and therefore faith development entails learning this truth (from authorised sources) and applying its implications in everyday life. By embodying new truths, perspectives and practices the young person effectively becomes an outsider to the community through their lack of conformity and falls afoul of their protectionist stance. Secondly, such transitions are problematic because they entail internalising new truths through a growing sense of inner authority and personal

differentiation. The critical distancing and willingness to assert the self over that of the group becomes highly problematic to the regulatory structure and mode of social cohesion. Such young people are perceived as dissident and problematic to the group. Taken together, these two dynamics highlight that both *what* the young person was finding to be meaningful and *how* the young person was going about their religious engagement and spiritual expression was something the community could not uphold.

While this study was a qualitative phenomenological inquiry and in no way incorporates a representative sample, it is instructive to observe that almost all study participants who resolved a significant faith transition through *revising* and/or stronger forms of *reconsideration* were unable to do so within the structures and resources of their originating faith community. Many found themselves at odds with traditional church, youth group settings, their parents' faith expression and equally felt isolated from the majority of their friends who were comfortably equilibrated in mainstream church settings. Most often, interview participants felt misunderstood, demonised and judged by their communities of origin. Interview participants reported that these communities were only able to constructively accompany them through periods of dissonance when the resolution involved warding off new and competing perspectives or converting into the community. That is, as long as the modal expression of group faith embodied by the collective remained true and significant to the young person, and as long as the young person continued to experience this community as a place of belonging and acceptance, the young person normally managed to resolve their dissonance in ways endorsed by the community.
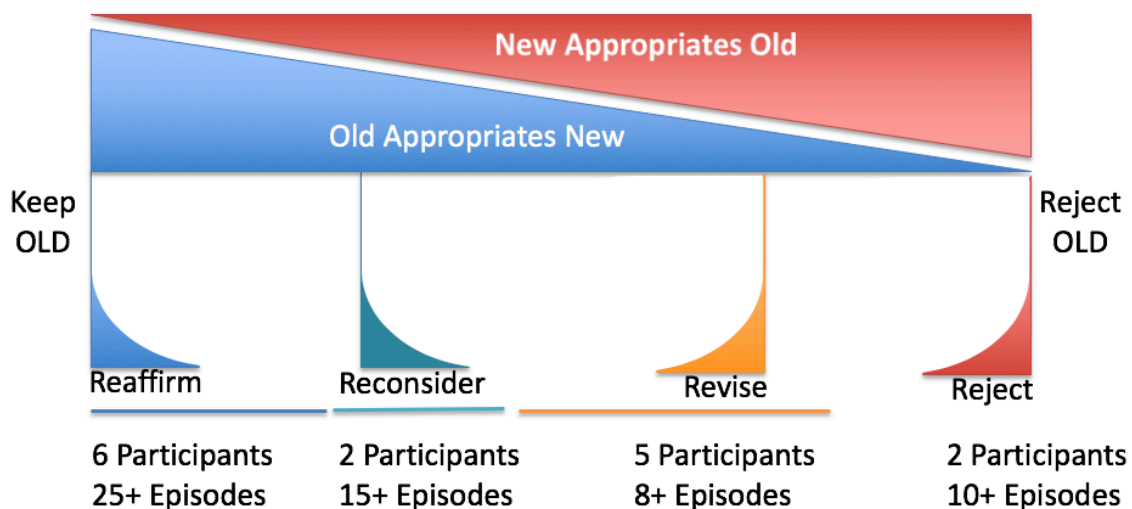
Figure 5.
The number of participants by strongest form of resolution pathway
and the number of resolution episodes identified in interview transcripts

Equally, this study observed a related phenomena; that when a young person was incapable of connecting their reconstructed spiritual expression and desire for religious engagement within *any* established Christian community, disidentification with the Christian tradition resulted. That is, young people found it very difficult to maintain a Christian faith

identity without being embedded in some way within a faith community. Those who did find a way to resolve this form of faith transition within the broader Christian tradition often did so: 1) by finding and associating with communities that were found to be in some way sociologically different to that of their primal community (usually more open/broad); or 2) by renegotiating the role the local congregation and their immediate family plays in their broader faith context by distributing its role across a loose network of resources.

4.4 Broad/Open Socialising Communities

The alternative to narrow/closed socialising communities are collectives that we designate 'broad' or 'open'.[38] An open system orientation views the divine reality as ineffable and mysterious meaning that *doctrinal* truth claims are by definition contestable and that plurality and ideological diversity are both expectable and unavoidable. *Truth*, if it exists at all, can never be objectively known but is rather the subject of an ever-present and ongoing quest. There is no timeless gospel to be preserved and passed on, but rather a process of continually rediscovering and reimagining what it means to live responsively and faithfully in relation to the transcendent. *Authority* is therefore necessarily decentralised and in some measure democratised as no single individual can claim to have the truth nor be relied upon to correctly interpret it. In stronger forms, *axiological* notions of right and wrong are dismissed entirely. Milder forms might engage in discernment and evaluation using categories of being helpful or unhelpful, life giving or not life giving, obtuse or expansive. Open system's preference for non-dualistic engagement also recognises paradoxical truth claims and dialectic forms of interaction. The lack of a unifying *doctrine* results in group *boundaries* that are vague and porous. In extreme cases, such collectives are simply vague associations of individuals who share some things in common but choose not to regulate or cohere their lives together. Where the society in which the collective is located is diverse and pluralised the patterns, practices and rhythms within the group, which are diverse and heterogeneous, may well mirror life outside the group, again reducing the sense of collective identity. In such circumstances, the dynamics of *belonging* move to the fore while the dynamics of belief and behaviour recede. The worldview that emerges from these collectives embraces pluralism and seeks unity in diversity. That which is right and wrong, good and evil are presumed to occur within the collective as much as outside it. Where closed collectives might spurning that which is different and other assuming it to be aberrant and wrong, open collectives might instead be inquisitive and curious because it may present a corrective or new insight. The general *religious stance* of the collective toward broader society is one that seeks the perpetuation of all human and ecological thriving, rather than the vindication of the few (positive legitimising tension). Their transcendent view of the numinous identifies members and non-members as equally sharing in the same circumstance and subject to the same conditions of nature and supernature.

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[38] It should be noted that if we were to take these continuums in their theoretical pure form, then the extreme alternative to narrow socialising communities would reflect a hopelessly chaotic and anomic circumstance devoid of any collective identity and structured organisation. Thus the notion of broad/open socialising collectives refers to groups that have reduced regulatory and social coherence structures while maintaining a positive but nonetheless convictional stance as the basis of its legitimacy. This enables the collective to maintain some definition as a distinctive group.

Where these tendencies are present, a community is more able to facilitate and engage with transitional experiences that revise or strongly reconsider one's faith because such collectives:

1. Are not threatened by the presence of plurality – assisting young people's development through individuation;

2. Maintain a humble posture towards its own claim to truth – encouraging the young person to differentiate Christianity *per se* from the particular expression found in particular faith communities;

3. Emphasise belonging over orthodoxy - nurturing a renewed basis of connection; and

4. Empower young people to express and embody their faith rather than conform to a prescribed regulatory code – supporting their journey of self-authorship.

While open/broad communities appear more able to vouchsafe, authorise and ritualise *revisionist* and strongly *reconsidered* transitions, such collectives were rarely identifiable in the narratives of this study's interview participants. This was particularly the case in relation to churches, youth groups and immediate family settings, However, there were several sources of open/broad discernible in the descriptions of interview participants. First of all, open/broad dynamics could be observed in particular individuals who functioned as key resources (mentors or spiritual directors) to interview participants through times of difficulty. Secondly, certain conferences or mediated settings (such as podcasts and online communities) that featured diverse perspectives on faith. Thirdly, personalities (authors, podcasters, speakers) known for their revisionist perspectives on Christian faith also functioned as a resource and/or turning point in participant's narratives.

It is equally instructive to observe the furtive and wary manner in which young people amidst or post revisionist transitions re-engage with church settings. Only a few of such interview participants had been able to find, or were presently 'testing out,' churches that seemed a constructive fit for their present faith expression. Such participants evidenced a pronounced sensitivity to matters of authority, power, exclusivity and particularity of truth claims. The churches they were engaging with were described with adjectives like 'diverse,' 'inclusive,' 'welcoming' and 'affirming'. Of particular note was the absence of a sense of coercion on behalf of the regulatory and cohesive dimensions of the collective. These young people found themselves 'able to breathe again', able to 'sort things through' and with time to 'process stuff', and they appreciated that their experience of deconstruction was normalised and endorsed by these communities as an expectable part of faith.

5. Discussion: An Ecclesiological Paradox

Thus far we have observed the manner in which differing forms of faith transition interact with differing sociological forms of faith community. In particular we have witnessed the manner in which closed/narrow faith communities positively engage with *reaffirmation* and

mild forms of *reconsideration*, but struggle to affirm strong forms of *reconsideration* and *revisionist* transitions. Examination of open/broad collectives highlighted the manner in which they are more able to affirm and constructively engage with these latter resolution strategies and in some cases can be a sanctuary for young people amidst and following a significant faith deconstruction. Based on these observations, one might conclude that open/broad socialising dynamics are therefore a preferred basis upon which to establish a faith community given that they appear to be able to cater for more complex and challenging transitional experiences. In this final section we shall examine whether this is indeed the case. I shall argue instead that if there is an ideal sociological form of faith community, it is multi-modal in nature, meaning that it actively nurtures multiple ecologies that offer distinctive balances of open-closed dynamics.

5.1 The Case for Open Systems

Arnett contends that Western industrialised cultures are, by and large, cultures of 'broad socialisation' and that that narrow socialisation virtually stands in contradistinction to what it means to be Western, progressive and enlightened.[39] John Seel makes a similar claim in relation to contemporary forms of spirituality in the West.[40] Seel argues that the principle religious distinction today is not, in fact, between so-called believers and non-believers (those who operate within a religiously transcendent or immanent frame), but between those who maintain and engage in belief or non-belief employing closed or open dynamics.[41] Identifying a fundamentalist orientation as 'closed' and progressive as open, Seel argues:

> A fundamentalist Christian and a fundamentalist atheist have more in common than a progressive Christian and a fundamentalist Christian. The fundamentalists hold to their convictions with a closed fist, confident that they have a corner on the truth. On the other hand, the open Christian or atheist holds their convictions with an open hand, always willing to learn more and acutely aware that even at the points of their strongest convictions they might be wrong and that there is more to know than they currently comprehend.[42]

Seel's normative assessment contends that closed system approaches belong to a pre-Newtonian worldview that will eventually become (if it is not already) 'culturally passé.'[43]

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[39] Arnett, and Taber, "Adolescence Terminable and Interminable: When Does Adolescence End?", 519.

[40] John Seel, *The New Copernicans : Millennials and the Survival of the Church* (Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson, 2018). Seel's work specifically brings closed and open systems analysis into dialogue with philosophical examinations of contemporary secularity, particularly that of Charles Taylor. See Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007).

[41] Seel develops this notion of open closed further by marrying this insight with Taylors notion of immanent and transcendent frame, thus identifying four social imaginaries: closed-transcendent, closed-immanent, open-immanent, open transcendent. Seel, *New Copernicans*, 63ff. This fourfold typology appears to be a promising mode of analysis, however space does not permit its further exploration here.

[42] This is perhaps also reflective of Taylor's description of the Athiestic and fundamentalist 'leap of faith'. See Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 550. Taylor, however, distinguishes the Atheist and fundamentalist by speaking of an 'open' or 'closed' immanent frame which is not to be confused with Taylor's later notion of the Closed World System. Open or Closed in this sense distinguishes between a strong immanent frame and a more moderate position. The latter notion of a closed/open world system more closely aligns with the systems-based the notion I am developing.

[43] Seel, *New Copernicans*, 5, 48, 64.

Seel contends that while much of the American evangelical church would be classified as relatively closed, the framework of belief amongst emerging generations is increasingly open in nature:

> Millennials are the poster children of seekers or explorers because they maintain an open mind and adopt a provisional attitude toward belief and reality, all the while longing for more. They embrace epistemological humility (the starting attitude), follow the scientific method and the explorer's quest (a process of open inquiry), and maintain a curious metaphysical openness to the laws of life wherever they may be found. They celebrate the journey, the exploration and the quest for new discoveries. They adopt the posture of a humble pilgrim or a courageous explorer rather than an arrogant teacher or know-it-all theologian.[44]

Together, these perspectives in addition to this study's findings (particularly those related to open/broad communities being more able to adequately engage with complex faith transitions) seem to make a strong case for an ecclesiological form that is more open in nature. Such a conclusion, however, I believe requires further scrutiny as it can be critiqued from several perspectives including that of political philosophy, organisational systems theory and faith development theory.

5.2 The Perennial Dialectic of Open and Closed Systems

An age old question of social-political organisation is the degree to which one should preserve the present order or change it? The attempt to resolve this question results in a preference for either social dynamics that are more systemically closed – whereby one is able to preserve the current order resulting in a narrow form of socialisation – or a preference for open systems that create broad socialising dynamics. The perennially dialectic nature of these dynamics have been observed by a number of authors. Rosas and Ferreira, for example, trace this dialectic through the centuries-old appropriations of 'left' and 'right' that eventually become formulated into the left-right political spectrum during the French Revolution.[45] However, Rosas and Ferreira contend against the notion that leftist or open framed social organisation is preferential because both need the other in the light of broader questions of social-political pluralism.[46] A similar position can be seen in the work

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[44] Seel, 48-49. Seel here is drawing on the imagery first developed by Wuthnow who differentiates between the spirituality of 'dwelling' versus 'seeking'. Robert. Wuthnow, *After Heaven : Spirituality in America Since the 1950s* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).

[45] During the French Revolution, the supporters of the revolution (the "party of movement") were required to stand on the presidents left while supporters of the king (the "party of order") stood on the right.João Cardoso Rosas, and Ana Rita Ferreira, "Left and Right: Critical Junctures," in *Left and Right : The Great Dichotomy Revisited*, ed. João Cardoso Rosas, and Ana Rita Ferreira (Newcastle upon Tyne, UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2013).

[46] "[T]he left and right are the product of a *ménage à trois*, since both need a centre and it is by reference to this centre that left and right are defined… The acceptance of a pluralism of political outlooks and groups and, furthermore, its protection with the constitutional entrenchment of basic liberties, gives rise to the idea that there are several legitimate paths in politics, not just one. The left-right (and centre) distinction is a form of describing this pluralism. If so, the political right needs the left, and the left needs the right (and both need the centre). This may be difficult to accept, since the work of politicians consists of explaining why the right is, indeed, right and that the left is wrong; or, conversely, that the left is right and the right is wrong. Understandably, politicians and doctrinaires attempt to occupy all the available political space and to expel their opponents from the playing field. However, without the right there would be no left; and in the absence of the left the right would make no sense." Rosas, and Ferreira, 4, 5.

of John Stewart Mills who contends that "[e]ach of these modes of thinking derives its utility from the deficiencies of the other; but it is in a great measure the opposition of the other that keeps each within the limits of reason and sanity"[47] Equally, Bertrand Russel argues that "[e]very community is exposed to two opposite dangers: ossification through too much discipline and reverence for tradition, on the one hand; on the other hand, dissolution … through the growth of an individualism and personal independence that makes cooperation impossible"[48] As such, while one might observe that the overall movement of society is evolutionary and progressive in nature, these perspectives underscore that this general movement is underpinned by a constructive balance or coordination of open and closed systemic operations.

We can equally observe this dialectic from the perspective of social systems theory. General systems theory underscores the manner in which closed systems are subject to the principle of entropy and normally degrade overtime unless there is sufficient input of new energy to reinvigorate the system.[49] Nevertheless, even though open systems are able to overcome entropy, they are nonetheless vulnerable to the chaotic and unpredictable forces of the environment that can equally threaten its very existence. The principle of homeostasis concerns finding not only a symbiotic relation to its environment, but an optimal balance of closed and open structures in order to ensure survival.[50] Applying these insights to socio-technical systems, Katz and Kahn argue that an organisation operating in an overly closed manner by not seeking out important information from the environment (feedback) resulting in the continual repetition of flawed procedures. Such organisations can become overly focused on internal functions and traditional practices where as an organisation that develops information feedback and feedforward loops can interact with the environment in order to find a balance between responsive change and stability.[51] Within ecclesial settings, we can at once recognise within these dynamics collectives that become fixated on preserving tradition and those whom actively seek new a 'relevant' forms. Yet, once again we can observe that, even though the preferred trajectory of organisations is generally towards some sense of advancement and vitality, this is still achieved by an striking an optimal balance of open and closed dynamics.

5.3 Multi-Modal Communities – An Ideal Type?

The perspective of faith development theory nuances this dialectic by adding the notion of change over time. In terms of human development, we have already observed that both family and society raise children within dynamics that transition from relatively closed through relatively open. In the same manner, faith development paradigms such as those of

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[47] John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty* (New York: Cosimo Classics, 2005), 113.

[48] Bertrand Russell, *A History of Western Philosophy and Its Connection With Political and Social Circumstances From the Earliest Times to the Present Day* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1990), 9.

[49] A Peacocke, "Thermodynamics and Life," *Zygon* 19, no. 4 (1984) and I. Prigogine, Isabelle. Stengers, and I. Prigogine, *Order Out of Chaos : Man's New Dialogue With Nature* (Boulder, CO: New Science Library : Distributed by Random House, 1984).

[50] Donald H. Ford, and Richard M. Lerner, *Developmental Systems Theory : An Integrative Approach* (Newbury Park, Calif.: Sage Publications, 1992), 90ff.

[51] McMillan, and Northern, "Organizational Codependency: The Creation and Maintenance of Closed Systems," 8ff.

James Fowler,[52] Oser and Gmünder,[53] as well as Streib[54] each in their own way describe a transition in the operations of faith that move toward increasingly open dynamics. Notwithstanding the manner in which this closed-to-open dynamic has been criticised by various commentators,[55] I want to focus on a relatively undeveloped dimension of Fowler's work that sought to apply his stages of (personal) faith to collective settings – notably family and congregations. [56] Fowler contends that just as we might view a person's faith taking a particular form and structure, we can also consider the form and structure of faith maintained by a group or institution. This, Fowler refers to as the group or *modal* developmental level.

> The modal development level is the *average expectable level of development for adults* in a given community. In faith terms, it refers to the conscious or unconscious image of adult faith toward which the educational practices, religious celebrations and patterns of governance in a community all aim. The modal level operates as a kind of magnet in religious communities. Patterns of nurture prepare children and youth to grow up *to* the modal level but not beyond it. Persons from outside the community are attracted to the community because of its modal development level. The operation of the modal level in a community sets an effective limit on the ongoing process of growth in faith.[57]

In the terms we are developing here Fowler's contention is that, even though it appears that a local congregation has the capacity to adapt its engagement to the differing life stages of its individual members (thus we can speak of children's ministry, youth ministry, seniors ministry and so on), by and large it embodies a relatively fixed proportion of open-closed dynamics which is borne of the average expectable faith style for adults. The challenging insight of modal faith is its contention that the form of faith embodied by the group functions hegemonically. That is, the degree to which a group's modal faith is maintained and expressed unreflexively, it becomes the unconsciously normal way of faith that organises, colours and shapes their religious expression and spiritual engagement – its worship practices, modes of instruction, formulation of moral living and so on. As such, Fowler contends that:

> If an adult does not develop to the modal level, he or she is made to feel *deviant* and somewhat *deficient*. If, on the other hand, a person develops to a stage beyond the mode, then he or she is also made to feel *deviant*. There is a powerful coerciveness about the modal developmental level in a community.[58]

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[52] Fowler, *Stages of Faith*.
[53] Oser, and Gmünder, *Religious Judgement*.
[54] Streib, "Faith Development Theory Revisited: The Religious Styles Perspective.".
[55] A. Coyle, "Critical Responses to Faith Development Theory: A Useful Agenda for Change?," *Archive for the Psychology of Religion* 33, no. 3 (2011) and W.G. Scarlett, "Toward a Developmental Analysis of Religious and Spiritual Development," in *The Handbook of Spiritual Development in Childhood and Adolescence*, ed. E.C. Roehlkepartain*, et al.* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc, 2006).
[56] Fowler, "Perspectives on the Family.". Fowler, *Stages of Faith*, 294. and James W. Fowler, *Faith Development and Pastoral Care* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987).
[57] Fowler, *Stages of Faith*, 294. Emphasis original.
[58] Fowler, *Faith Development*, 97. See also Fowler, "Perspectives on the Family," 18.

Herein lies the perplexing challenge of ecclesiological organisation. Fowler argues that if a faith community is to adequately attend to the progressive stages of faith that transpire across the life course, it must become 'multi-modal'.[59] By multi-modal, he intends a form of faith community where there are multiple faith contexts in which individuals at differing stages of faith can truly thrive instead of feeling the hegemonic draw towards that congregation's modal faith stage. In such a community, the strengths of relatively closed settings are able to benefit those who thrive in such contexts, and vice versa for open contexts. Precisely how communities of faith are to bring about this multi-modal form is not spelled out in Fowler's work,[60] neither did he observe any such collectives in his empirical research. Yet while a multi-modal community of faith may only be a theoretical notion, Fowler nonetheless concludes that, '*Enabling such groups [of differing faith stage] to coexist and work together with integrity in a church represents, when it occurs, one of the major accomplishments of pastoral leadership and care.*'[61]

In relation to the observed dialectical tension between open and closed system dynamics, Fowler's proposal of a multi-modal community contributes at least a more nuanced response if not a theoretical resolution. We commenced this section observing the arguments of Arnett and Seel who contend for a normative shift toward open system dynamics. However, we concluded that this 'leftist' priority was not well founded, and that the weight of historical inquiry underscored the mutual benefit and necessity of both closed and open dynamics; thus some kind of optimal balance or tensive relation was required. With the addition of insights gained from human and faith development, we observed how development is facilitated by altering this tensive balance across the life course. Thus, theoretically, the optimal organisation form is one in which multiple open-closed tensive relations co-exist simultaneously.

6. Conclusion

This paper commenced by outlining this study's method of analysing faith transition through the perspective of systems theory. It highlighted the fourfold manner in which emerging adults resolve faith transitions – via *reaffirmation*, *reconsideration*, *revision* or *rejection of* one's original faith identity. We then turned to examine the manner in which one's faith context interacted with these differing resolutions. By differentiating faith communities along a spectrum ranging from open through to closed, we observed that relatively closed communities greatly assisted *reaffirmation* and mild forms of *reconsideration* while problematising *revisionist* and stronger forms of *reconsideration*. The reverse was the case for relatively open communities. Such communities are better able to accompany young people through complex periods that significantly *revise* their faith, yet they appear to struggle to consolidate a robust faith identity in the early years. In terms of

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[59] Fowler, *Faith Development*, 97.
[60] Fowler's main suggestion in this regard, was that multi-modal communities needed to be facilitated by later faith-stage leaders who would therefore be capable of nurturing earlier faith-stage ecologies. Fowler, *Faith Development,* 80-81 and 97.
[61] Fowler, *Faith Development,* 92.

the experiences of those interviewed, open system dynamics were rarely observable in the descriptions of congregations, however they could be observed in the descriptions of particular individuals, in loose networks of association and in digitally mediated groups.

Analysing these findings indicated that open-closed dynamics represent dialectally related worldviews and organisational forms. The notion of a multi-modal faith community represented the most nuanced proposal toward resolving this paradoxical relationship, however it remains an open question as to whether such an organisational form is, in fact, simply a theoretical ideal to which we can only ever falteringly approximate.

I will conclude with some observations and suggestions that might practically ground, apply and extend this investigation.

Firstly, using the frameworks developed in this study, faith communities can examine their own capacity and willingness to support young people amidst transitions, particularly transitions that are revisionist or strong forms of reconsideration. This study found very few faith communities, institutional structures, ministries or ritual practice that could authenticate and facilitate such forms of transition. This is not to say that these resources and communities do not exist, but rather that one of the first challenges that confronts churches that are relatively closed is their commitment to support young people amidst deconstructive faith episodes.

Secondly, I would contend that the general notion of open and closed forms of spiritual expression offers a powerful lens through which to examine the foundational differences that manifest itself in theological and ecclesiological disputation. Coming to terms with this conception either through the work of John Seel, Charles Taylor's expansive treatment of secularity, or the framework offered here, will aid empathic engagement with many young people experiencing a faith deconstruction.

Thirdly, faith communities that are relatively open in orientation must wrestle with the possibility that such dynamics are not conducive for faith establishment, particularly in the earlier stages of faith development. For example, recent data in Australia suggests that denominations that are relatively more open in nature experience increased levels of disidentification and disengagement of young people earlier than denominations that are relatively closed by comparison.[62] Thus while relatively closed communities struggle to respond constructively to young people amidst deconstruction, some forms of closed community yet appear able to more effectively instil a robust Christian faith identity in ways that relatively open communities may not.

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[62] The National Church Life Survey in Australia develops demographic profiles of Australian churches and denominations and in the most recent (2016) survey also turned its attention to formally assess church disengagement by young people (Survey H). Some data is publicly available (See for example http://www.ncls.org.au/ageing-church and http://www.ncls.org.au/default.aspx?sitemapid=136, last accessed September, 2018). Data relating to baptist churches in Australia can be reviewed in Darren Cronshaw, ""Sticky Faith" in Australian Baptist Churches: Surveying Generational Participation and Ministry Priorities," *International Association for the Study of Youth Ministry (IASYM) conference, Ridley College, Melbourne,* (2018). Indicatively, the denomination that consistently instantiates a relatively open/broad dynamic in Australia is the Uniting Church who also consistently struggles to retain young people. The Uniting Church evidences the lowest proportion of young people amongst all denominations as well as some of the highest rates of disengagement occurring prior to emerging adulthood.

Finally, describing a multi-modal faith community as a theoretical ideal does not legitimise relegating it as an irrelevant ecclesiological form. Quite the opposite. Analogously, I would describe the notion of justice as also being a theoretical ideal, toward which our actions, policies, social structures and laws do their best to approximate and therefore must be continually revised as we strive to this ideal. In the same way, a multi-modal community may well be an ideal form that we should also falteringly approximate and then revise our structures and forms of social organisation such that we might better instantiate this ideal. As such, this investigation challenges faith communities to consider the manner in which their particular modal faith style functions hegemonically in non-constructive ways. The notion of multi-modal faith communities does not simply advocate for some general notion of diversity in unity. Instead, Fowler's suggestion is to curate multiple ecologies of differing closed-open relations that value the presence of one another and facilitate transition between them. In so doing, we may just be contributing to one of the 'major accomplishments of pastoral leadership'[63] of our time.

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[63] Fowler, *Faith Development,* 92.

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