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A Local Christian Community's Missional Imagination: Accessing, Cultivating, and Assessing Missional Discernment in Civil Society

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A LOCAL CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY'S MISSIONAL IMAGINATION: ACCESSING, CULTIVATING, AND ASSESSING MISSIONAL DISCERNMENT IN CIVIL SOCIETY

by

JOHANNES GERHARDUS JACOBUS SWART

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of Luther Seminary In Partial Fulfillment of The Requirements for the Degree of DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

ST. PAUL, MINNESOTA

2010
ABSTRACT

A Local Christian Community's Missional Imagination: Accessing, Cultivating, and Assessing Missional Discernment in Civil Society

By

Johannes Gerhardus Jacobus Swart

This dissertation explores a particular local Christian community’s socially-embodied theology as their missional imagination in civil society from within a research question on how to access, cultivate, and assess such missional imagination. The research question is addressed through a phenomenological approach to such particular local Christian community’s process of discernment.

In following the trajectory of this particular local Christian community’s process of discernment, the research journey became embedded in the playful imagination of this local Christian community’s engagement with their discernment question, and how their critical reflectiveness from within this playful imagination opened up the possibilities of God’s preferred and promised future in, among, and through them. The entire process presented this dissertation with this particular local Christian community’s socially-embodied theology as the theo-cultural contours of their missional imagination in civil society, described by this local Christian community as the threads of relationships-diversity-openness, mystery-Eucharist-spiritual practices, and continuity-discontinuity-abundance.

This dissertation integrates into the research journey from within this particular local Christian community’s process of discernment a variety of conversation partners from theology, philosophy, cultural anthropology, and organizational theory. These
conversation partners illuminate both the process of discernment and production of theology of this particular local Christian community. The integration of the local Christian community’s process of discernment (and their production of theology in the process) with the voices of these conversation partners provides this dissertation with a hermeneutic of *mimesis* on how to access, a hermeneutic of *Bildung* on how to cultivate, and a hermeneutic of *poiesis* on how to assess this particular local Christian community’s socially-embodied theology as their missional imagination in civil society.

These hermeneutics are accompanied by a missional theology that takes on the shape of a trinitarian theology rooted in the biblical *imago Dei* (with respect to the hermeneutic of *mimesis* as interpretation of accessing missional imagination), a pneumatology (with respect to the hermeneutic of *Bildung* as interpretation of cultivating missional imagination), and an eschatology (with respect to the hermeneutic of *poiesis* as interpretation of assessing missional imagination).
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This journey would not have been possible without the love and support of my wife, Mari, and our children, Sune and Janco. Their willingness to explore a different world made this a fun and enriching family adventure.

I am especially grateful to my advisor, Dr. Gary Simpson, and two reading team members, Dr. Mary Hess and Dr. Patrick Keifert. All three of them have shaped my theology and research journey in profound ways. I not only appreciate Dr. Simpson’s advice and direction during the research and dissertation journey, but I am also indebted to his work (long before I met him) for my interest in local congregations’ public moral companionship in civil society. Dr. Hess’ encouragement and direction during my first Ph.D. seminar at Luther Seminary put me on a rich journey of exploring sources from other disciplines than theology and philosophy (especially cultural anthropology and religious education). Dr. Keifert was not only instrumental in opening up the possibilities for exploring this journey in a different country, but also the one to whom I am most indebted for shaping my theological approach to local congregations. The sophistication of his integrated theological and philosophical approach, together with his practical embodiment of companionship with local congregations for the sake of God’s preferred and promised future is my inspiration for shaping my own participation in God’s mission in the world. Needless to say, if this dissertation turns out to be an embarrassment in the
light of how profoundly all three of them have influenced me, then it is entirely due to my inability to embody and illustrate their influence.

The journey of this dissertation is embedded in the discernment journey of a particular local congregation. As such, this dissertation primarily belongs to the life of this particular congregation. My family and I are deeply thankful for the hospitality of the people of this congregation, and for the ways in which the leadership of this congregation invited us into their journey of discerning how God is bringing forth the future among them. It has been a privilege for us to not only accompany them on this journey over the last few years, but also to call this Christian community our spiritual home in Minnesota.

Finally, my thanks to Luther Seminary for their willingness to accept me as a Ph.D. students a few years ago, and for creating wonderful opportunities on the way in which I could explore my theological vocation. I am proud to be associated with Luther Seminary’s Congregational Mission and Leadership program as one of the most unique approaches to missional leadership in the world.
TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT ........................................................................................................................................ ii

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS .............................................................................................................. iv

Chapter

1. A DIVINE ADVENTURE .............................................................................................................. 1

   The Dissertation Journey ................................................................................................... 2
   Field of Study ....................................................................................................................... 7
   The Local Christian Community .................................................................................... 13
   The Broader Community of the Local Christian Community .................................. 16
   The Civil Society Context of the Local Christian Community ............................... 18
   The Missional Challenge of the Local Christian Community .................................... 27
   The Social Imaginaire of the Local Christian Community ...................................... 30
   Accessing, Cultivating, and Assessing the Missional Imagination .............................. 37

2. MIMESIS: ACCESSING THE PLAYFUL IMAGINATION ........................................... 50

   God’s Future: The Discernment Journey ..................................................................... 54
   The Playful Imagination: Engaging the Discernment Question .............................. 65
   The Phenomenological Imagination: The Habit of Relational Attentiveness ......... 98
   The Trinitarian Imagination: Participating Belonging ............................................. 117

3. BILDUNG: CULTIVATING THE SOCIAL IMAGINAIRE ........................................ 149

   God’s Movement: The Discernment Disclosure ....................................................... 150
   The Social Imaginaire: Engaging the Discernment Reflections ............................ 164
   The Hermeneutical Imagination: The Habit of Critical Reflectiveness ................ 186
   The Pneumatological Imagination: Cultural Transformation ................................. 198

4. POIESIS: ASSESSING THE MISSIONAL IMAGINATION .......................................... 240

   God’s Gift: The Discernment Posture ......................................................................... 242
   The Missional Imagination: Engaging the Discernment Learnings ..................... 254
   The Poetic Imagination: The Habit of Conversational Openness ......................... 273
   The Eschatological Imagination: Receiving Abundance ........................................ 279

5. SUMMARY .......................................................................................................................... 298

APPENDICES .............................................................................................................................. 308

BIBLIOGRAPHY ......................................................................................................................... 345
I dedicate this dissertation to Coenie Burger,
my childhood pastor, student chaplain, colleague,
and mentor in shaping my ecclesiology.
CHAPTER 1
A DIVINE ADVENTURE

How did God become man? As everyone knows, the Lord God was accustomed to spend his mornings reading the Torah, his afternoons regulating the affairs of man, and his evenings playing with the leviathan. As the days passed and passed and passed, the mornings became so tedious and the afternoons so frustrating, that even the delights of play began to pale. The Lord wondered if an event could come to pass. It did. On that day, he had sat on his golden throne as usual, in all power and majesty and surrounded by angels in solemn assembly. At mid-day, he put aside the Torah. He rose and stepped forward with the intention of looking down onto earth and checking up on mankind. A little cherubim had just finished lunch. The Lord God slipped on a banana peel and tumbled head over heels into the world. He became man.1

In response to this story, Robert Neale wrote, "If you are concerned about whether the above story is true or whether it is 'good theology,' stop reading. If you are not so concerned, then we can wonder together about the divine adventure."2 The rest of this dissertation is a journey of wondering (and wandering) together with a local Christian community3 on their divine adventure into the future that God is bringing forth in, among, and through them.4 If adventure is an appropriate metaphor for the spirit of

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2 Ibid.

3 The term local Christian community is preferable as an inclusive term for what is called the local church or local congregation, or for that matter, any other possible forms of local Christian community that are associated with either the term church or congregation.

4 The language of the future that God is bringing forth in, among, and through them is deliberate in the light of this particular local Christian community’s preferred theological language for describing their journey of discernment. Chapter 2 will show how this local Christian community’s divine adventure was directed by their question of discernment on the kind of future they imagine God is bringing forth.
play, then this dissertation represents an adventurous journey into the playful imagination where God, a particular local Christian community, and others in civil society meet as public moral companions for the sake of God’s preferred and promised future in the world.5

The Dissertation Journey

The journey of this dissertation up until its writing stages profoundly determines its eventual approach, structure, and style of writing. Providing the reader right at the beginning with a broad overview in this regard will hopefully avoid some confusion when beginning to participate in the fusion of horizons6 presented in the rest of this dissertation. The basic approach is one of integrating the discernment journey of the local Christian community with the researcher’s reflections via the contributions of a variety of conversation partners from the disciplines of theology, philosophy, cultural

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5 The terms public moral companions (indebted to Gary Simpson) and God’s preferred and promised future (indebted to Patrick Keifert) will take on specific meanings later on in this chapter.

6 The Gadamerian term of fusion of horizons is deliberately used as an early indicator of what is at stake in this dissertation’s approach to truth. What is developed in chapter 3 of this dissertation as a hermeneutic of cultivation for a particular local Christian community in its civil society context is equally true about this dissertation’s research and educational responsibility, namely that truth is cultivated through an endless process of fusion of horizons. The basic assumption behind this dissertation is that an appropriate response to accessing, cultivating, and assessing a particular local Christian community’s socially-embodied theology as their missional imagination in civil society is to allow for the endless contestation between the local and the broader (including the particularity of local embodiment and the theoretical of meta-reflection). Allowing for such a contestation is this dissertation’s participation in the truth that is embodied in the local Christian community’s discernment of the future that God is bringing forth among them. In this sense, this dissertation should be read as an unfolding and ongoing conversation based on the thickness opened up by the local Christian community’s lived experiences of discerning God’s future in, among, and through them.
anthropology, and leadership and organizational theory. Since this integration follows the local Christian community’s journey of discernment through different phases and aspects of discernment, this dissertation is not structured in a way that clearly distinguishes chapters of research data from chapters of reflection and/or chapters of constructive proposals.\(^7\) And since the purpose of this integration is to cultivate an ongoing conversation about accessing, cultivating, and assessing a particular local Christian community’s socially-embodied theology as their missional imagination in civil society, this dissertation is written in a style that is unfolding and opening up rather than summarizing or bringing to closure.\(^8\)

However, there is a very specific pattern to how this integration happens in each of chapters 2-4 (the main chapters reflecting the research journey’s embeddedness in the local Christian community’s discernment journey). Each of these chapters (after a brief introduction that gives an overview of what is to follow in the rest of the chapter) begins with a description of how a particular phase or aspect of the local Christian community’s process of discernment unfolded during the research process.\(^9\) This description is

\(^7\) This aspect is directly related to how this dissertation’s phenomenological research approach is distinguished from other research possibilities (see the end of this chapter, as well as the phenomenological sections in chapters 2-3), and how the structuring of this dissertation is an attempt to illustrate this chosen methodological approach.

\(^8\) Therefore, what is true about this dissertation’s hermeneutic of poiesis as suggested missional posture for the local Christian community’s ongoing conversation about the future that God is bringing forth in, among, and through them in civil society is also true about this dissertation’s style of writing. It is a style of writing that invites the reader on a journey through different phases or aspects of the local Christian community’s process of discernment, and even though the other phases and aspects are simultaneously implied during a particular phase or aspect, the ah-ha experience (if any!) is an unfolding dynamic as the journey proceeds.

\(^9\) Chapter 2 begins with a description of the local Christian community designed a discernment question, and how they invited members to participate in focus group events during which they were asked to engage this discernment question via imaginative activities. Chapter 3 begins with a description of how the local Christian community interpreted what emerged from these focus group events. And chapter 4 begins with a description of how the local Christian community engaged in an ongoing conversation about their interpretation of what emerged during the focus group events. Each of these three chapters
followed in each of these chapters with a reflection on the process via the insights of Peter Block, a leadership and organizational consultant. In the middle part of each of these chapters, careful attention is paid to what emerged relevant to this particular phase or aspect of the local Christian community’s process of discernment. In each of these chapters, this attentiveness to what emerged in the local Christian community’s process of discernment then becomes the basis for reflection on three different levels, namely a framing of what is at stake in this particular phase or aspect of the local Christian community’s process of discernment with regard to the history of imagination, a meta-theoretical reflection with regard to a philosophical hermeneutic of what is at stake in this particular phase or aspect of the local Christian community’s process of discerning the future that God is bringing forth among them, and a methodological reflection on how this dissertation’s phenomenological research approach is related to that particular phase corresponds to one dynamic of the threefold research interest of how to access, cultivate, and assess this local Christian community’s missional imagination. Chapter 2 addresses the question of accessing this imagination, chapter 3 addresses the question of cultivating this imagination, and chapter 4 addresses the question of assessing this imagination.

A specific historical framework is used to explore the historical development of imagination, namely Richard Kearney’s account of this history through the lenses of pre-modern, modern, and post-modern characteristics. It is beyond the scope of this dissertation to thoroughly engage Kearney’s historical and philosophical interpretation of the imagination with other sources in this regard, and it is merely used as a conversation partner for the purposes of a heuristic framework that sets up the meta-theoretical conversation that follows Kearney’s historical framework in each of these chapters. Its function of setting up these meta-theoretical conversations is to provide a characterization of what is deconstructed in the next meta-theoretical section.

Chapter 2 is presented as a hermeneutic of mimesis that rehabilitates or reclaims mimesis from its association with imitation. Chapter 3 is presented as a hermeneutic of Bildung that rehabilitates or reclaims Bildung from a constructivist understanding more associated with Einbildungskraft. Chapter 4 is presented as a hermeneutic of poiesis that rehabilitates or reclaims poiesis from a merely creative association. Mimesis (chapter 2) is rehabilitated as a playful imagination (with the help of Gadamer); Bildung (chapter 3) is rehabilitated as a hermeneutical imagination (with the help of Gadamer and Ricoeur); and, poiesis is rehabilitated as an ethical imagination associated with a missional imagination (with the help of Kearney, Marion, and Westphal).
or aspect of the local Christian community’s process of discernment. These three levels of reflection are followed in each chapter by how the local Christian community articulates a particular dynamic or thread that indicates the kind of future that they have discerned God is bringing forth among them. This particular dynamic or thread then becomes the basis for a last section of theological reflection.

Pointing out this common pattern to each of chapters 2-4 should prepare the reader on when to distinguish in each of these chapters between the voice of the local Christian community and the voices of the researcher’s different types of conversations partners. However, this does not guarantee the ability to always make such clear distinctions when, in the fusion of horizons, the playful imagination of the conversation between the local Christian community’s process of discernment and the researcher’s conversation partners take place during the researcher’s reflections on these integrations. If any lack of clarity is due to such fusion of horizons (rather than the real possibility of confusion due to the researcher’s lack of clarity), then there is hopefully a chance for this dissertation to participate in a truth that transcends either a romanticization or

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12 What is at stake in a phenomenological approach to these three different phases or aspects of the methodological interest in accessing, cultivating, and assessing respectively is the habit of relational attentiveness (chapter 2), the habit of critical reflectiveness (chapter 3), and the habit of conversational openness (chapter 4). The methodological reflections in these sections of the three chapters engage these habits in relationship to what the local Christian community has done during these respective phases or aspects of their discernment process.

13 These three threads are articulated as relationships-diversity-openness (providing the theological impulses in chapter 2) mystery-Eucharist-spiritual practices (providing the theological impulses in chapter 3), and continuity-change-abundance (providing the theological impulses in chapter 4).

14 In chapter 2 the local Christian community’s thread of relationships-diversity-openness provides the theological impulse for a trinitarian theology rooted in a relational ontology and based on a relational interpretation of the biblical imago Dei. In chapter 3 the local Christian community’s thread of mystery-Eucharist-spiritual practices provides the theological impulse for a pneumatology based on God’s transformative communion in relationship with others. And in chapter 4 the local Christian community’s thread of continuity-change-abundance provides the theological impulse for an eschatology based on God’s promises and embodied in the local Christian community’s trust.
mischaracterization of the research community through the researcher’s hearing of their voice, and/or a transcendence of the control of the researcher through either an abstraction or manipulation of their voice.\textsuperscript{15}

This integrated approach begs the question on the nature of the relationship between what emerged during the local Christian community’s journey of discernment and the researcher’s conversation partners via the researcher’s reflections on the local Christian community’s journey of discernment. It is already suggested so far that this relationship is a \textit{conversational} relationship for the sake of opening up possibilities of participating in the truth of this local Christian community’s discernment of the future that God is bringing forth in, among, and through them.\textsuperscript{16} It is not a deductive or inductive relationship (see later in this chapter), but rather one in which possibilities emerge for an ongoing reflection about accessing, cultivating, and assessing a local Christian community’s socially-embodied theology as their missional imagination in civil society when readers of this dissertation participate in this ongoing conversation.

The first and last chapter of this dissertation function purely as the researcher’s attempt to situate this dissertation’s journey within its research interest and broader fields of study (chapter 1), and to explore the continuation of an ongoing conversation based on

\textsuperscript{15} The choice to write almost the entire dissertation in the third person has its advantages and disadvantages with regard to the need for distinguishing between the voice of the researcher and the voice of the local Christian community. Writing in the first person would certainly help for avoiding any unnecessary or even unhealthy confusion due to a lack of appropriate boundaries between roleplayers. However, it could also inhibit the dynamics of a healthy fusion of horizons for the sake of something new to emerge that transcends the I of the researcher and/or the we of the researched community. What may be at stake far beyond a mere risk of confusion is the very nature of \textit{communion} and the critical moments of difference and otherness within such communion.

\textsuperscript{16} Such conversational relationship explores the conditions of possibility for the local Christian community’s discernment journey to be an embodiment of the researcher’s reflections via these conversation partners, and/or for these reflections to illuminate the journey of discernment (depending on the issue at stake for a particular audience engaging this conversational relationship at a particular point in time).
the impulses that emerged during this dissertation's journey (chapter 5). It is exactly at
the point of attempting to situate this dissertation within its proper field of study that the
rest of this journey continues.

**The Field of Study**

From a research perspective, this dissertation is a divine adventure into a very
specific field of play called *the local congregation*. This dissertation explores theology
from within the life of a particular local Christian community. The field of study is the
lived experiences of a particular local Christian community within their broader
community contexts. As such, this dissertation situates itself within a movement that
argues for a return of the local congregation in theological education.\(^{17}\) The attempt of
this study to do theology from within the lived experiences of a particular local Christian
community, with a research interest in accessing, cultivating, and assessing their socially-
embodied theology, is an attempt to illustrate a particular embodiment of such a return of
the local congregation in theological education.\(^{18}\)

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\(^{17}\) Patrick R. Keifert, "The Return of the Congregation: Missional Warrants," *Word & World* 20,
no. 4 (2000).

\(^{18}\) Even though this dissertation has as its purpose to be an illustration of the kind of return of the
local congregation to theological education that Patrick Keifert argues for (see next paragraph), the primary
academic field of interest is not religious or theological education. In consistency with the argument that
Keifert makes about how the local congregation should feature with regard to theological education, the
field of study is in fact *the local congregation*. Given the purpose of being an illustration of this kind of
return of the local congregation to theological education, it is without a doubt that this dissertation's
research journey is also profoundly relevant to the fields of religious and theological education. However,
as will become clear in how the rest of this chapter sets up the rest of this dissertation, the primary interest
behind this dissertation’s purpose to illustrate the return of the local congregation to theological education
is to explore a particular local Christian community’s socially-embodied *missional ecclesiology* in civil
society. The main interest is in a particular local Christian community as *productive center of theology* in
civil society (defined in this dissertation as *missional*) rather than a *productive center of theological
education* per se (see next paragraph). Therefore, even though what this dissertation’s attempt to explore a
particular local Christian community’s production of theology is an illustration of has everything to do with
how the local congregation returns to theological education, and even though the relevance to the fields of
religious and theological education will be a pronounced underlying thread in how this dissertation
explores a particular local Christian community’s production of theology, it is (for the sake of focusing on
The suggestion of a return does not indicate that local Christian communities have disappeared from the theological education scene in more recent time, but it rather argues for a different relationship between theological education and local Christian communities that leads to a different way of doing theology all together. What is at stake in this return is a change from locating the local Christian community “as primary recipient of the products of theological education” to “the primal center for the study of theology and productive center of theology and theological education.” This change challenges the underlying theory/practice divide of an approach to theological education in which the institutions of theological education are responsible for the study of theology, while local Christian communities then only become the places (objects) where the products of theological education get applied. Instead, considering a particular local Christian communities as such a productive center of theology is the challenge that this research adventure takes on.

Therefore, this dissertation represents an attempt at an embodied theology that is embedded in a particular local Christian community’s processes of producing theology as it is shaped by their habits and practices of discerning God in their context. As the attempt unfolds, some of the radical consequences for the return of the local congregation in theological education will become clear in relation to both this dissertation’s research methodology and this particular local Christian community’s production of theology.

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20 Therefore, this movement is not even to be confused with the congregational studies movement as the study of congregations. Keifert writes, “ironically, even the congregational studies movement becomes another commodity to be used on congregations, since so little of this scholarship has congregations as the chief productive agents of the study or production of theology.” Ibid.: 370.
The Research Question

Given this dissertation's primary interest in exploring a particular local Christian community’s production of theology in their broader contexts, this dissertation’s research journey from within the lived experiences of a particular local Christian community was initiated and guided by a research interest in how to access, cultivate, and assess such a particular local Christian community’s production of their socially-embodied theology for the sake of God’s mission in the world.21 It is primarily a methodological interest both from a research perspective and the perspective of this particular local Christian community’s own processes of producing theology. It is a methodological interest that is driven by a sensitivity not to objectify the research community for the sake of theological education only, but instead, to take the research adventure into the primary journey of the research community’s own production of theology as it is shaped by their processes of discerning their participation in God’s mission in the world.

Therefore, the aim of this dissertation’s research journey was, first of all, to be embedded in the processes of discernment initiated by a particular local Christian community, and secondly, for the research and discernment processes to converge as one journey on which the researcher and the research community are co-learners for the sake of both the researcher’s methodological interest and this community’s processes of producing theology. As will be indicated throughout this dissertation, the embodiment of such an approach turned out to create an in-between environment of co-learning in which

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21 I use the term production of theology to be consistent with Patrick Keifert’s metaphor of describing the local congregation as a productive center of theology (see above). In this dissertation, production of theology refers to a particular local Christian community’s specific process of communal discernment during which it emerged how they understand God truly in their specific context. See also David H. Kelsey, To Understand God Truly: What’s Theological About a Theological School? (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992).
the mutual contributions of the researcher and research community took on a life of its own. It created a playing field on which the distinction of methodological interest and production of theology blurred into a socially-embodied theology of this particular local Christian community.

Most of the rest of this first chapter contains the development of the original research interest into a more nuanced, and very specific research question. It provides a framework for how this dissertation’s research interest in a particular local Christian community’s discernment of their participation in God’s mission in the world is shaped and refined by a convergence of theological and cultural flows in the particularities of their existence in the world. It shows how such a theo-cultural convergence takes place in, among, and through the local Christian community’s cultural embeddedness in their broader community, their interconnectedness with other institutions in civil society, and their existence during a missional era (which some call post-christendom). In exploring how to access, cultivate, and assess such a theo-cultural convergence constituted by all these dynamics, this dissertation’s research journey approaches a particular local Christian community’s theo-cultural convergence as what is sometimes described in philosophy and cultural anthropology as a *social imaginaire*.\(^{22}\)

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\(^{22}\) Chapters 2 and 3 will elaborate on the understanding and function of a *social imaginaire* in this dissertation, but two basic definitions from philosophy and cultural anthropology respectively can provide a provisional background to the discussion. Charles Taylor describes it as “the ways in which they imagine their social existence, how they fit together with others, how things go on between them and their fellows, the expectations which are normally met, and the deeper, normative notions and images which underlie these expectations.” Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), 171. Arjun Appadurai describes it as “*the imagination as a social practice*” that is “no longer mere fantasy (opium for the masses whose real work is elsewhere), no longer simple escape (from a world defined principally by more concrete purposes and structures), no longer elite pastime (thus not relevant to the lives of ordinary people), and no longer mere contemplation (irrelevant for new forms of desire and subjectivity),” but “a form of negotiation between sites of agency (individuals) and globally defined fields of possibility.” Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*, Public Worlds (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 31.
Developing this dissertation's research interest through all these dynamics will lead to the formulation of a more specific research question, namely how to access, cultivate, and assess a particular local Christian community's socially-embodied theology as their missional imagination in civil society. Exploring this question was facilitated by a particular local Christian community's invitation to me as the researcher to become a participant in their processes of discerning the future that God is bringing forth in, among, and through them in civil society.

The Researcher

The invitation from this particular local Christian community (called the LC in this dissertation) was not only for me as the researcher to be a participant and facilitator in their processes of discernment, but to also join their staff on a part time basis. The Governance Board of the LC requested and authorized my participant involvement with their continuing efforts to lead the LC in discerning their missional vocation in civil society.

As someone who has been involved in structures, ministries, and discernment processes of the LC, my participation and interpretations during the research journey, and the subsequent writing of this dissertation, are shaped by this embedded position in relationship to the life of the LC. From this perspective, I am also a co-stakeholder in the long term effects of this research intervention in the congregation's ongoing processes of discernment. As will be indicated later in this chapter, the very understanding of the underlying research approach and methodology of this study requires the researcher to take up a position of an inside participant rather than an outside observer during the research process.
However, it also asks for a special concern for this research journey and dissertation’s ethical requirements related to data collection, analysis, storage of data, and especially the distinctions between research and the LC’s ongoing process of discernment. All focus group events, and other conversations related to this research and discernment process, promised anonymity to participants, and that all references in written or visual material that would identify individuals or the identity of the LC will be expunged from public reports and analysis. At the beginning of all events, meetings, or sessions, I always explained the integrated nature of the LC’s process of discernment and my dissertation research project, before asking participants to read and sign consent forms for their participation. During these explanations, all participants were informed that transcripts of conversations would be available to the Governance Board of the LC for the sake of other levels of interpretation and ongoing conversation related to the LC’s process of discernment. Some quotations from the transcripts were also used in a presentation at the annual meeting of the LC, but always in an anonymous way, and as an illustration of the threads emerging from the focus group events for ongoing conversation.

Video recordings of events, meetings, or sessions were only used for transcription purposes, and were not viewed by anyone else than myself and the transcriber. Occasionally, screen shots of some of the visual illustrations during conversations were included in the transcripts, but always without identifying persons participating in the process. Names of participants are deleted from all data files. Data will be stored for a three-year period and protected in electronic form by passwords, while all paper versions will be secured in a locked box. The data will be destroyed after three years. All names of
participants in the system will be changed in the published accounts of the research. The names of any other local Christian communities or civil society institutions will not be used in published accounts of the research.

**The Local Christian Community**

Given the explicit aim of this dissertation to explore theology from within a particular local Christian community, and my own position as the researcher in the LC, this dissertation is primarily shaped by its research journey within the LC. The LC is a local Christian community in a Mid-West city of the United States, with its church building located in a mid-town area of this city. The LC exists since the late-1900s, and has a membership of a few hundred members (worship attendance of 150 to 180 people on average) of whom a significant number have residential addresses in other areas of the city than the immediate neighborhoods of the church building. The immediate neighborhoods host a variety of educational institutions, and therefore consist of a rich intergenerational, international, and inter-cultural diversity of people of whom a significant number are academics, students, and artists.\(^2\)\(^3\) The LC’s diverse membership represents a variety of people from these immediate constituencies, and those who are prepared to drive long distances to associate themselves with the LC.

In terms of the LC’s most recent history, the 1980s and 1990s were characterized by a period of growth and relative stability. The growth was due largely to an intentional

\(^2\) The current pastor describes the “demographics of the neighborhood” as follow: “As would be expected, the educational level of ‘Park’ residents is above average, with 29% having post graduate degrees. The population in the neighborhood surrounding the church is 80% Caucasian, with Asian, African American, multiracial and Latino populations making up the remaining 20%. The residents are split between family and non-family households, with as many rental as owner occupied properties, not unusual for a university neighborhood. The majority of residents are in the 25 to 44 age range.” (From a PowerPoint presentation by the current pastor, October 2008).
outreach to younger families with children. This period of growth and stability was disrupted about six to seven years ago by the resignation of the pastor, followed by a two-year interim period of uncertainty, conflict, and membership decline. The current pastor was called to the LC about five years ago with the explicitly articulated desire of some members "to go deeper spiritually." As will be indicated in chapter 3, this desire continues to be an integral dynamic to the LC’s production of theology.

The current pastor describes “the lay of the land” at arrival five years ago as follow:

...little clarity on "core" Christian and denominational beliefs, and how they are related; church identified more with being denominational than Christian; fear that being more explicitly Christian will make the church more conservative, narrow-minded, and intolerant toward other religions; fear of biblical and theological differences bringing conflict; desire to focus on spiritual practices rather than beliefs; strong social justice commitments and impulse "to do," often without a theological or biblical rationale; impulse "to do" without discernment, prayer, or reflection; little understanding of God as active and alive, as calling the LC to partner with God in God's work in our community; lots of competing social justice ministries overseen by individuals, not teams; question "what is God up to" never asked; church and faith mainly a Sunday affair; lots of lone ranger ministry, with a high burn out rate; main adult formation offering (on Sunday) focused on critiquing the Christian faith and its history rather than sharing the treasures of the Christian tradition.

These theo-cultural contours described five years ago will continue to emerge in this dissertation’s research journey as important dynamics in shaping the LC’s continuous journey of discerning how to participate in God’s mission in the world. Specific mention should be made of the Godly Play faith formation program for little children that was already in place when the pastor arrived. The current pastor tells, “the quality of this

24 From a PowerPoint presentation by the current pastor, October 2008.

25 Ibid.
program spread by word of mouth, and parents (even those who didn’t attend church or attended church but went to a local coffee shop during the LC’s education hour) brought their children... the church grew to be at least one-third age 12 or younger.”26 This history of a passion for the children in their midst, and an imagination for play as an important mode of being together, would become a significant dynamic in this dissertation journey from within the LC’s lived experience of discerning God (see especially chapter 2).

The LC’s social justice ministries represent a strong passion of a large number of LC members to be actively involved in their broader neighborhood and community. These engagements are almost exclusively via projects related to social and justice issues in the community, but the commitments to these projects are of a high intensity. These projects include four major partnerships with other community or civil society institutions on providing shelter to the homeless, low cost housing to people with very little income, providing meals to the jobless, and running an orphanage in an African country. Apart from these four major partnerships, the LC also supports the work of a number of community- and church-based social services, as well as their own project helping the children of immigrants with their homework during the week. This passion for community or civil society involvement would become a distinct and pronounced contour shaping the landscapes of this dissertation’s research journey from within the LC’s lived experiences of discerning God (see especially chapters 3 and 4).

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26 Ibid.
The Broader Community of the Local Christian Community

The significant way in which the LC's interconnectedness with their broader community shapes the culture of this local Christian community, and constitutes theological meaning to the understanding of their vocation, emphasizes the importance for this dissertation's research journey to account for the interwovenness of such theological contours that are shaping their lived experiences of discerning God. Producing theology from within the LC is strongly characterized by the ecology of meaning constituted through this interconnected dynamic between the LC and its broader community. In elaborating on the importance of this aspect in the life of the LC, the research journey finds a conversation partner in the field of congregational studies that illuminates this important aspect.

Nancy Ammerman on Congregation and Community

In exploring the relationship between congregation and community through a number of case studies, Ammerman found that "congregations are a part of a community's institutional infrastructure, a part of the structures and connections that make social life possible." These structures and connections are not "neutral shells," but "living networks of meaning and activity, constructed by the individuals and collective agents who inhabit and sustain them." It forms an "ecology" in which "new life forms

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28 Ibid. Ammerman's network metaphor is relevant to this dissertation's attempt to describe the local Christian community's embeddedness in such an interconnected community infrastructure in terms of a convergence between the theological and cultural, exactly because, as L. Michael White puts it, "One of the great advantages of network theory is that it does not presuppose any one social or cultural symbol system. Rather it derives both the nature and the normative value of different types of relationships from the specific social context being studied." L. Michael White, "Social Networks: Theoretical Orientation and Historical Applications," Semeia no. 56 (1991): 29.
are constantly emerging, as old ones fade from the scene."\textsuperscript{29} These structures of relationship between actors are referred to as "social capital," namely "the social stuff of our lives together, the networks of skill and trust that makes civil life possible."\textsuperscript{30} Within these broader networks of societal structures and connections, the congregation is "a space of sociability" that is more than "merely the product of individual choices," but rather "a community, a public, a collective, a piece of the larger societal whole."\textsuperscript{31}

Given Ammerman's findings in the field of congregational studies, and playing off her metaphors of describing the relationship between congregation and community, this dissertation is shaped by a research journey from within the interconnected infrastructure of the LC and its broader community as such a public space of sociability that transcends individual choices. As such, the research journey can be considered the theological participation in the social capital of an ecology shaped by an intricate landscape of theo-cultural contours as networks of meaning and activity. It is a participation that not only finds it impossible to untangle these intricate theo-cultural contours into static relationships between the local Christian community and the cultural flows of its broader communities,\textsuperscript{32} but also explores the emergence of new possibilities

\textsuperscript{29} Ammerman and Farnsley, Congregation & Community, 346.

\textsuperscript{30} Ibid., 347. Ammerman's inclusion of trust in her definition of social capital is significant from the perspective of the local Christian community's embeddedness in the interconnected infrastructure of broader communities. It opens the possibility of engaging the convergence of the theological and cultural with the prominent theological category of trust, especially as an eschatological hermeneutic for the local Christian community's participation in a trustworthy world based on God's trustworthiness (as will be evident in chapter 4 of this dissertation). For the prominence of trust in definitions of social capital, and its theological implications, see also Paul Varo Martinson, "Social Capital and the New Missionary Pragmatics," Word & World 18, no. 2 (1998): 155-65.

\textsuperscript{31} Ammerman and Farnsley, Congregation & Community, 354.

\textsuperscript{32} The impossibility of untangling these theo-cultural contours into static relationships will be fully explored in chapter 2 with the help of the cultural anthropologist, Arjun Appadurai.
when the local and the broader meet in the convergence of theological and cultural impulses that transcends individual agency. Exploring the emergence of new possibilities from within such a convergence of the theological and cultural is exactly what shaped this dissertation’s research interests in the first place. The LC’s production of theology from within this theo-cultural convergence gives this research journey the opportunity for exploring such interest.

The Civil Society Context of the Local Christian Community

These intricate theo-cultural contours of the LC’s embeddedness in the broader social capital of an ecology of interconnected networks of meaning and activity run through a variety of different landscapes. These landscapes include, among other, spheres of the personal, the family, lifeworld, public life, politics, economics, and the institutional. From a corporate point of view on the life of the LC, a first and obvious interconnection takes place on an institutional level when the LC engages in the broader community through projects of partnership with and through other organizations in society. In many western contexts, such as the LC’s context, this kind of institutional involvement in a sociological sphere between the lifeworld on the one hand, and the megasystems of politics and economics on the other hand, is characterized as a civil society engagement. In this regard, the research journey from within the LC’s

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33 For a brief civil society “archaeology of an idea,” see John L. Comaroff and Jean Comaroff, Civil Society and the Political Imagination in Africa: Critical Perspectives (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 3-15. It is beyond the scope of this dissertation to address the civil society debate in all its nuances, except for exploring its sociological landscapes for the sake of the LC’s socially-embodied and theological participation in the ecology of meaning established by their civil society interconnectedness and partnerships. Otto Scharmer makes special mention of how the birth of civil society as a global force is part of a “revolution from within,” which “emerged as major actors and driving forces in the four pivotal historic events that shaped the last four decades of the twentieth century,” namely “the rise of the civil rights movement in the 1960’s; the rise of the environmental movement in the 1970’s; the rise of the peace and human rights movement and the collapse of the Cold War system and of communism in Eastern
interconnected ecology of meaning constituted also by their institutional partnerships finds a conversation partner that reflects theologically on congregation and civil society.

Gary Simpson on Congregations as Public Moral Companions in Civil Society

Simpson distinguishes between two dimensions of how the “everyday world” of people are integrated, namely how such “cultural embodiment, social integration, and socialization have both a symbolic-metaphorical-linguistic dimension and an institutional dimension.” The local Christian community is one such institution that embodies people’s participation in these interconnected networks that Simpson calls civil society. Simpson argues for especially paying attention to this institutional dimension of the local Christian community’s participation in the theo-cultural landscapes constituted by their civil society interconnectedness and partnerships, because on the one hand, it will “diminish the colonizing effects of the marketplace and its media of money as well as of the state and its media of administrative power,” while on the other hand, and at the same time, it “will provide the more private spaces of our everyday world with a richer moral milieu than is possible when each solitary individual – or family – is trying to stitch together its own moral fabric.”

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There is no "correct" or "fixed" definition of civil society, and how it is defined "largely determines priorities and approaches for working with it." Therefore, any generic understanding of civil society, as a transplantable conceptual model to different contexts, and detached from the particularities of specific realities, is highly questionable. The conventional identification of civil society in Western contexts as a "third sector" or sociological "space or sphere" in relation to both the everyday lifeworld of individuals and the megasystems of politics and economics, "in which social movements become organized," seems to be enough of a minimal indication for what is at stake.

For Simpson, this refers to a "sociological location" in which there is a "vast, spontaneously emergent, ever dynamic plurality of networks, associations, institutions, and movements for the prevention and promotion of this, that, and the other thing." Simpson borrows his conceptualization of civil society from Jurgen Habermas' particular understanding of these institutional relationships at the intersection of "the political

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36 As indicated by Chaplowe and Engo-Tjega, "civil society is a complex and contested concept with multiple interpretations" and it "is a very malleable concept, easily co-opted to serve various interests and causes." Scott Chaplowe, G. and Ruth Bamela Engo-Tjega, "Civil Society Organizations and Evaluation: Lessons from Africa," Evaluation 13, no. 2 (2007): 258-59.

37 In considering how the concept generally "evoke a polythetic clutch of signs" and how it has "a slippery, equivocal quality" to it in specifically African contexts, John and Jean Comaroff ask the question, "could this have something to do with the fact that Europeans who impute to Africa a lack of anything qualified by the adjective 'civil' seldom ground their claims in empirical observation; in the interrogation, 'on the ground,' of existing forms of association and aspiration, of participatory politics and public life, past and present?" Comaroff and Comaroff, Civil Society and the Political Imagination in Africa: Critical Perspectives, 2-3.


public sphere” and “the lifeworld” of people. In this regard, Simpson explains civil society as follows,

Civil society arises from the thick network of life histories grounded in the private lives and lifeworld of citizens. It is a vast and pluralistic institutional threshold that emerges unpredictably from the lifeworld. It emerges when personal life histories mesh with other life histories while sharing and processing the moral wisdom rooted in the lifeworld. This is civil society's internal relationship with the lifeworld. Externally, as a threshold, institutions of civil society function as a “sluice” for the flow of moral wisdom. Such wisdom issues from the lifeworld into the political public sphere to form public opinion. In this way, civil society and the political public sphere form a two-sided threshold between the megasystems of the state and economy, on the one hand, and the lifeworld, on the other.40

This dissertation not only accepts Simpson’s basic definition of civil society for the purposes of the LC’s broader community context, but also subscribes to the importance of accessing and cultivating the moral responsibility of local Christian communities in civil society.41 In fact, this study was inspired to a large extent by Simpson’s challenge to cultivate missional congregations that are “public moral companions” in civil society.42 In this dissertation, the LC is approached as an integral part of the interwovenness and interrelations of societal movements, networks and

40 Simpson, Critical Social Theory: Prophetic Reason, Civil Society, and Christian Imagination, 122. Simpson quotes Habermas’s description of civil society as “...composed of those more or less spontaneously emergent associations, organizations, and movements that, attuned to how societal problems resonate in the private life spheres, distill and transmit such reactions in amplified form to the (political) public sphere. The core of civil society comprises a network of associations that institutionalizes problem-solving discourses on questions of general interest inside the framework of organized public spheres.” Simpson, Critical Social Theory: Prophetic Reason, Civil Society, and Christian Imagination, 122.


institutions in such a sociological location, space or sphere. It is not only critically important to discern what all the this, that, and the other things are that the LC has a moral responsibility to help prevent and promote as a public companion within these institutional networks and movements, but also to discern the possibilities for such public moral companionship from within the lived experience of the life of this particular local Christian community.

In this sense, the research journey of this dissertation follows a different route than addressing the issue at stake from an institutional perspective per se. It seeks the same missional purpose of cultivating local congregations as public moral companions in civil society, but asks the question from within the lived experience of the LC as a particular local Christian community rather than explicitly or primarily from within the institutional networks that the LC participates in. The question during this dissertation’s research journey was rather, how does the LC produces theology for their possibilities of being public moral companions within their interconnected engagements in civil society? Such a production of theology will of course also be shaped from within their current interconnectedness and partnerships in civil society, but this research journey’s interest in accessing and cultivating the LC’s production of theology is more a cultural than institutional interest. Therefore, it seeks to access possibilities for the LC’s public moral companionships in civil society from within the lived experiences (culture) of the LC rather than their network of (institutional) relationships in civil society, while subscribing to the importance and necessity of research related to local Christian community’s institutional networks in civil society.43

43 This dissertation recognize the multiple other possibilities of access to the same purpose, especially the studying of the actual institutional relationships between a particular local Christian
This dissertation's research journey asks the question of access and cultivation from the perspective that Simpson would probably call a more *symbolic-metaphorical-linguistic* perspective.\(^{44}\) However, at the core of this research journey is an interest in how, despite the otherwise helpful heuristic distinctions between private and public, as well as an in-between sociological space between the lifeworld and the megasystems of politics and economics, a cultural perspective may be able to show the fluidity and integral nature of these distinctions when it converges in the lived experience of the ordinary life of a particular local Christian community such as the LC.

The interest of this dissertation is in accessing and cultivating the LC’s public moral companionship from within the intersection of Simpson’s two dimensions where the institutional participation is embedded in the soils of theo-cultural shapings constituted by both the *symbolic-metaphorical-linguistic* and *institutional* dimensions, and how theology is produced from within this integration for the sake of public moral companionship.\(^{45}\) This dissertation suggests that what Simpson calls the equally important task in local Christian communities of a “more internal” and a “more external”

\(^{44}\) See again footnote 22 in this chapter.

\(^{45}\) Wolfhart Pannenberg, in his theological anthropology, talks about “the cultural meaning of social institutions” when he not only grounds “the unity of a culture” in “a communal consciousness of meaning which establishes the social world as an orderly place, permeates it, and, in the beginning, is represented in communal play” (mediated through the symbolic and linguistic), but also shows how this permeation by the communal consciousness of meaning “determines the order of the shared world, an order comprising the methodical ways in which individuals live together. These ways or forms are called ‘institutions’” (integration of the symbolic and linguistic with the institutional). Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Anthropology in Theological Perspective*, trans. Matthew J. O'Connell (New York: T & T Clark, 2004), 397-98.
moral formation is an integrated formational task in which the "internal" and "external" cannot be a too static distinction given the fluid reality of theo-cultural dynamics, and also needs its co-dependence for what this dissertation will later on call missional imagination (see especially chapter 4).

In his attempt to set up the civil society conversation for local Christian communities' missional discernment, Simpson gives an indication of what is at stake for the church from an institutional perspective when situated within the ambiguous sociological space of civil society. Using Habermas' three models of democracy, Simpson provides "three different modes of civil society" that "impinge in three different ways on civil society's contribution to the economy and state and to the lifeworld," and what the implications are for "the Christian prophetic imagination." These modes lay out the land for exploring the intersection of the missional and civil society conversations.

For Simpson, two of these modes are problematic for the posture of a local Christian community within the convergence of theological impulses and cultural flows in civil society. The first represents an agonistic understanding of the church as Christian communal tradition among others, namely that "within the public space of civil society each rival communal tradition presents itself as a pure, self-sufficient, and cohesive

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Simpson, Critical Social Theory: Prophetic Reason, Civil Society, and Christian Imagination, 137.

Both the argument for the convergence of theological impulses and cultural flows, and the institutional positioning of the church in a post-christendom civil society, makes it problematic for an understanding of a local Christian community as “admired moral masters” in either a theocratic or sectarian sense. The second mode represents the liberal ethos of civil society with its agenda “to squelch the moral elitist and totalizing consequences of the agonistic civil society.” However, it promotes a “constraint of neutrality” that is equally problematic in its implications for a local Christian community’s public positioning, namely to reduce it to the “private” sphere of individual’s choices based on their personal values.

Given how the current pastor describes the lay of the land when s/he arrived at the LC five years ago (mentioned earlier in this chapter under the section on the local Christian community), the LC’s theo-cultural landscapes reflect a strong liberal ethos with a sensitivity to avoid being agonistic (elitist and totalizing) in their socially-embodied participation with others and in the broader institutional community. In the light of this, one of the important dynamics of this dissertation’s research journey from within the LC’s lived experiences will be to explore the extent to which this also means that their community or civil society engagements (through their many projects) are confined to acts of benevolence based on the private choices of church members, or


50 Chapter 4 of this dissertation provides a hermeneutic of poiesis in which an ethical turn is of the utmost importance for missional imagination, and also opens up an alternative mode of moral companionship than the agonistic approach.

whether it operates as a socially-embodied public theology that shapes their discernment of God in civil society (and how they participate in God’s public involvement).  

In the midst of these two problematic models, and using the best impulses from both, Simpson argues for a communicative mode that he borrows from a paradigm of communicative rationality and action. This mode enhances participatory and communicative practices that can lead to the anticipation of new possibilities to emerge from within the theo-cultural convergence of the local Christian community’s participation in civil society, despite the power flows of distortions and manipulations embedded in this very same convergence. “This anticipation,” Simpson writes, “depends on thick moral traditions becoming socially embodied and mutually engaging according to communicative procedures and by means of communicative practices.”

This dissertation’s research journey from within the lived experiences of the LC, as an attempt to access, cultivate, and assess their production of theology shaped within the interwovenness of the theo-cultural contours of these intricate landscapes of the life of the LC in civil society, is an attempt to explore the thick, socially-embodied moral traditions that shape the LC’s civil society engagements with other institutions. Entering this socially-embodied theo-cultural landscapes of the LC’s production of theology brings together their interconnectedness with the life of civil society and their missional vocation of participating in the life of God’s mission in the world.

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52 Chapter 3 provides a pneumatological imagination for moving beyond religious privatization to public transformation and chapter 4’s hermeneutic of poiesis suggests an alternative communal and participatory ethos to the liberal ethos.

53 Simpson, Critical Social Theory: Prophetic Reason, Civil Society, and Christian Imagination, 139.

54 Ibid.
The Missional Challenge of the Local Christian Community

Theological reflections on the theo-cultural contours of a local Christian community’s socially-embodied participation in civil society and their broader community also takes on the shape of what some theologians would call *missional theology*. Missional implies certain theological assumptions about the church’s position in relation to the presence and activity of God in the world (the church as participant in God’s mission rather than primary agents of missions), and also certain cultural assumptions about the church’s position in the western world (especially with regard to more European and North American contexts). The integration of these theo-cultural assumptions into a *missional ecclesiology* became relevant during a period in history that many would describe as a *post-christendom* era. A changing context from christendom to post-christendom influences the nature of the church’s modes of being as public moral companion in civil society and the interconnected networks of the church’s

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broader communities, and is an underlying thread to what is at stake in the three different civil society modes referenced to by Simpson.

Technically, *christendom* refers to the church’s relationship to culture as “an official ecclesiastical status through legal establishment,” but functionally to how the church “contributed to the formation of a dominant culture that bore the deep imprint of Christian values, language, and expectations regarding moral behaviors.” Post-christendom refers then to the era after several disestablishments took place that eroded the functional ability of the church to play the role of moral formation in the same way than before these disestablishments. However, the missional theological conversation usually explores and emphasizes the post-christendom era as a fruitful era of opportunity rather than negatively defining it in relationship to a mourned past. This dissertation’s research journey from within the lived experience of the LC finds Patrick Keifert a relevant conversation partner in this regard.

**Patrick Keifert on the Missional Era of Local Christian Communities**

Keifert prefers the “much more positive, hopeful, and challenging description” of a *new missional era* rather than the post-language of post-christendom, post-modernism, or post-Constantinian. The reason for this is theological. It creates the opportunity to build Christian community around a “shared positive faith in the promises of God” rather

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60 Keifert, *We Are Here Now*, 26.
than “a negative emotion.”\textsuperscript{61} It is stimulated by a particular understanding of the church’s participation in the life of God who is always present and active in the world (\textit{missio Dei}). Keifert writes,

\begin{quote}
This is God’s mission, not ours. This is God’s mission and not just the church’s, for it is the reign of God that is near, not just the church. The reign of God is far more than the church, though of course the church continuously experiences the breaking in of the reign of God. Imagine the reign of God as the space and time, will and movement of God that is at hand (but not in hand), that is present and creating the church but always more than, and even at times over against, the church and culture.\textsuperscript{62}
\end{quote}

Keifert’s preference for more constructive and positive theological language to describe the missional challenge is obviously not a denial of the dramatic changes in the church’s position in the cultural flows of especially Western European and North American contexts. The dramatic change is especially clear in transformations on denominational levels in the USA. Keifert describes it in terms of the “marginalization” of denominations, “identity confusion” because of that, and with the result of “tremendous disaffection among members.”\textsuperscript{63} However, despite the seriousness of the dramatic changes at stake, Keifert is convinced that the situation is a lot more complex than an analysis of complete despair, especially those who read anything post-Christian in this situation. He writes, “Post-Christian sounds to me like the ranting of mainliners used to presumptive importance, or the predictions of overly triumphant secularists, or the expressions of hope of the growing number of faithful of other religions rather than a sober observation of the current scene in North America and internationally.”\textsuperscript{64}

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{61} Ibid., 24.
\textsuperscript{62} Ibid., 37.
\textsuperscript{63} Ibid., 24.
\textsuperscript{64} Ibid., 25.
\end{flushright}
Therefore, even though one can grieve the passing of *christendom* in some respects, the *post-christendom* era is an exciting *new missional era* of "God’s invitation to join in this new adventure in the life of God and world, gospel, church, and culture."\(^{65}\) This dissertation’s research journey within the lived experiences of the LC participates in such an adventure of how this particular local Christian community struggles with the challenges of the new missional era, and how their production of theology from within these challenges embodies their acceptance of the invitation to discern God’s preferred and promised future in this new era.\(^{66}\)

**The Social Imaginaire of a Local Christian Community**

Mention was made early on in this chapter already that this dissertation argues for a description of the theo-cultural convergence through the lens of the *social imaginaire*. The integrated and interwoven flows of the LC’s embeddedness in broader communities and their institutional interconnectedness in civil society during a post-christendom era shape the theo-cultural contours of the landscapes of living experiences that this dissertation’s research journey attempted to access, cultivate, and assess. Entering the contours of meaning that is shaped by such integrated and interwoven flows are described by some theorists from a variety of disciplines as the *social imaginaire*.

\(^{65}\) Ibid., 36.

\(^{66}\) The concept of God’s *preferred and promised future* will be used frequently throughout this dissertation as the researcher’s interpretation of what is at stake in the LC’s discernment of *the kind of future that God is bringing forth among them*. This interpretation refers to the theological assumption that God has a very particular and embodied future for the LC (*preferred*), and that such a preferred future is always a particular embodiment of God’s promises to God’s people throughout the ages (*promised*). Using this interpretation in relationship to the LC’s discernment question is ultimately related in this dissertation to the missional posture of *trust* that emerge in the eschatological theology of chapter 4.
Graham Ward makes an important point about social imaginaire conversations when he says that "thinkers differ in their approach to social imaginaries, but to varying degrees each of them emphasizes the role that sign-exchange or representation plays in establishing a particular social imaginary."\textsuperscript{67} This dissertation will argue that the theological and cultural embeddedness of local Christian communities within the convergence of local and broader theo-cultural flows in society are not an exception to this case. As a public space of sociability (Ammerman) with the institutional challenge to be public moral companions in civil society (Simpson) during a new missional era (Keifert), the LC's social imaginaire refers to the nature and dynamics of how these integrated and interwoven theo-cultural flows are shaping them as "public sphere – who composes it, what images of the social circulate within it, what debates or questions govern it, etc." determined "by the forms of mediation available, and how widely these are available."\textsuperscript{68} This dissertation's research journey took on the challenge to access, cultivate, and assess such a social imaginaire of the LC for the sake of their missional imagination as participants in God's mission in civil society, with the assumption that their missional imagination is accessed and cultivated through the integrated theo-cultural flows shaping such a social imaginaire.

Various social scientists, cultural anthropologists, and philosophers influence the use of the social imaginaire in the rest of this dissertation, but the main focus at various stages will be on the contributions of Arjun Appadurai, Charles Taylor, and Paul


\textsuperscript{68} Ibid.
Ricoeur. Given the framing of this dissertation's research journey as an interest in the theo-cultural convergence at stake, the cultural interpretation of Arjun Appadurai will be in constant conversation with the philosophies of Taylor and Ricoeur, especially in its relevance to theological conversations regarding a socially-embodied understanding of cultural transformation in and through local Christian communities. The cultural interest of this dissertation in relation to theological conversations makes Arjun Appadurai, a cultural anthropologist, an obvious first conversation partner on the social imaginaire.

Arjun Appadurai’s Cultural Flows Between the Local and the Broader

Appadurai’s definition of the social imaginaire emerges from within his very specific interest in how cultural flows of globalization (especially through media and migration) affect “the work of the imagination as a constitutive feature of modern subjectivity.” In his book on the cultural dimensions of globalization, he indicates how especially media and transitional diasporas are mutually structuring a globalized world of disjuncture that complicates the production of lived communities or localities. He shows “that the work of the imagination, viewed in this context, is neither purely emancipatory nor entirely disciplined but is a space of contestation in which individuals

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69 Others worth mentioning are Benedict Anderson and Cornelius Castoriades.

70 The dissertation also uses Graham Ward as an important conversation partner with an interest in similar questions, and especially in how he uses some of the other mentioned thinkers (although he never mentions Appadurai) to construct his own argument in this regard.


72 He subsequently wrote another book on “the darker sides of globalization, such as violence, exclusion, and growing inequality.” Arjun Appadurai, Fear of Small Numbers: An Essay on the Geography of Anger (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006), ix-x.
and groups seek to annex the global into their own practices of the modern."\textsuperscript{73}

Appadurai’s cultural insights on the work of the imagination as a space of contestation between the local and the global as neither an emancipatory nor disciplined space of integration and interwovenness seems relevant for this dissertation’s research journey of learning how to access, cultivate, and assess such integrated and interwoven theo-cultural landscapes of a particular local Christian community. It is particularly relevant for considering the LC’s production of theology shaped by their social imaginaire as a social fact within their embeddedness in civil society, and therefore as a field or space of contestation in and through which possibilities of transformation are opened up for the sake of God’s mission in the world.

Appadurai reminds us that, ever since Durkheim and the Annees Sociologiques group, “anthropologists have learned to regard collective representations as social facts – that is, to see them as transcending individual volition, as weighted with the force of social morality, and as objective social realities.”\textsuperscript{74} For him, the imagination has become such a collective, social fact as the basis for varieties of imagined worlds in today’s modern, globalized world. He agrees that, in some sense, there is nothing new to this role of the imagination in contemporary world in contrast to earlier times. However, he indicates at least three distinctions involved in more contemporary times. First, he shows how “the imagination has broken out of the special expressive space of art, myth, and ritual and has now become a part of the quotidian mental work of ordinary people in


\textsuperscript{74} Ibid., 5.
many societies.\textsuperscript{75} Second, how distinctions between imagination and fantasy became clearer in how the imagination “provokes resistance, irony, selectivity, and, in general, agency.”\textsuperscript{76} And third, how the imagination in recent times has more clearly evolved not “as a property of collectives, and not merely as a faculty of the gifted individual,” but as a collectivity that he calls a “community of sentiment” or “a group that begins to imagine and feel things together.”\textsuperscript{77}

Defining the \textit{social imaginaire} through these distinctions, Appadurai makes it clear that his theory of rupture or disjunction in contemporary globalization is neither a teleological theory of modernization (that will eventually yield universal rationality) nor a large scale project of social engineering, but “the everyday cultural practice through which the work of the imagination is transformed.”\textsuperscript{78} This dissertation’s research journey was interested in exploring how to access, cultivate, and assess the LC’s socially-embodied theology with a similar approach to the everyday lived experiences of the LC’s culture rather than addressing what is at stake in the theo-cultural convergence of the LC’s with either a teleological or social engineering theoretical purpose.

In doing so, this dissertation’s research journey hoped to access, cultivate, and assess what Appadurai calls the \textit{social imaginaire},\textsuperscript{79} namely “the imagination as a social

\textsuperscript{75} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{76} Ibid., 6-7.
\textsuperscript{77} Ibid., 8.
\textsuperscript{78} Ibid., 9.
\textsuperscript{79} Defining the \textit{social imaginaire}, Appadurai brings together what he calls “the old idea of images, especially mechanically produced images (in the Frankfurt School sense); the idea of the imagined community (in Anderson’s sense); and the French idea of the imaginary \textit{(imaginaire)} as a constructed landscape of collective aspirations, which is no more and no less real than the collective representations of Emile Durkheim...” Ibid., 31.
practice. No longer mere fantasy (opium for the masses whose real work is elsewhere), no longer simple escape (from a world defined principally by more concrete purposes and structures), no longer elite pastime (thus not relevant to the lives of ordinary people), and no longer mere contemplation (irrelevant for new forms of desire and subjectivity)."\textsuperscript{80} In these terms, accessing, cultivating, and assessing the imagination means entering the LC's imagination as "an organized field of social practices, a form of work," and "a form of negotiation between sites of agency" consisting of the LC and more broader defined fields of possibility.\textsuperscript{81}

Approached as such, Appadurai shows "how the role of the imagination in social life can be described in a new sort of ethnography that is not so resolutely localizing."\textsuperscript{82} In addressing the question on "the nature of locality as a lived experience in a globalized, deterritorialized world", Appadurai argues that the negotiation between locally imagined lives and deterritorialized worlds are complex, "and they surely cannot be captured by the localizing strategies of traditional ethnography alone."\textsuperscript{83} It implies that the thickness of the local and the particular are not "more elementary, more contingent, and thus more real than life seen in larger-scale perspectives," and that one should therefore "resist making claims to epistemic privilege in regard to the lived particularities of social life."\textsuperscript{84}

\textsuperscript{80} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{81} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{82} Ibid., 55.

\textsuperscript{83} Ibid., 52. Ward makes a similar point about the "intradependence" of an integrated and complex globalized system that is social, political, ecological, and economic. Graham Ward, \textit{The Politics of Discipleship: Becoming Postmaterial Citizens}, ed. James K. A. Smith, The Church and Postmodern Culture (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2009), 26.

\textsuperscript{84} Appadurai, \textit{Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization}, 54-55.
Appadurai wants to get out of the local-global split all together, and sees the challenge of this new kind of ethnography to "illuminates the power of large-scale, imagined life possibilities over specific life trajectories" as a "thickness with a difference, and the difference lies in a new alertness to the fact that ordinary lives today are more powered not by the givenness of things but by the possibilities... that are available."\(^{85}\)

The research journey from within the lived experience of the LC, as the theological participation in this particular local Christian community's ecology of meaning, is a similar attempt to examine the possibilities that emerge from within the convergence between theological impulses and cultural flows where the larger-scale and specific life trajectories meet. This includes the convergence between the lived experience of the LC and the more institutional influences and shapings involved in the LC's networks of civil society participation. Given the intricate nature of this convergence, the possibilities that emerge are not only within the LC as an isolated local Christian community (that would imply a static and romanticized view of the local), but within the context of the broader communities of which the LC is a part, and therefore the mutual influences of the local and the broader within the convergence of the theological and the cultural.\(^{86}\)

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\(^{85}\) Ibid., 55.

\(^{86}\) In the last chapter of his book, on "the production of locality," Appadurai considers this intricate convergence of the local and the broader as a relationship between locality and neighborhood. Locality is "a complex phenomenological quality, constituted by a series of links between the sense of social immediacy, the technologies of interactivity, and the relativity of contexts" that expresses itself "in certain kinds of agency, sociality, and reproducibility", and therefore "a property of social life" that is "primarily relational and contextual rather than scalar or spatial." Neighborhood is "the actual existing social forms in which locality, as a dimension or value, is variably realized." The point is that "this dimensional aspect of locality cannot be separated from the actual settings in and through which social life is reproduced." Ibid., 178-79, 82.
Accessing, Cultivating, and Assessing Missional Imagination

Approaching the LC’s socially-embodied theology in civil society as their social imaginaire helps to shape the more nuanced research question as a matter of accessing, cultivating, and assessing the LC’s socially-embodied imagination. However, since the primary interest of this dissertation’s research journey to access, cultivate, and assess is a theological interest in how theology is produced from within this socially-embodied imagination, and since this interest is also located within the missional conversation about local Christian community’s public companionship in civil society, it is described in its final form as how to access, cultivate, and assess the LC’s socially-embodied theology as their missional imagination in civil society.

Chapters 2-4 of this dissertation represent the research journey guided and directed by this research question. Each of these three chapters addresses the research question from the perspective of either the challenge of accessing (chapter 2), or cultivating (chapter 3), or assessing (chapter 4) the LC’s socially-embodied theology as their missional imagination in civil society. However, each of these chapters follows a similar pattern of approaching the research question from the perspective of each of these three different perspectives. In each chapter, the specific perspective (either how to access, or cultivate, or assess) is approached by journeying through a particular phase of the LC’s discernment process, for the sake of engaging in the LC’s socially-embodied imagination as this imagination is shaped by specific habits of discernment, and as this imagination provides the theo-cultural landscapes for dwelling in the LC’s production of theology. Given the primary methodological interest of the research journey, the purpose of dwelling in the LC’s theo-cultural landscapes of producing theology as it emerges
from within their socially-embodied imagination shaped by habits of discernment in a particular process of discernment (chapters 2-4) is to learn with the LC about the conditions and possibilities for continuing their journey of discerning their participation in God’s mission in the world. In chapter 5, these learning will be provided as impulses for the ongoing conversation about the LC’s *theo-cultural methodology of discernment*. These impulses point at the conditions and possibilities of an environment in which the LC can continue with discernment as an ongoing theological practice embedded in civil society, and these impulses provide this dissertation’s research journey with a very specific, socially-embodied methodology of discernment shaped by the methodological experimentation and production of theology of a particular local Christian community.  

This approach makes it clear that the *research journey* of this dissertation became *embedded* in the LC’s *discernment journey* of the LC. It *follows* the LC’s process of discernment, *facilitates* the process of the discernment (in the form of the researcher), became a *conversation partner* on the LC’s journey of discernment (through the researcher’s reflections), and *learns* from the LC’s process of discernment. Even though there is an element of sequentiality in following the LC’s *process* of discernment, the three perspectives on how to access, cultivate, and assess (presented in chapters 2-4) are not sequentially distinguishable when the LC’s socially-embodied imagination is accessed/cultivated/assessed via the theo-cultural convergence shaped by their habits of discernment. In this sense, chapters 2-4 may represent a sequentiality in process, but the three perspectives of accessing, cultivating, and assessing the socially-embodied  

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87 Chapter 5 will elaborate how this can obviously not be understood as a general grounded theory of discernment, and how methodology as such is not safeguarding discernment, but rather shaped in itself by the experimentation and production of theology within a particular local Christian community.
imagination are not presented as sequential steps from a methodological point of view. Accessing, cultivating, and assessing refer to a simultaneity rather than a linear sequentiality in any particular order.

Each of the three chapters on accessing, cultivating, and assessing the LC’s socially-embodied theology in civil society integrates a phenomenological description of the LC’s journey of discernment with conversation partners and histories from broader theological and philosophical conversations, especially regarding the imagination, discerning the truth, cultural transformation, and facilitating habits and practices of discernment. In this regard, the LC’s discernment journey is accompanied by conversation partners from broader frameworks on especially the history of imagination, a hermeneutic-phenomenological approach to discernment, a cultural view on transformation, and a Trinitarian theology with pneumatological and eschatological focuses. For reasons explained in the section on this dissertation’s research approach (see below), these broader frameworks were, however, never deliberately introduced to participants in the LC’s process of discernment.

The Research Approach

The more explicit introduction of the above mentioned frameworks to the conversation throughout this dissertation is a matter of integrating these frameworks into the LC’s journey of discernment in a way that transcends the alternatives of either an inductive or deductive reasoning about the relationship between the LC’s process and theoretical (theological, philosophical, cultural) frameworks. In this sense, this dissertation is not an attempt to either justify/falsify (prove, apply, reject) theory or to construct/design (ground, extract, systematize) theory in relationship to the LC’s process
of discernment. Using the criteria of distinctions made by John Creswell and Vicki Plano Clark on “methodological differences” among a variety of research approaches, the approach in the research journey of this dissertation is participatory and collaborative in the sense of the researcher participating in how the researched community themselves form the question, analyze the data, interpret emerging themes, describe their learnings, and decide on the next steps in their journey. Therefore, it is true that this dissertation’s research approach shares the research attitude of methodologies, such as both grounded theory and action research that are “more data-driven than theory-driven.” But it is equally important to distinguish this dissertation’s phenomenological approach from action research and grounded theory.

The participatory and collaborative nature of this study brings it close to Kathryn Herr and Gary Anderson’s definition of action research as an “inquiry that is done by or with insiders to an organization or community, but never to or on them.” It also has the same orientation and purpose that these authors ascribe to action research, namely that it “is oriented to some action or cycle of actions that organizational or community members

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88 “In postpositive research, the investigator works from the ‘top’ down, from a theory to hypothesis to data to add to or contradict the theory. In constructivist approaches, the inquirer works more from the ‘bottom’ up, using the participants’ views to build broader themes and generate a theory of interconnecting the themes. In advocacy and participatory research, the methodology is collaborative, with the participants serving as active members of the research team, helping to form questions, analyze the data, and implement the results in practice. In pragmatism, the approach may combine deductive and inductive thinking, as the researcher mixes both qualitative and quantitative data.” John W. Creswell and Vicki L. Plano Clark, Designing and Conducting Mixed Methods Research (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 2007), 23.


have taken, are taking, or wish to take to address a particular problematic situation,” and with the assumption “that changes occur either within the setting and/or within the researchers themselves.”91 In this sense, the phenomenological approach to the LC’s discernment journey followed a classical pattern of action research, namely to have “a plan of action to improve what is already happening” (in this case, however, not a plan to improve, but a process of discerning the future that God is bringing forth in the LC); “to act to implement the plan” (in this case, however, not the implementation of a plan of action, but an invitation from the LC’s Governance Board to participate in discernment groups focused around a question of discernment); “to observe the effects of action in the context in which it occurs” (in this case, however, not to observe the effects of action, but to join the conversation of interpretation based on an attentiveness to the emerging imaginations and reflections of these discernment groups); “to reflect on these effects as a basis for further planning, subsequent action...” (in this case, reflection as basis for an ongoing conversation of how to discern the possibilities of the LC’s participation in God’s mission in the world).92

Looking at this dissertation’s phenomenological approach from the point of view of action research methodologies make even more sense in the context of how participatory action research is perceived. Using the description of De Schutter and

91 Ibid., 3-4. More definitions of action theory, as quoted by Herr and Anderson, can be added to illuminate the phenomenological approach of this dissertation’s research journey: “systematic inquiry that is collective, collaborative, self-reflective, critical, and undertaken by the participants of the inquiry...; “a form of collective, self-reflective enquiry undertaken by participants in social situations in order to improve the rationality and justice of their own social or educational practices, as well as their understanding of these practices and the situations in which these practices are carried out...” Herr and Anderson, The Action Research Dissertation: A Guide for Students and Faculty, 4.

Yopo, "social processes and structures are understood within a historical context; theory and practice are integrated; the subject-object relationship is transformed into a subject-subject relationship through dialogue; research and action (including education itself) become a single process; the community and researcher together produce critical knowledge aimed at social transformation..."93 Given the position of the researcher (as indicated above on the ethical implications of the researcher's position in the LC), this dissertation's phenomenological action research can probably be categorized on Herr and Anderson's "continuum of positionality" as "insider in collaboration with other insiders."94

It is equally important to put this dissertation's phenomenological approach as a kind of participatory and collaborative action research process in the context of grounded theory as another data-driven rather than theory-driven research methodology that has possible affinity to this dissertation's approach. Kathy Charmaz describes grounded theory as follows in her book on this research methodology:

[Grounded theory is] a method of conducting qualitative research that focuses on creating conceptual frameworks of theories through building inductive analysis from the data. Hence, the analytic categories are directly 'grounded' in the data. The method favors analysis over description, fresh categories over preconceived ideas and extant theories, and systematically focused sequential data collection over large initial samples. This method is distinguished from others since it involves the researcher in data analysis while collecting data – we use this data analysis to inform and shape further data collection. Thus, the sharp distinction between data collection and analysis phases of traditional research is intentionally blurred in grounded theory studies.95

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93 As quoted in Ibid., 16.

94 Ibid., 36-37.

This description shows both the commonalities and distinctions between a phenomenological approach and grounded theory. In terms of a basic definition of grounded theory, namely the "systematic, yet flexible guidelines for collecting and analyzing qualitative data to construct theories ‘grounded’ in the data themselves," this dissertation’s research approach differs in terms of the purpose of constructing theories by grounding it in the data. The LC’s interpretations of emerging imaginations in their data are not for the purpose of constructing theories from the data. Rather, these interpretations provide the LC with emerging impulses that open up possibilities for further attention and ongoing conversation (which in itself could qualify as an important dynamic of grounded theory) for the sake of actionable discernment, but never to reach a stage of systematizing or constructing theory on the basis of that data. The research journey that is embedded in the LC’s discernment journey does not want to go any further than the LC takes this process, except for providing in the writing of the dissertation a phenomenologically interpretative conversation partner for the sake of continuing the conversation on an academic and research level about the LC’s ongoing process of discernment, and by inviting into the conversation a variety of hermeneutics indebted to other relevant conversation partners from the broader fields of theology, philosophy, and cultural anthropology. In doing so, this dissertation’s research approach

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98 This is why Charmaz’s use of *abductive reasoning*, as an attemptive alternative to inductive and deductive, does not fully do justice to the approach in this dissertation either. Especially not if the definition of such an abductive approach is "considering all possible theoretical explanations for the data, forming hypotheses for each possible explanation, checking them empirically by examining data, and pursuing the most plausible explanation.” Ibid., 103-04.
wants to recognize the challenge of theological research that takes seriously the return of the local congregation (mentioned at the beginning of this chapter) by suggesting that even the final dissertation writing stages cannot be considered to only be the end of a process on another more academic level, but should be considered an additional conversation partner to the ongoing life of the congregation involved.

This dissertation's phenomenological research approach shows similarities with grounded theory's attempt to simultaneously involve both data collection and analysis, and even by making comparisons between data during phases of interpretation, but not for the sake of deducing theoretical hypothesis based on the interpretations. The LC's process of discernment does not reflect the purpose of a theoretical destination to their effort, and the researcher's reflection (chapter 5) isn't an attempt to reach a theoretical conclusion for a theory of discernment for the LC, or even more generally. Identifying methodological impulses for the LC's ongoing habits and practices of discernment falls short of presenting a comprehensive theory of discernment, and will function in chapter 5 within the posture of asking more questions for the sake of contributing to opening up the ongoing conversation. The specific details of a phenomenological approach to this research adventure will become clear during each of the next three chapters.99

Mimesis: Accessing the Playful Imagination

Chapter 2 represents the first steps in the research journey of asking the methodological question of how to access, cultivate, and assess the LC’s socially-embodied imagination in civil society. It specifically addresses these first steps through the lens of how to access the LC’s socially-embodied imagination. It tells the research story as a journey through the LC Governance Board’s attempt to initiate a congregation-wide process of discernment facilitated by a specific question of discernment, and it shows how this initiative led to the playful engagement of discernment or focus groups around the question of discernment. As such, the research question related to accessing the LC’s socially-embodied imagination in civil society became embedded in the LC Governance Board’s question of discernment on how the LC imagine the future God is bringing forth among them.

By journeying through this process of facilitating playful engagements with the discernment question, the research accessed an ecology shaped by a relational attentiveness between groups of members of the LC when they are reflecting on their imaginative engagement with the Governance Board’s discernment question. This ecology of relational attentiveness to the LC’s playful and imaginative reflections on the question of discernment gave the research journey access to a rich convergence of cultural and theological flows representing the cultural embodiment of their theology.

In addition, chapter 2 integrates this research journey from the perspective of accessing the LC’s socially-embodied imagination in civil society with a variety of theological, philosophical, cultural, and theoretical conversation partners on the way. From a theoretical perspective on leadership initiatives, it illuminates the power of
questions to facilitate access to the LC’s socially-embodied imagination. From a philosophical perspective on imagination, it illuminates the representative nature of accessing such an imaginative engagement around a powerful question (by suggesting a playful rather than imitating mimesis), and how to phenomenologically approach the access to the relational attentiveness in such imaginative engagements (both in terms of the history of phenomenology, and as a first level of phenomenological research). From cultural and theological perspectives on the access obtained, these conversation partners illuminate the interwovenness of how the imagination is shaped by cultural and theological flows with insights from both cultural anthropology and Trinitarian theology.

**Bildung: Cultivating the Social Imaginaire**

Chapter 3 represents the interpretive steps in the research journey of asking the methodological question of how to access, cultivate, and assess the LC’s socially-embodied imagination in civil society. It specifically addresses these steps through the lens of how to cultivate the LC’s socially-embodied imagination. It tells the research story as a journey through the LC Governance Board’s attempt to interpret the congregation-wide process of discernment facilitated by their question of discernment, and it shows how their interpretations led to the emergence of themes for ongoing conversation around the question of discernment. As such, the research question related to cultivating the LC’s socially-embodied imagination in civil society became embedded in the LC Governance Board’s critical reflection on how the LC imagine the future God is bringing forth among them.

By journeying through this process of facilitating playful engagements with the discernment question, the research accessed an ecology shaped by a relational
attentiveness between groups of members of the LC when they are reflecting on their imaginative engagement with the Governance Board’s discernment question. This ecology of relational attentiveness to the LC’s playful and imaginative reflections on the question of discernment gave the research journey access to a rich convergence of cultural and theological flows representing the cultural embodiment of their theology.

In addition, chapter 3 integrates this research journey from the perspective of cultivating the LC’s socially-embodied imagination in civil society with a variety of theological, philosophical, cultural, and theoretical conversation partners on the way. From a theoretical perspective on leadership initiatives, it illuminates the transformational capacities of the LC’s socially-embodied imagination. From a philosophical perspective on imagination, it illuminates the responsive nature of cultivating such an imaginative engagement around a powerful question (by suggesting a *social imaginaire* rather than a constructive *Einbildungskraft*), and how to phenomenologically approach the cultivation of a critical reflectiveness in such imaginative engagements (both in terms of the history of phenomenology, and as a second level of phenomenological research). From cultural and theological perspectives on the cultivation of socially-embodied imagination, it illuminates how the imagination is transformed by the interwovenness of cultural and theological flows with insights from both cultural transformation and pneumatology.

**Poiesis: Assessing the Missional Imagination**

Chapter 4 represents the learning steps in the research journey of asking the methodological question of how to access, cultivate, and assess the LC’s socially-embodied imagination in civil society. It specifically addresses these learning steps
through the lens of how to assess the LC’s socially-embodied imagination. It tells the research story as a journey through the LC Governance Board’s attempt to stimulate an ongoing conversation around the emerging possibilities from the congregation-wide process of discernment facilitated by their question of discernment, and it shows how this attempt to an ongoing conversation led to the missional engagement with the gifts opened up by the process of discernment. As such, the research question related to assessing the LC’s socially-embodied imagination in civil society became embedded in the LC Vestry’s attempt to stimulate an ongoing conversation on how the LC imagine the future God is bringing forth among them.

By journeying through this process of facilitating playful engagements with the discernment question, the research accessed an ecology shaped by a conversational openness between members of the LC when they are receiving their gifts of imagination from their engagement with the Governance Board’s discernment question. This ecology of conversational openness to the LC’s missional reflections on the question of discernment gave the research journey access to a rich convergence of cultural and theological flows representing the cultural embodiment of their theology.

In addition, chapter 4 integrates this research journey from the perspective of assessing the LC’s socially-embodied imagination in civil society with a variety of theological, philosophical, cultural, and theoretical conversation partners on the way. From a theoretical perspective on leadership initiatives, it illuminates the culture of ongoing conversation to assess the LC’s socially-embodied imagination. From a philosophical perspective on imagination, it illuminates the receptive nature of assessing such an imaginative engagement around a powerful question (by suggesting an ethical
rather than technological *poiesis*), and how to phenomenologically approach the assessment of a conversational openness in such imaginative engagements (both in terms of the history of phenomenology, and as a third level of phenomenological research). From cultural and theological perspectives on such an assessment, it illuminates the interwovenness of how the imagination is shaped by a cultural and theological openness with insights from both cultural anthropology and theological eschatology.
CHAPTER 2  

MIMESIS: ACCESSING THE PLAYFUL IMAGINATION

Come play with me.  
What would we play?  
A game.  
Are there rules?  
No. Its just for fun.  
What is the name of the game?  
Every-body plays.

Accessing the LC’s socially-embodied theology as their missional imagination in civil society is accessing the playground where everybody plays. Exploring the question on how to access this socially-embodied imagination became this dissertation’s adventurous journey into fields of possibilities opened up by the playful imagination of the LC in the presence of God and each other. This chapter will not only describe how the research process of accessing the LC’s playful imagination provided the researcher with the opportunity to participate in the LC’s habit of relational attentiveness to God and each other, but also to reflect theologically on the LC’s communion with God and each other in the social-embodiment of such playful imagination. The descriptions and reflections in this chapter culminate in a consideration of how the imagination is shaped within this relational attentiveness to God and each other as a playful mimesis beyond imitation or replication.

It all began with the initiative of the LC’s Governance Board to launch a next phase in their ongoing process of discerning their participation in God’s mission in the world. The research journey joined the LC’s discernment journey at the point of their expressed desire to look at the LC’s practices of discernment in a fresh and new way. This first chapter describes the beginnings of this next step in the LC’s ongoing journey of discernment from the perspective of the research question of how to access the LC’s socially-embodied theology in civil society.

This chapter describes the research journey’s attempt to facilitate this access through the Governance Board’s reflections on a powerful question to direct the process, and their open invitation to members of the LC to participate in discernment events (focus groups) structured around an engagement with the discernment question via imaginative, communal activities. The facilitation of this access via these discernment events created an opportunity for the research journey to go on a co-learning adventure with the LC on how to access their own socially-embodied theology, and to dwell in the LC’s production of theology during this process of accessing their socially-embodied imagination.

This journey of discovering how to access the LC’s socially-embodied imagination, and the theology produced in that process also created the opportunity for this first chapter to invite conversation partners and frameworks into the mix of reflecting on what both the research and researched community learned on this journey. It was already mentioned in the first chapter that the intent of inviting these partners and frameworks into the conversation is not of a deductive or inductive nature, but has the purpose of further opening up the researcher’s possibilities of reflecting on what is at stake in the attempt to access the LC’s socially-embodied theology.
Bringing in conversation partners and frameworks in this first chapter makes it possible to reflect on the journey of accessing the LC’s socially-embodied imagination through a hermeneutic of *mimesis*. This hermeneutic of *mimesis* emerged during the researcher’s reflection on accessing the LC’s socially-embodied imagination as an interpretative framework for incorporating the research discoveries during the adventure of learning how to *access* the LC’s socially-embodied imagination. It provides an interpretative framework for reflecting on accessing the LC’s socially-embodied imagination through a *playful* and *communal* endeavor rather than an *imitating* or *representational* exercise. As such, it evolved as a conversational framework from within the LC’s discernment process, but shaped by developments in the history of imagination, impulses from a phenomenological approach to the habit of attentiveness, dynamics from cultural anthropology on the heterogeneity of cultural flows, and a Trinitarian *imago Dei* theology rooted in a relational ontology. In this sense, a hermeneutic of *mimesis* maps out the phenomenological contours of the LC’s relational attentiveness to their playful participation in the life of the Triune God from within the interwovenness of theological and cultural flows in civil society.

This chapter will show how these phenomenological contours shape a theo-cultural landscape beyond either a Platonic *metaphysics* or a scientific *positivism*. It is a hermeneutic of *mimesis* that views the representations of the imagination during the LC’s process of discernment not as mere imitations of an ideal local Christian community detached from their socially-embodied interpretation of God’s presence and activity in their midst, and also not as the replication of an objective status quo appearing to their senses. The production of their theology provided the contours of a socially-embodied
landscape shaped by God’s presence and activity in their midst (past and present), but with an openness to God’s future as a posture of expecting God to do new things that transcend and transform who they currently are. It is a hermeneutic that interprets the LC’s process of accessing their socially-embodied imagination not through the application, replication, or imitation of an already quantifiable template of ecclesial existence beyond or within their socially-embodied existence, but through receiving the gifts of God from within the playful imagination in relationship with the other.

This chapter presents mimesis as the naming of the LC’s godly play. This godly play is structured and opened up by the power of the question, while simultaneously shaping and developing the LC’s imaginatio Trinitatis as their relationally- and socially-embodied imagination of communion with God from within community with each other and others in civil society. It creates the opportunity to consider the LC’s missional imagination as participation in the life of the triune God from within the interwovenness of cultural flows in civil society that goes beyond a mere imitatio Christi or imitatio ecclesiae. A playful posture rather than imitated substance became the LC’s field of openness to God’s preferred and promised future.

It all started with the Governance Board’s decision to first spend time in carefully attending to the question at stake for this newly initiated phase of what they called a congregational- or community-wide process of discernment. This question facilitated and directed the entire process of discernment (from focus group events to all the subsequent levels of the LC’s interpretation of what emerged during the process).
God’s Future: The Discernment Journey

The Governance Board’s careful considering of the discernment question took place against the background of previous discernment processes. In this sense, the research journey joined an already existing conversation with a rich history of discernment. During one of the focus group events later on in the process, a former Governance Board leader describes this rich history as follows:

When we first did the discernment, I thought okay, we’re done. And then a few months later we have to discern again. Why? (laughter). Why do we need to discern more? And then through the process of discussion we learned why we do need to continue to discern – as we change we need to discern more to see if we still are going down the direction we want to go in. And where God is leading us. But sometimes it felt on the negative side that we didn’t honor the past discernments, then we were just starting new because there were new people with new ideas who want to discern more and didn’t always base it on the past – not that you stay in the past, but you have to know where you came from so you know where you’re going to go. Yes, I think everyone now, in the community, has the idea that discernment is a part of who we are. But it took us a while to get there.  

This former Governance Board leader’s contribution on how important the habit of continuous discernment became in the LC was made at a specific point during this particular focus group conversation when a larger conversation was taking place on how discernment emerged as an important habit during what another leader from this group called an era of “renewal” born from within “the 80s and the chaos.” These former Governance Board Leaders clearly remember how they needed the difficult times of the LC to teach them about the necessity of cultivating a culture of ongoing discernment. Memory of God’s faithfulness in the past, especially during difficult times, shapes their

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2 From the Former Governance Board Leaders Focus Group Event Transcript.

3 Ibid.
discernment imagination for an ongoing posture and habit of opening themselves up to
where God is leading them.

Their history of discernment had its intentional moments of stimulating this habit
in very specific ways. The most recent such attempt was in 2007 when an Appreciative
Inquiry Team initiated a process of “sharing our stories, discovering our strengths.”\(^4\) The
rest of this dissertation will frequently show the continuity with interpretations and
outcomes of this particular appreciative inquiry process, and how this previous
discernment phase shaped the LC’s current imagination of their participation in God’s
mission in the world. Discovering and experiencing continuity with the past on this
particular journey certainly helped to cultivate an acceptance of discernment as an
ongoing conversation\(^5\) rather than sporadic, ad hoc exercises during times when problems
need to be solved. The ah-ha moments of affirmations of past discoveries on how and
where God is present and active in the midst of the LC not only confirm the channeling
of energy for participation in God’s movement, but also build the trust that discernment
processes are ongoing conversations rather than tools of manipulation for particular
agendas.

Within this ongoing conversation, the researcher joined the LC’s journey of
discernment at a time when the need was expressed to look in new and fresh ways at their
discernment practices. The Governance Board invited the researcher to facilitate a
process of inviting as many as possible LC members to participate in discernment group
activities. As facilitator, the researcher began this process by first engaging the

\(^4\) See Appendix A for this team’s 2007 report to the Governance Board and the people of the LC.

\(^5\) Chapter 4 will return to the importance of assessing the LC’s socially-embodied imagination as
an ongoing conversation.
Governance Board in the question at stake for them as a leadership team when they invite the rest of the LC into such a process of discernment. This engagement of formulating an appropriate *discernment question* took place over the course of three Governance Board meetings of approximately 2 hours each.

The Question of Discernment

For the Governance Board, engaging an appropriate *question of discernment* for their initiated congregational- or community-wide process of discernment was not a trivial matter of only getting the process started. They understood very well the power of this question, and that how this question is formulated would be one of the most important aspects determining the atmosphere and direction of focus group events. They realized the power of a question to either close down or open up reflection. A concern was expressed early on during the Governance Board’s conversation that the discernment question should not be formulated in a way that lead participants in directions that suit the agenda of the Governance Board, but rather to make sure it is an open-ended question that creates an environment in which participants would feel free to engage the question in any way they want. They were determined to come up with a question that would open up *possibilities* rather than inhibit participation. They were not interested in selling anything to the rest of the LC, or in manipulating them into particular directions, but to engage in as inclusive as possible a process of *listening* to what emerges in these conversations. The Governance Board set the example of what would become a dominant discernment posture of questioning and listening.
Developing the Question

After the three 2-hour meetings of reflection, the discernment question was eventually formulated as follow: *When we (the people of the LC) bring together our deepest desires and greatest gifts, what kind of future do we imagine God bringing forth among us?*\(^6\) The development of the question to get to this eventual formulation reflects theological conversation on a variety of levels.

The first level of theological engagement to develop this discernment question involved a reflection on the *type* of question that they wanted to ask the rest of the LC. They chose to ask the *when* question after considering a number of different possibilities of starting their question with *what*, *why*, and *who*. Eventually, the story of one member of the Governing Board made an impact on the rest, and led to the choice of formulating a *when* question.\(^7\) This Governance Board member summarized her contribution as follow in a subsequent email to the rest of the Governance Board members:

> A's words have really sunk in -- I have been taking to heart the reminder that this needs to be a question that will truly engage the congregation, and will not become an exercise that is tightly framed by the Governance Board, in search of a particular response. We want to begin with a question that is broad enough to invite a wide range of responses, but guided by the Governance Board's faithful discernment of our common spiritual values and purpose.

> We believe the question itself needs to affirm movement from our individual views to a corporate vision, held together in Christ.

> I have been wondering what type of question we should be asking, literally -- should it begin with "how?", "what?", "why?", "who?" What structure will evoke the kind of open, playful responses we hope for? As I have prayed about it, the question that has grabbed my attention is a "when" question, inspired by the many years I spent in ECFE learning to apply "Grandma's Rule" to coax maximum cooperation out of my kids. I'm sure B knows it well, but for anyone who isn't

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\(^6\) Appendix B shows how the process unfolded to get to this formulation. The attachment reflects the exact powerpoint presentation used by the Governance Board to capture the process of developing the question. It includes the ongoing conversations via email in-between these three meetings.

\(^7\) See Appendix B.
familiar with this invaluable preschool concept, bear with me for a moment — Grandma's Rule goes like this:

Child: "Can we go to the park?"

Frazzled parent's response: "No! You need to clean up your toys." (Or a bribe is proffered: "If you clean up your toys, THEN we can go to the park." Or it degenerates into a threat: "If you don't clean up your toys, then we can't go to the park."

Alternatively, Grandma's response is: "Yes! WHEN you have cleaned up your toys, darling, then we will go to the park."

Grandma is brilliant! Grandma's Rule affirms that all the potential is there and is moving toward fulfillment; good things are already in progress, and we just need to step up our participation. I would love for our question to affirm that God is already at work and that we need only to bring ourselves more fully, and with greater focus, into that work.

To the extent that the above mentioned contribution made an impact on how the Governance Board decided to articulate the question, they chose when as an alternative to if. For them, the if would have indicated an approach that focuses on a mentality of scarcity in terms of what is not yet in place for realizing the future, while their chosen approach of when focuses on the abundance of what is already available as their potential to participate in what God is already doing in their midst. This contribution's influence on how the question was formulated not only brought a positive focus to discovering the abundance of potential that God already gave to the LC for the sake of their participation in God's mission in the world, but also gave it a profoundly missional interpretation of understanding the LC's participation as "God is already at work and that we need only to bring ourselves more fully, and with greater focus, into that work" (From the quotation above).

The atmosphere, tone, and content of all the focus group events subsequently became a wonderful testimony to this attempt of the Governance Board to avoid a problem-solving approach that works out of a scarcity mentality or with what is
sometimes referred to as a *gap model* of discernment. The imagination of focus groups, and their reflection on the imaginative exercises that they engaged in, hardly ever went into conversations about how to bridge a gap of scarcity to an ideal point of abundance. This possibility all began with formulating the question in a way that immediately puts the focus on what God already provides in terms of gifts and desires. This was a true gift early on in the research process, because as Patrick Keifert puts it, “unfortunately, most local churches either don’t believe this or aren’t interested, or don’t know how to attend to those gifts; they fail to engage in the spiritual discernment of God’s preferred and promised future.”

The second level of theological engagement in articulating the discernment question was to settle on using the terminology of *imagination*. The question was originally framed as, “When we (the people of the LC) bring together our deepest desires and greatest gifts as we follow the way of Jesus, what kind of future will God bring forth among us?” It went through a further phase of development when somebody suggested focusing more on *direction* rather than *destination*. This development was obviously influenced by the original question’s focus on the future. The suggested implication was that the LC is on a journey into what God will continuously do in their midst rather than the future as a destination of God to be achieved. So it became a question of “*where do you see the way of Jesus leading/directing us as a community?***

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8 Patrick Keifert contrast the “gap model” approach to a diffusion of innovation approach as developed by Everett Rogers. Keifert, *We Are Here Now*, 48-51.

9 Ibid., 23.

10 See Appendix B.

11 See Appendix B.
However, this development only turned out to be a necessary transitional phase that led the Governance Board to consider the *imagination* rather than the *way of Jesus* as the preferred medium for discerning the future. The word *see* in this transitional phase brought up subsequent conversations that led to the prominence of the concept of *imagination* emerging. What is most interesting in this shift is that the concept of *imagination* replaced the notion of *the way of Jesus* in the structure of the sentence. So it changed from *where do you see the way of Jesus leading us* to *how do you imagine the future God bringing forth among us?* Even though it was never explicitly stated as a deliberate attempt to replace an emphasis on *the way of Jesus*, the openness that came with the possibility of the play of imagination replaced the risk of closing conversations with any possible associations surrounding *the way of Jesus*.\(^1\)\(^2\) This was a very significant moment in the conversation when the focus shifted back to the *play* of imagination rather than an *imitation* of Jesus’ way. As will unfold in the rest of this chapter, this moment provides an important impulse for this chapter’s reflection on a hermeneutic of *mimesis*, and for opening up the possibility of producing a robust Trinitarian theology of *imagination* rather than a reductionist imitating Christology of *imagination*.

The third level of theological engagement to finalize the discernment question was in relation to the matter of *agency*. When imagination came into the formulation, the original articulation of *the future that God is bringing forth* came back into the formulation as well. Many contributions during the Governance Board discussions

\(^{1,2}\) Even though it was never explicitly stated in these terms, it could be that this kind of sensitivity reflects a broader phenomenon among some members of the LC to avoid theological language that remind them too much of any possible associations with what they would describe as more conservative, evangelical branches of Christianity (see chapter 1 for the current pastor’s assessment of the LC five years ago).
continued to emphasize the importance of what was already implied right at the beginning with the decision to frame the question as a *when* question, namely that the focus should be on the agency of God in their midst rather than their own achievements to create the future. The implication was clear that the future is not dependent on *if* the LC would do something, but *when* the LC live more fully into what God is already bringing forth in their midst. This aspect will come into theological focus when explored *pneumatologically* at the end of chapter 3.

The final level of theological engagement was with regard to the *future*. It became more and more clear to the Governance Board that imagining the future is a matter of *trust* in the ability of God to bring forth the future in the midst of the desires and gifts of the LC. Apart from again reflecting the above mentioned assumption on agency, the shift from focusing on *destination* to *direction* opened up the possibility of avoiding a teleological understanding of future, and instead exploring a truly *eschatological* understanding of the future (which will be the theological focus at the end of chapter 4). The Governance Board was ready to engage God's preferred and promised future for the LC.

These levels of theological engagement prepared the Governance Board for exploring a discernment question of *possibility*. They saw the future not as a problem to be solved, but as a richness of possibility to explore from within their desires and gifts. They wanted the question “to evoke wondering rather than problem-solving.”\(^{13}\) They saw a God of possibility that is able to do new things from the future. They perceived the

\(^{13}\) See Appendix B.
imagination to open up these possibilities of hope. And so they formulated a question of possibility for the LC to engage with.

**Questions of Possibility**

This dissertation finds Peter Block’s recent contributions on community as the structuring of belonging a very relevant conversation partner for framing more broadly the Governance Board’s process of developing this profound question of possibility. Peter Block, leadership consultant, says, “Questions are more transformative than answers and are the essential tools of engagement.”

His insight on how questions “create the space for something new to emerge,” influenced this dissertation’s research journey to not only recognize the importance of the Governance Board’s careful attempt to get the question right for the rest of the discernment process, but also how the power of a question (such as the one formulated) can open up the possibilities of accessing the new that emerge in the LC.

Block argues, “Answers, especially those that respond to our need for quick results, while satisfying, shut down the discussion, and the future shuts down with them.” While most leaders are schooled to provide answers, the importance of getting the question right could be one of the main leadership challenges in an environment of discernment. If they can do that, leaders have a chance of cultivating an environment of **curiosity** rather than **advice**, and cultivating a posture of **listening** rather than **negotiation**.

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15 Ibid.

16 Ibid.
Block distinguishes between powerful questions with the ability to transform action, and questions that have little power beyond argumentation, analysis, explanation, and defense. Questions with transformative power are questions "that take us to requests, offers, declarations, forgiveness, confession, gratitude, and welcome." Depending on the type of questions you ask, you “either keep the existing system in place or brings an alternative future into the room.” Questions with little power, if answered directly, are cultivating an environment that supports “the mindset that an alternative future can be negotiated, mandated, engineered, and controlled into existence,” while transformative questions “are ones that engage people in an intimate way, confront them with their freedom, and invite them to co-create a future possibility.”

The hidden agenda behind questions with little power “is to maintain dominance and to be right,” and “they only carry force.” They also imply that the one asking knows the answer, and they usually objectify the other within an environment of problem-solving. Block says such questions “destroy relatedness, and it is in this way they work against belonging and community.” Moreover, they are many times used by leaders who are anxious about the uncertainty of the future, and who wish to create a predictable

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17 Ibid., 104-07. For examples of both questions with little power and questions with transformative power, see Appendix C.

18 Ibid., 103.

19 Ibid., 104.

20 Ibid., 104-05.

21 Ibid., 105.

22 Ibid.
future. Such questions then, ironically, shut down the future, because "what distinguishes the future is its unpredictability and mystery."23

Powerful questions, instead, "are the ones that cause you to become an actor as soon as you answer them," because "you no longer have the luxury of being a spectator of whatever it is you are concerned about."24 Block describes such powerful questions as ambiguous,25 personal,26 and anxiety evoking.27 When powerful questions are used to cultivate an environment of discernment, then "the conversation is not so much about the future for the community, but is the future itself."28

The LC’s Governance Board provided the LC’s ongoing journey of discernment with a powerful question as an initiative to open up possibilities of engaging God’s future for them in civil society. This question stimulated a playful imagination of living into the mystery of the future. The Governance Board decided to facilitate the engagement with the discernment question through a process of inviting as many members of the LC as possible into focus group events as the next step in their ongoing conversation about their participation in God’s mission in the world. These focus groups would provide the soils for theo-cultural contours to emerge that are shaping the socially-embodied landscapes of the LC’s participation in God’s mission in civil society.

23 Ibid.
24 Ibid., 106.
25 "There is no attempt to try to precisely define what is meant by the question. This requires each person to bring their own, personal meaning into the room." Ibid.
26 "All passion, commitment, and connection grow out of what is most personal." Ibid.
27 "All that matters makes us anxious. It is our wish to escape from anxiety that steals our aliveness. If there is no edge to the question, there is no power." Ibid.
28 Ibid., 102.
The Playful Imagination: Engaging the Discernment Question

This dissertation’s research journey through this particular phase of the LC’s ongoing process of discernment was guided by the LC’s discernment question of *when we (as the people of the LC) bring together our deepest desires and greatest gifts, what kind of future do we imagine God bringing forth among us?* The researcher took on a facilitating role during the engagement of this discernment question at focus group events. Given the guidance of the discernment question, with its focus on *imagination*, the research journey was presented with the opportunity to shape these engagements through imaginative activities. The experiment of using a variety of different imaginative activities had an original purpose of facilitating an action-reflection type of engagement with the discernment question, and with the goal of creating an environment in which participants’ imaginative engagement with the discernment question could be opened up through communal involvement. It was a deliberate attempt not only to facilitate communal reflection based on creative (and sometimes, visual) activities together, but also to do it in a playful way.

This experiment was not only based on an articulated desire in the discernment question for an imaginative engagement, but also with a desire to connect the idea of imaginative engagement with a dominant theological metaphor in the life of the LC, namely the Christian education program *Godly Play*. The facilitated focus group engagements with the discernment question became the LC’s adult version of Godly Play. Almost everybody could relate to the idea of using imaginative exercises as a playful engagement with their discernment question because of their familiarity with *Godly Play*, and some expressed their excitement for the opportunity to do what they
admire the children doing every Sunday. Facilitating this process helped the research journey gain access to the LC’s socially-embodied theology through their playful imagination.

A variety of exercises were used in designing these focus groups as playful events, such as playing with Legos, constructing a story wall, taking photos, creating posted notes, and an imaginative balloon ride into the future. These were the methods used during 12 different focus groups events. Eight of the focus groups consisted of existing ministry groups of the LC, but there were also four open-invitation groups for any other members to attend. After beginning each of these events with a practice of dwelling in the Word, participants were asked to participate in a communal exercise structured around an imaginative activity. This participation would engage them in activity together, and then create the opportunity for reflecting on what they were doing together.

The Focus Group Events

The 12 focus group events gave the opportunity to approximate 80 members of the LC to engage the discernment question in playful and imaginative ways.

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29 Another reason for the LC’s openness to these imaginative activities could be because of generally a high appreciation for the role of art in the LC. The LC has a very active Arts Ministry, and the LC frequently hosts Art exhibitions.

30 The researcher initiated most of these activities, namely playing with Legos, creating posted notes, the imaginative balloon ride into the future, and designing a menu. The other activities were all suggestions from members of the LC, namely taking pictures, sharing children’s story books, and painting.

31 See Appendix D for a list of the groups, and their matching imaginative activities as basis for reflection.

32 See Appendix E for an explanation of this practice.
One of the participants in the Art Ministry Focus Group event painted the picture in figure 1.1 as her expression of the kind of future that God is bringing forth among the LC, and then explained it as follows: "...we can as church be playful, if we’re not playful and have a sense of humor about ourselves and our messiness, we’re done. You can look at this anyone way you want, see faces in here, sideways rain, eyes, but most of it is pretty humorous and playful."33 This is just one example of how participants felt drawn into the playful nature of discerning God’s future for them. As such, the playful nature of facilitating her engagement with the discernment question helped her make the connection that church can be playful, and that the playfulness of church is related to also approaching the messiness of life in a playful way. In this case, the method of facilitation shaped her ecclesiology of play. The intent with all the focus groups was to facilitate an environment for the production of theology through a playful imagination when they engage their discernment question.

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33 From the Art Ministry Focus Group Event Transcript.
One of the methods used during the LC's focus group events was influenced by research on how playing with Legos shapes the imagination. Three of the focus groups (the Godly Play Sunday School teachers, and two open invitation groups) engaged in playing with Legos. Opening up the imagination through playing with Legos is a method used in a variety of organizations and institutions. One of the most prominent illustrations from the business environment is Lego Serious Play that works with the assumption that "everyone in an organization can contribute to the discussion, solutions, and outcomes," and that playing with Legos can facilitate that to its maximum. It is "based on research that this kind of hands-on, minds-on learning produces a deeper, more meaningful understanding of the world and its possibilities," and it is a "grounding experience of three-dimensional self-discovery interwoven with genuine team values." Many focus group participants gave the feedback of how surprising the experience was for the ability of play to open up conversation between them. When one of the small groups during the Godly Play Sunday School Teachers Focus Group event were asked to give their reflection on the lego model that they had built, the first reaction from one of them was that, instead of focusing that much on what they were building together, she rather got involved in getting to know her co-teachers in a way she never had the opportunity.

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34 For creative approaches that go beyond just focusing on written texts, and specifically the possibilities of employing methods such as Lego Serious Play, see David Gauntlett, Creative Explorations: New Approaches to Identities and Audiences (New York: Routledge, 2007).


before. It reminds of what Plato once said, "You can learn more about a person in an hour of play than you can from a lifetime of conversation." 37

But lego-play also helps participants to "think through their fingers," and to "explore the relationships and connections between people and their world, to observe the dynamics both internal and external, to explore various hypothetical scenarios, and to gain awareness of the possibilities." 38 Through building lego buildings as a visual expression of their engagement with the LC’s question, participants engaged in story-making and scenario building while bonding together as a group. The same dynamics applied to the other imaginative activities used during these focus group events.

Three focus groups (the Social Justice Ministries Group, and two open invitation groups) participated in an imaginative exercise of a balloon ride into the future during which they would look down on the LC’s church building within their immediate neighborhoods and broader community. They would then describe what they see, hear, and smell when they witness the community in action within their broader contexts. The other six groups all engaged in different exercises consisting of a story wall exercise to open up the imagination through memory (Group of Former Governance Board Leaders), the use of posted notes to design a menu of food that reflects the future that God is bringing forth (Hospitality Ministry Group), dwelling in the liturgy of the LC (Worship Team), taking pictures of what God is up to in the midst of the LC (Staff), sharing favorite story books for little children that reflects the future God is bringing forth (Family Faith Group), and drawing art work that reflects this future (Art Ministry Team)

37 As quoted in Ibid.

Godly Play

As already mentioned, these focus group events created the opportunity for adult members of the LC to engage in what was already a popular and integrated metaphor in the life and culture of the LC, namely *Godly Play*. One focus group participant said, "I was talking about Godly Play and really adults needed to learn how to play and to engage in wonder..."³⁹ It was no surprise when the group of Godly Play teachers came up with the same metaphor during their reflection on engaging the discernment question through playing with *Legos*. They expressed their imagination of the future that God is bringing forth among them as a *circle* (see figure 1.2).

![Figure 1.2. Godly Play.](image)

In reflecting on this lego model (figure 1.2), one of the participants explained it as follow: "I was kind of going toward the idea of we’re all in these Godly Play rooms for size and it would be wonderful if we could open it up more to the wider congregation so that people know what’s happening here and what kind of questions are being asked, what kind of discussions are going on - there’s richness I think there that a lot of people

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³⁹ From the Family Faith Focus Group Transcript.
don't know about. But we also talked about the symbolism of the circle – renewal and constant growth and change and I thought that’s where God was – in this circle.\(^{40}\)

Reflecting on this lego model, as the Godly Play Room illustrated by a circle, there was a specific focus on two dynamics involved in how this Godly Play Room performs the future that God is bringing forth in the LC. First, one of the participants in building this model said, “We talked about the center that it was kind of messy and we decided that that is the mystery of faith – this right here jumbled all together…”\(^{41}\)

Second, when asked questions about the fair amount of windows around the circle (and, as pointed out during this questioning, “there’s an arch too…”), another participant said, “… you can get too insulated in a circle and never look out – so, I really like that you have a lot of openings to the outside world… Ways for the outside world to get in. That’s really good and that’s what you worry about with a circle that it does not let forces in.”\(^{42}\)

These two dynamics immediately framed Godly Play as an encounter with the mysterious Other on a playground that is open to others as fellow players in this encounter. The metaphor of play took on a relational imagination far beyond a mere romanticized expression of the circle, and breaks open the missional possibilities of a local Christian community in play with other companions in civil society (which this dissertation return to in chapter 4).

The underlying educational philosophy of Godly Play, Jerome Berryman’s Godly Play: An Imaginative Approach to Religious Education, is precisely to provide an

\(^{40}\) From the Godly Play Teachers Focus Group Transcript.

\(^{41}\) Ibid.

\(^{42}\) Ibid.
appropriate metaphor for connecting play with the imagination in the context of Christian formation. Berryman begins his book with the statement that "Godly play has something in common with all play. The pleasure of it comes from the act of playing itself. Play is recreation." For him, the goal of Godly play is "to play the ultimate game for itself" with "God, the self, others, and nature" as the players of the game. For many participants in the LC's focus group events, and especially mentioned by the Governance Board in their reflection on what they have learned from engaging their ongoing discernment journey in this way, the playful manner in which these events took place was in itself one of the most valuable features of their attempt to open up the imagination. Engaging the discernment question in a playful way gave access to their socially-embodied imagination of their participation in God's mission in civil society.

This approach to education assumes that playing is fundamental to the identity of human beings. Berryman refers to the important work of Donald Winnicott (1896-1971) with regard to what is happening in the relationship between mothers and babies. As a psychoanalyst indebted to Sigmund Freud, Winnicott wrote a book on Playing and Reality during the same year that he died. In this book he explains how frustration begins to develop for a baby when the mother's special sensitivity to the needs of the baby begins to wane. A gap starts to open up for the baby between desire and satisfaction. Berryman sums up Winnicott's observations in this regard as follow:

The child experiences something new: the mother is out there, independent of me. The mother becomes an object. Reality is taking shape in terms of its subjective

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44 Ibid., 1.

and objective aspects. Winnicott noticed that between the subjective and objective experience was a neutral area of experience. Transitional objects are the focus of such experience. My own transitional object was a blanket with a satin edge… The transitional object is neither subjective nor objective alone, but both. The child chooses it and lets it go when it is time, but the experience of the overlapping area in which children and adults play with such objects widens into artistic creativity, religious feeling, dreaming, and many aspects of shared symbols and culture.46

It is in this intermediate, overlapping, and in-between space, says Berryman, that play takes place.47 Play is constituted in the experience between me and the not me. It is a space “where one can be not only with the true self but also with the true self of others,” including with God.48 The important aspect of play in this regard is that it is not primarily the product of creativity, but that the process of play constitutes itself. The participants in the LC’s focus group events of engaging the LC’s discernment question got a taste of such an in-between space of experience where transitional objects as a result of their playful communal expressions shape the imagination in ways that transcend their subjective and corporate identities. Godly Play emerges as a profound way of accessing an imagination that is not only socially-embodied and relationally oriented, but also carries within it the possibilities of a missional imagination of how to participate in God’s mission through engagements with the Other and others.

Engaging the LC’s discernment question with a playful imagination is not to be taken for granted in a very active and busy local Christian community influenced by the pragmatism of its larger culture. As Jurgen Moltmann noticed in the early 70’s already, the dawn of the industrial age brought with it that “play has become a theoretical problem

46 Ibid., 10-11.

47 Chapter 3 will show how Walter Brueggeman relates this very same theory of Winnicott with pneumatology.

only since man has been forced into disciplined, rationalized labor at constantly growing industrial complexes and since playfulness has been banned from the realm of labor as mere foolishness. Therefore, associations with play usually "have overtones of a romantic or utopian longing for a simple childhood world which has either been lost or not yet been reached." The Puritans used to tell their children that they have not come into the world for pleasure.

Churches are not immune to this post-Enlightenment spirit. Moltmann reminds us as well that "the history of life's reformations and revolutions has up to now revealed an irritating paradoxical nature," and that it is particularly true of the Reformation history. He says,

The Reformation fought justification by works in the medieval ecclesiastical society with its system of penances, indulgences, and almsgiving on the grounds of a new faith which justified without the works of the law. The Reformation also abolished the holidays, games, and safety valves of that society. This led to the establishment of the Puritans society of penny pinchers and to the industrial workaday world among the very people who had at first insisted on believing that men are justified by faith alone. Nowhere did the morality of achievement find greater support in the Protestant countries, Scotland and Swabia, for example.

This history, and the LC's broader culture, makes it important to reclaim the importance of play as constitutive of who we are so that we are "no longer playing merely with the past in order to escape it for a while, but we are increasingly playing with the future in order to get to know it." 

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50 Ibid., 4.

51 Ibid., 10.

52 Ibid., 10-11.

53 Ibid., 13.
A Playful Mimesis

The LC’s Godly Play gives an opportunity to invite more voices into the conversation about play for the sake of exploring the possibilities of what might be at stake in the LC’s playful imagination. Reflecting on the research journey’s access to the LC’s socially-embodied imagination through their playful engagement with the LC’s discernment question creates the opportunity for exploring the work of the imagination as playful rather than imitating. Such an exploration is possible through a hermeneutic of mimesis that reclaims play at the root of mimesis rather than associating the history of mimesis with imitation or repetition. It will locate the LC’s experience of accessing their playful engagement with their discernment question within a broader history of imagination, and provide the convergence of the research and discernment journey with conversation partners for understanding what is epistemologically and ontologically at stake in the LC’s playful engagement with their discernment question.

In order to do so, it is important to trace the history of imagination through its pre-modern phases of an imitating mimesis, before reinterpreting mimesis through the metaphor of play. Tracing the history of mimesis will primarily be done through Richard Kearney’s framework of interpreting the pre-modern imagination as reproductive and imitating, before reinterpreting the mimesis with the help of Hans-Georg Gadamer’s metaphor of play.

The Reproductive and Imitating Mimesis

Tracing the pre-modern development of what Richard Kearney calls an alio-relative and imitating mimesis begins at the origins of the imagination in the Hebraic and Hellenistic worldviews, before the journey goes through Plato, Aristotle, and various
medieval developments for establishing the imagination as primarily a representational repetition of something outside of itself. This history not only provides a background for a different interpretation of mimesis as playful rather than imitating, but also allows for the possibility to deconstruct accessing the LC’s imagination as a metaphysical or onto-theological endeavor.

The Hebraic Imagination

A genealogy of the imagination begins at the ancient biblical heritage of Hebraic sources. Richard Kearney says it is “as old as the story of creation itself.” It is therefore not accidental that the Hebraic word for imagination (yetser) derives from the same root (yzr) as the term create (yatsar) or creation (yetsirah). However, the yetser, as the beginnings of the history of imagination in Genesis, represents mostly an ethical tale of the human being’s transgressive ability to imitate the Creator (yotser). It is a fallen imagination that coincides with the original sin of Adam, and therefore, corresponds with the ethical consciousness of good and evil.

In this ethical context of Genesis, “the yetser bears the stigma of a stolen possession,” as something that belongs to someone else. It is also the beginning of an awareness of opposites, difference, otherness, and splits implicit in all being in the world.

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55 Kearney writes, “This allusive interplay between the terms used to describe God’s creation of the world and the First Man’s transgressive capacity (i.e. the Yetser) to imitate this divine act is highly significant. When God ‘created (Yatsar) Adam in his own image (tselem) and likeness (demuth)’ (Gen. 2:8), He risked allowing man to emulate Him, to set himself up as His rival, to supplant Him in the order of creation.” Ibid.

56 Martin Buber, in his *Good and Evil*, stresses the ambiguity of the imagination in this context, describing Adam’s act of rebellion also as a “dream-longing,” or “a longing for godliness.” As quoted in Ibid., 41.

57 Ibid.
The tension between the present and future possibilities is at the core of these splits. From these first beginnings, the yetser represents the human "passion for the possible: the human impulse to transcend what exists in the direction of what might exist." The imagination became evil in the sense of living independently from God, and therefore, losing the sense of belonging to God in a participatory relationship with God as Creator. As such, the imagination also becomes the drive towards idolatry, or the attempt to reduce God to our images rather than belonging to God and participating in God's creative presence and activity.

In this context, the Talmudic tradition of interpretation suggests a paradox or ambiguity with regard to the imagination. The imagination does "relate to both a divine and a human source." This ambiguity opens up the possibility for what Kearney calls "a more benign" interpretation of the imagination. The Talmudic tradition also calls for an integration of the evil imagination into a good imagination. Kearney says, "According to this positive reading, imagination... can serve as an indispensable power for attaining the goal of creation: the universal embodiment of God's plan in the Messianic Kingdom of justice and peace." Then idols are only "premature Messiahs, the distorted fantasies of an impatient imagination," while "the human yetser might indeed become an accomplice in the task of historical re-creation: a task which man now undertakes in dialogue with

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58 Ibid., 42.
59 Ibid., 45.
60 Ibid., 46.
61 Ibid.
The good imagination opens up the possibility of an I-Thou dialogue between man and Creator.

On the basis of Genesis 1:31, the imagination was not created by God as an evil impulse in itself, but only became so in humanity’s subsequent transgression. Therefore, the imagination is neither good nor bad until man makes it so in relationship with God. The Talmudic tradition would primarily interpret this as an ethical choice of humanity. Kearney says, “According to this Talmudic tradition, evil does not pre-exist man, either as a form of cosmic being or as a pre-established given of his own corporeal being. Evil, like good, is seen in the context of man’s ethical horizon of decision.”

This ethical emphasis finally leads the Hebraic imagination into a historical consideration. Even though the imagination became explicitly evil by virtue of the fall, what is always present is the future possibility of returning to the good. The Jewish concept of teshuvah (return) makes a repentance possible as precondition for the manifestation of a covenant between God and humanity with regard to the future direction of history. Kearney sums it up,

In Jewish teaching the ethical notion of goodness is thus intimately related to the historical notion of becoming. This Hebraic preference for the historical category of becoming over the ontological category of being (which predominated in Hellenic culture), has radical implications. It declares that man is not good per se but may become so. But the act of becoming good means that goodness itself, as a condition of existence, is never acquired in any definitive fashion, it is never reducible to a single act in the present. On the contrary, one might say that it is an eschatological horizon which opens up the path of history as a dynamic movement towards the end (eschaton) or goal of perfect goodness – a goal which

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62 Ibid., 47.

63 Ibid., 49.
would only finally be realized in the arrival of the Messianic era, what Christianity later referred to as the Coming of the Kingdom.  

The Hellenic Imagination  

Even though it can be argued that a history of the imagination from Hellenic perspective should begin with Plato and Aristotle, Richard Kearney shows the importance of the pre-philosophical narrative of the ancient Greek myth of Prometheus. It is in this myth that the Hebraic understanding of Adam’s fallen imagination finds its closest equivalent. The difference is that the Hellenic imagination brings a shift from the *ethical* emphasis of the Hebraic imagination to an *epistemological* dimension of imagination.  

Prometheus (meaning “foresight”) “designates the power to anticipate the future by projecting an horizon of imaginary possibilities.” In this myth, Zeus punishes Prometheus for his transgression of stealing fire from the gods. However, it was with this stolen fire that “man was able to invent his own world, creating the various arts which transmuted the order of *nature* (the cosmos of blind necessity governed by Zeus) into the order of *culture* (a realm of relative freedom where man could plan and control his own existence).” The Promethean foresight indicated the ability to imitate the gods with the stolen that belonged to the gods.  

As such, the Promethean myth shares with its Adamic counterpart the characterization of a rebellion against the divine order of things, and therefore the

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66 Ibid., 79-80.

67 Ibid., 80.

68 Ibid.
ambiguity of being “both benefactor of man and instigator of his illegitimate desire to substitute his own arbitrary creations for the original act of divine creation.”\(^6^9\) Both the Adamic and Promethean imagination “is a power which supplements the human experience of insufficiency and sets man up as an original creator in his own right.”\(^7^0\) However, both of them are sacrificial victims who are neither entirely innocent nor entirely guilty, because they “occupy an intermediary position somewhere between the divine and the human.”\(^7^1\)

The role of mediation is significant in this regard. Kearney says, “The intermediary character of imagination in the Hellenic and Hebraic myths determines its ultimately mimetic role.”\(^7^2\) This mimetic functioning of imagination shaped the entire classical and medieval culture of the West, because these origins deals with the imagination in the realm of art (culture) rather than nature. It “never escapes the feeling that it is merely an imitation of the original act of a divine maker (e.g. the biblical Yahweh or the Greek Demiurge)... that its freedom is arbitrary, that its originality is a simulation, repetition, mimesis.”\(^7^3\)

In this sense, the mimetic character of both the Hebraic and Hellenic imagination is alio-relative rather than ipso-relative. There is always a divine or cosmic power greater than the imagination itself. This characteristic brings Kearney to the conclusion that “this obtains whether imagination is condemned for seeking to imitate God in the sense of

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\(^{6^9}\) Ibid., 81.

\(^{7^0}\) Ibid., 82.

\(^{7^1}\) Ibid.

\(^{7^2}\) Ibid.

\(^{7^3}\) Ibid.
replacing Him, or praised for subordinating its own creative activity to the divine order of things (as when Adam confesses his fault and resolves to obey the law of Yahweh; or when Prometheus finally becomes reconciled with Zeus in the final part of the Aeschylus tragedy).”

However, the Promethean imagination also differs from the Adamic imagination in a significant respect. While Adam’s fate was due to an ethical choice between a good and evil imagination, Prometheus’ fate is inscribed as a tragic destiny. Kearney says, “it is part of a cosmological order of being which supersedes the anthropological order of freedom and responsibility.” Contra to Adam, Prometheus’ imagination is not one of participation, but rather an imagination of defiance. The anthropological rather than cosmological paradigm of the Hebraic imagination then also implies for Kearney that Adam is also free, “after his fall from paradise, to put the stolen power of imagination (as a knowledge of good and evil) to good use by submitting it to the way of God (Torah), thereby contributing actively to God’s Messianic plan for history.”

The Metaphysical Imagination

The backdrop of the tragic vision of existence in Greek mythology, which led to a condemned Promethean imagination, is important to understand Plato’s reaction to rehabilitate divine goodness over and against Aeschylus’ portrait of the wicked god. Kearney says, “The ‘innocence of god,’ which Plato’s metaphysics sought to ensure by dividing the cosmos into two radically opposed worlds of spiritual good and material evil,

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74 Ibid., 83.
75 Ibid.
76 Ibid., 85.
was incompatible with the tragic mythology of evil." However, this agenda of Plato also led to an even further demotion of the imagination, and therefore ultimately a condemnation of the imagination as a mimetic function that is divorced from divine being through belonging to the lower order of human existence.

With Plato, the imagination becomes a distinctly human mode of existence. It represents the transition from a mythological to a metaphysical view of the imagination. Already anticipated by many pre-Socratic thinkers (such as Democritus, Pythagoras, Xenophanes, and Anaxagoras), it views the relationship between images (phantasmata or eidola) and reality as problematic. With Plato, however, it for the first time became an explicit theory of imagination.

Plato makes the epistemological distinction between reason (nous) and the mimetic functions of imagination (eikasia and phantasia), which has an underlying metaphysical distinction of being and becoming. The original forms of being, as immutable and timeless, belongs to the transcendental realm of Ideas. And they are sealed off from the lower order of material becoming. The realm of the Ideas is untainted by the lower human order, and the latter is transient and from a source of evil. Reason alone has access to the Ideas, while imagination is condemned to a pseudo-world of imitations.

Therefore, Plato is suspicious of mimesis, especially if it refers to the ability to imitate the divine. In fact, the human imagination is demoted to a third order removed from the truth. Kearney writes,

As he (Plato) explains in the Timaeus (29-31), it was in imitation of the transcendental order of Ideas that the divine demiurge or craftsman first fashioned

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77 Ibid., 86-87.
the material world of becoming... The imagination, by contrast, simply leads man further astray; it does no more than imitate the material world of becoming, which is itself but an imitation of the divine world of being. Thus Plato denounces man-made images as ‘the poor children of poor parents’ – that is, as inferior copies. In presuming to create a world in its own image, the human imagination resides at a third remove from truth. And in so far as it identifies itself with the shaping activity of the divine demiurge, imagination easily leads to idolatry. What is permitted to God is not permitted to man.78

Even though Plato granted Prometheus’ art making as the capacity of human beings to raise above the animal order, he nevertheless rejected that ability to be an art of politics (techne politike). In fact, the art of making proves to be destructive in itself, and couldn’t guarantee human beings to live together in community without committing crimes and injustices against each other. Therefore, Prometheus still has to stand trial for the theft of fire, while Zeus had to save humanity from destruction by sending Hermes “to impart to men ‘the quality of respect for others and a sense of justice, so as to bring order into our cities and create a bond of friendship and union’.”79 This divine order of being, as reflected in the polis, stands in opposition to the human arts of making as represented by Prometheus. It is the rational order of Zeus versus the imaginative disorder of Prometheus.

Herein lies the foundation for Plato to identify humankind as a “race of imitators” (ethnos mimetikon).80 His critique of the mimetic imagination finds its fullest expression in the Republic (Book VI), especially as an epistemological account of imagination. When he draws his divided line between episteme as the correct vision of knowledge, and doxa as the false vision of opinion, reason is placed in the highest section of the divided

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78 Ibid., 88.

79 As quoted from Plato’s Protagoras. Ibid., 89.

80 Ibid., 90.
line, and imagination in the lowest. Reason (nous) gives access to truth, and imagination can be no more than an inferior form of opinion. In this sense, imagination is equated with eikasia or illusion. As an illusion, the imagination reflects the things of our sensory world, which in itself is no more than a copy of the transcendental Ideas themselves.

In this sense, imagination is the agency of falsehood in Plato’s cave (Book VII) where human beings live in an illusionary ignorance. We can only aspire to move into the light outside the cave by following the way of reason. The imagination is epistemologically condemned, and reduced to a non-didactic function that can teach nothing about the reality of things. It reinforces the Platonic oppositions of being and non-being, spirit and matter, soul and body, good and evil, truth and falsity, and it lays the foundation for the entire edifice of Western metaphysics. The imagination is the prodigal son of the Good-Sun-Father who dared “to lay unfilial hands on the paternal pronouncement (patrikoi logoi).”

Jacques Derrida suggests that the identification of the Platonic Good-Sun-Father with logos as a “silent dialogue of the soul with itself” entails “the correlative model of the Father as absolute origin, as self-sufficient identity and unity—in short the model of divine being as an original presence to itself.” In Platonism, the imagination is a threat to this original dialogue of being with itself. By challenging the copyright of the paternal logos, it assumes a life of its own and an existence independent from the Father. Only the divine demiurge can claim to be the legitimate heir of the Father’s inheritance. The imagination, on the other hand, “cannot be assigned a fixed spot... sly, slippery and

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81 As quoted from Plato’s Theaetetus. Ibid., 95.
82 As quoted in Ibid.
masked... a joker, a floating signifier, a wild card which puts play into play.”

The end of this chapter will provide a radically different *imaginatio Trinitatis* as theological basis for a hermeneutic of *mimesis* than these explicit Platonic and metaphysic roots of the imagination.

**The Psychological Imagination**

Like Plato, Aristotle is also concerned with an *epistemological* account of the imagination, namely the function it has in relation to truth and falsehood. However, Aristotle shifts Plato’s metaphysical approach to a *psychological* approach to the imagination. This also means that the Aristotelian approach moves the imagination into a *realist* epistemology rather than the Platonic *idealism*. Kearney writes, “And this difference from Plato means that the emphasis is now more consistently placed on the role of the image as a mental intermediary between sensation and reason rather than as an idolatrous imitation of a divine demiurge.”

As a consequence, Aristotle (especially in the *Poetics*) redefines *mimesis*. It now becomes a “positive capacity of art to portray the universal meaning of human existence” through constituting “a *muthos* which isolates universal truths from the contingent particulars of man’s everyday experience.” In this sense, *mimesis* is an imitation of action that seeks unity, coherence, and the disclosure of the essential dimension of things.

Aristotle, therefore, redeems the artists from their Platonic censorship, and gives the practice of poetic imagination a positive qualification related to truth rather than

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83 As quoted from Derrida’s *Dissemination*. Ibid., 96.

84 Ibid., 106.

85 Ibid.
falsehood. However, the image now has a mental (phantasma) rather than external (eidolon or eikon) status. It is an internal activity of the mind that has the ability to mediate between sensation and reason. Kearney says, “Phantasia stands midway between the inner and the outer. It is both a window on the world and a mirror in the mind.”

This psychological approach to the imagination is especially clear from Aristotle’s De Anima. Here he describes the imagination’s capacity to relay impressions of reality to the inner activity of reason. In De Memoria, he compares this mode of image-representation to a kind of drawing or draughtsmanship. The imagination is an inner draughtsman of the mind. So it does not differ from Plato in the sense of a picturing activity, but it is psychologized as a precondition for rational thought, and it may lead to the apprehension of truth rather than doomed to the illusionary world of imitations only.

Aristotle shifts Plato’s ideas as disembodied spiritual essences to categories of thought through the mediation of images. As such, images become “reliable agents of our phenomenal experiences.” The imagination is now also directly connected to desire and time. By virtue of its ability to recall experiences of the past, experiences of the future can be anticipated through desire. However, for both Plato and Aristotle, the imagination remains largely a reproductive rather than a productive activity, and therefore, a servant rather than a master of meaning; an imitation rather than origin of truth.

The Medieval Imagination

The Medieval Imagination was mostly formed through the blending of the traditions of Jerusalem and Athens, especially as a Christian synthesis of Greek ontology

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86 Ibid., 107.
87 Ibid., 109.
and biblical theology. It is an onto-theological synthesis, as the "bringing together of the Judeo-Christian notion of a Divine Creator and the Platonic-Aristotelian metaphysics of Being" in which God is identified with Being. This synthesis was resisted since the writings of Paul (describing the Gospel a folly for the philosophical mind) through early Church Fathers such as Tertullian (who thought Athens and Jerusalem had nothing in common), but it was always clear that Christian apologists would find it compelling to indicate that classical metaphysics occasionally anticipated (even if unconsciously so) the revealed truth of biblical religion.

It really "was Augustine in the fourth century who first succeeded in forging a sustained and systematic concordance between Judeo-Christian theology and Greek ontology." In Augustine, faith was brought into the onto-theological framework of reconciling belief in the God of Revelation with a metaphysical understanding of the categories of Being. Kearney says, "Yahweh as the God (theos) of Creation is seen as the ultimate origin of Being (on)… theology and ontology as joint allies in the pursuit of truth." The possibility was opened up for the famous medieval model of fides quarens intellectus (faith seeking understanding).

The implications for the history of imagination were profound though, because this onto-theological impulse just served an even deeper suspicion of the imagination. In fact, "it combined and consolidated a) the biblical condemnation of imagination as a transgression of the divine order of Creation (i.e. as ethical disorder) and b) the

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88 Ibid., 115.
89 Ibid., 116.
90 Ibid.
metaphysical critique of imagination as a counterfeit of the original truth of Being (i.e. as epistemological disorder).91 It gave currency to the medieval imaginatio profana (profane imagination). No wonder that Augustine, as the first Latin author to use the term imaginatio, combined the biblical distrust of images with the Greek and neo-Platonic understanding of phantasia as a hindrance to spiritual contemplation.92 The end of this chapter will provide an imaginatio Trinitatis that perceives the imagination as integral rather than a hindrance to spiritual discernment.

Since the onto-theological synthesis brings together the two traditions of mimetic imagination, it is no surprise that someone like Augustine’s theory of imagination is also largely captured within a schema of mimetic representation. Images, even if they are perceived to be completely interiorized and mentalized, still refer to some original reality beyond themselves. The image is a derivation that “cannot create truth out of itself, but must always observe the strict limits of reproduction.”93 The status of originality is only the prerogative of the divine.

In the medieval history of the imagination, this onto-theological synthesis of Jerusalem and Athens sometimes even portrayed the imagination as a threat to the spiritual. Richard of St. Victor’s 12th century text entitled De Unione Corporis et Spiritus is a good example that “warns of the corruptive influence which imagination may exert on the practices of spiritual contemplatio.”94 Contemplation is already considered to be the mistress who inhabits the inner sanctuary of reason, but imagination is the handmaid

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91 Ibid., 117.

92 Especially with reference to Augustine’s De Genesi. Ibid.

93 Ibid., 118.

94 Ibid., 119.
who frequents the outer rooms of bodily desires (with biblical reference to Rachel and Bilhah).

Richard of St. Victor does develop a paradoxical understanding of nature in which imagination is both indispensable to reason, and yet an obstacle to the highest aim of reason, namely meditative contemplation. Like Augustine, Richard “admit a limited role to images as a means of ‘clothing’ rational ideas so as to make them ‘presentable’ and accessible,” but it is “only legitimate to the extent that it occupies an intermediary position between the inner mind and the outer body.” This between positioning of the imagination, even though it reinforces the metaphysical gap between spirit and matter, provides an interesting prelude to what will become important to Kant’s theory of imagination later on, namely that “the imagination would be revealed not as a mere representation of some pre-existing original (i.e. the body or reason) but as the very play which produces the notion of such an original presence in the first place.”

St. Bonaventure was influenced by Richard St. Victor’s treatment of the soul’s contemplative ascent to God. Kearney says, “the most telling metaphor for imagination in Bonaventure is that of mirroring.” Bonaventure relies on an interpretation of the term imago as a derivative of imitando, meaning to imitate or reflect. For him, images are secondary forms of imitation, what he calls similitudo. Kearney sums it up, “the human creature is a simulacrum of the Divine Creator, and his highest vocation is to faithfully

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95 Ibid., 121-22.
96 Ibid., 122.
97 Ibid., 123.
‘mirror’ the Supreme Artist of the universe.” It is Bonaventure’s way of invoking the neoplatonic model of exemplarism that accounts for creation’s mirroring of the original.

Descartes’ cogito ergo sum of later times is still far removed from Bonaventure’s I am a copy, therefore I am. The imagination is an itinerarium halfway between the sensible world and the understanding. “As such,” Kearney says, “images can either lead downwards into error or upwards toward supernatural truth.” When it takes the upward route, imagination can create images which imitate God, and Bonaventure even proposes at one point a daring comparison between a human creation of an artistic image and God’s creation of man. However, it still remains the privilege of knowledge to judge images in the light of the truth.

Another good example of the onto-theological approach of this era is Bonaventure’s use of a biblical metaphor to understand the ascent of images toward God. Kearney explains, “As a transitional faculty of imaging, imaginatio is, of course, analogous to ‘Jacob’s ladder’ (although Christ remains the true example of the ladder model). For just as Jacob dreamt of a ladder stretched between heaven and earth with angels descending and ascending, so too images may point towards sacred truths by mediating between the lower senses and the higher faculties of reason.” However, imagination can never reach truth on its own, and only represents a very low step in climbing the ladder to truth. In fact, more often than not phantasia serves as a hindrance to truth, and therefore also leaves us vulnerable to demonic possession.

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98 Ibid., 124.
99 Ibid., 125.
100 Ibid., 127.
Aquinas “represents what many consider to be the crowning achievement of the medieval synthesis of Greek and biblical learning, rehearsing and rearranging the principle stages of Western ontology and theology in a magisterial system or *summa.*”

In his *Summa Theologia*, he consolidates the imagination as mediational faculty between mind and body. As such, he considers the imagination as one of the plurality of psychological functions without any autonomy of its own.

Kearney shows how the metaphor of *storehouse* “is perhaps the paradigmatic figure of imagination in Thomistic philosophy and, one could even argue, in the mainstream of medieval scholasticism as a whole.” In using this metaphor, Aquinas combines the Platonic notion of a pure noetic realm devoid of images with the Aristotelian understanding that forms cannot be mentally represented without images. Therefore, all uses of imagination remains subordinate to the superior claims of both reality and reason.

The mediational role of imagination can indeed be either positive or negative, but it still is considered to be mimetic of nature. Therefore, as Kearney sums it up, “the ambiguous status of imagination on the epistemological plane was expressed in a general attitude of suspicion – a suspicion exacerbated by the adherence of medieval philosophy to the ethical condemnation of imagination found in Holy Scripture. The combination of these two foundational authorities (Greek ontology and Judeo-Christian theology) resulted in a largely hostile view of imagination.”

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101 Ibid., 128.
102 Ibid., 129.
103 Ibid., 131.
transcendent Other (God or Being) as the exclusive Origin of all reality. The imagination is only granted probation under the jurisdiction of reason.

Accessing a Playful Imagination

It is because of the previous history of *mimesis* that *representation* or *reproduction* became, to use Paul Ricoeur's description, "the great accused of contemporary philosophy." 104 However, there is enough of an indication in the history of *mimesis* to suggest that *mimesis* is more than mere representation, especially where *mimesis* arose as a "*figurative praxis* through which something is enacted." 105 This dissertation will specifically focus on Gadamer's reclaiming of *mimesis* from its representational interpretations, especially since his understanding of *mimesis* is closely related to his use of the *play* metaphor.

The Playful Imagination

*Mimesis* is key to Gadamer's understanding of truth. After retrieving *mimesis*' heritage, Gadamer portrays *mimesis as performative action*. Therefore, he refuses to tie up *mimesis* with *Vorstellung* as some realistic representation. For Gadamer, *mimesis* is related to *Spiel (play)* as the texture of being itself, and therefore it does not refer to "something made after something already known, but, rather, to bring something to presentation so that it is present in this way in sensual fullness." 106 As performative act,

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105 Ibid.

106 As quoted from Gadamer's 1977 publication on *Die Aktualitat des Schonen: Kunst als Spiel, Symbol und Fest*. Ibid.: 794.
the *mimesis* is rather "the process by which worlds come to be, an event of being and truth."\(^{107}\)

In the work of Gadamer, *mimesis* is intrinsically related to participation in *play* as an ontologically central movement in which the subjective consciousness of participants are transcended. Schweiker sums it up well,

*Spiel* is ontologically basic because it is how things and consciousness come to be in specific ways. That coming to be is mimetic because internal to the movement is another aspect of *Spiel*: a coming to presentation. That is why Gadamer understands *Spiel* as mimetic, as performative and figurative. And yet, the presentation is not the imitation of some antecedent idea or form (*Abbild*); it is the dramatic presentation (*Darstellung*) of the mimetic movement itself in its originality (*Urbild*). Mimesis articulates how the original being of something, its nature or emerging power (*physis*), comes to presentation.\(^{108}\)

The performative nature of *mimesis* as *Darstellung* in Gadamer's work is in fact a *Selbstdarstellung* of the action. It is the play itself that is presented. However, in doing that, play is transformed into the figurative structure of a drama (*Verwandlung ins Gebilde*). This moment transfigures play into truth as an ideality beyond the momentary performance. Both the performative action of selfpresentation and the transformation into figuration implies that play is always performed for an audience, and therefore becoming a public reality.

In *Truth and Method, mimesis* is taken up in the section on play's transformation into structure, and just after he explained the dynamics of *play*. He makes the connection between *mimesis* as *imitation* and *dance* as *representation of the divine* when he talks


about the classical theory of art. However, he says, imitation can only be used to describe *mimesis* in this regard if the one that imitates “allows what he knows to exist and to exist in the way that he knows it.” What is at stake in this imitation is an *ontological* import of *recognizing* the thing that is represented. Gadamer writes, “what we experience in a work of art and what invites our attention is how true it is – i.e., to what extent one knows and recognizes something and oneself,” and therefore, “the joy of recognition is rather the joy of knowing *more* than is already familiar.”

He continues to explain that this is exactly the kind of recognition that takes place in play, namely a kind of representation that “leaves behind it everything that is accidental and unessential – e.g., the private, particular being of the actor” when the actor “disappears entirely in the recognition of what he is representing.” David Bryant explains that “this means, in the first place, that the essence of play is located not in the consciousness of the players but in the movement of play itself... Genuine play absorbs the players into the structure of its movement and hence shapes their consciousness in its movement.” Play transcends subjectivity while including subjectivity, because “the players are not the subjects of play, though the play cannot become actual without them.” The players are playing the game by being played by the game. In this sense, “mimesis surpasses mere mimicry,” and is released from any possible close connection to

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110 Ibid., 113.

111 Ibid.

112 Ibid., 114.


114 Ibid., 107.
idealism.\textsuperscript{115} It creates the opportunity to take \textit{mimesis} out of its association with 
\textit{likeness}\textsuperscript{116} into the sphere of play constituted by the \textit{otherness} of play and players.\textsuperscript{117}

In this sense, “the situation basic to imitation… not only implies that what is represented is there (das Dargestellte da ist), but also that it has come into the There more authentically (eigentlicher ins Da gekommen ist).”\textsuperscript{118} This brings Gadamer to the conclusion that \textit{mimesis} as imitation and representation is not merely \textit{repetition} or a \textit{copy}, but in fact “knowledge of the essence” as a “bringing forth” of the truth, and therefore the important insight that “the presentation of the essence, far from being a mere imitation, is necessarily revelatory.”\textsuperscript{119}

Since \textit{mimesis}, within the context of \textit{Spiel}, is not a copied repetition but an essential recognition, the audience is involved in the play. This aspect brings about a \textit{double mimesis}, “since both the subject matter and the audience comes to presentation in the event of performance.”\textsuperscript{120} Jean Grondin describes this \textit{double mimesis} as “an open event of truth in which we simply participate, a basic experience which Gadamer wants to define as the event of truth in general.”\textsuperscript{121}


\textsuperscript{116} Ibid.: 525.


\textsuperscript{118} Gadamer, \textit{Truth and Method}, 114.

\textsuperscript{119} Ibid.


\textsuperscript{121} As quoted from his \textit{Hermeneutischen Wahrheit? Zum Wahrheits-begriff Hans-Georg Gadamers}. Ibid.: 796.
Therefore, understanding is the basic mimetic phenomenon, because it can only happen through interpretation. Gadamer sees interpretation as a conversation which is exactly the Spiel that is mimetic in character. As such, “the concept of play also provides a clue to the nature of the hermeneutical phenomenon in general, whether in the work of the human sciences or in communication between individuals.”122 Schweiker says, “through an interpretive conversation what is interpreted comes to a new presentation even as understanding is won.”123 This interpretive act that leads to understanding as recognition of the truth is the fusion of horizons (Horizontverschmelzung) between the interpreter and what is being understood.124 This fusion is the double mimesis.

Gadamer sums it up by saying, “My thesis, then, is that the being of art cannot be defined as an object of an aesthetic consciousness because, on the contrary, the aesthetic attitude is more than it knows of itself. It is a part of the event of being that occurs in presentation, and belongs essentially to play as play.”125 This conclusion leads him to ask the question regarding its ontological implications. The importance of this necessitates to quote Gadamer more fully,

This much is clear: drama, and the work of art understood as a drama, is not a mere schema of rules or prescribed approaches within which play can freely realize itself. The playing of the drama does not ask to be understood as satisfying a need to play, but as the coming-into-existence of the work itself. And so there arises the question of what such a work properly is, given that it exists only in being played and in its presentation as play, though it is nevertheless its own being that is thereby presented... Play is structure – this means that despite its


124 See also Bryant, Faith and the Play of Imagination: On the Role of Imagination in Religion, 111-13.

125 Gadamer, Truth and Method, 115.
dependence on being played it is a meaningful whole which can be repeatedly presented as such and the significance of which can be understood. But structure is also play, because – despite this theoretical uni

Gadamer’s reclaiming of mimesis to indicate at much more than a mere repetition or copy of something else, but rather an event of truth coming into being through play that brings forth a middle space (Zwischen) of transcending subjectivity and intersubjectivity, provides the broader framework to perceive the LC’s playful imagination during their focus group events as a participation in the truth of what God is doing in, among, and through them as the LC in civil society. These focus group events became the first impulses of congregation-wide conversations during which a fusion of horizons emerges as an in-between landscape of meaning that transcends what they know of themselves, and creates the field of power in which they participate to discern God’s presence and activity among them and in the world. The focus group participants had a taste of how a “loss of self (in play) is not the self’s destruction; it is the self’s enrichment through what is disclosed in the play of the dialogue.”

This in-between field of truth and meaning constituted by play in itself is dependent on the habit of relational attentiveness to the other (God and each other) as participants and players for the sake of receiving the gifts of the new and surprising that emerges as a field of subjective and intersubjective transcendence. It is in this regard that insights from a phenomenological research approach are relevant for cultivating such a habit of attentiveness. In their playful and imaginative engagement with the LC’s

126 Ibid., 116.

127 See also Hyde, “Beyond Logic - Entering the Realm of Mystery: Hermeneutic Phenomenology as a Tool for Reflecting on Children’s Spirituality,” 35.

discernment question, participants of the focus groups events were drawn into a much larger conversation through practicing the habit of paying attention to what emerges in relationship to the other co-players in the process. This not only includes their fellow LC participants, but also communion with God through Word and Spirit.

**The Phenomenological Imagination: The Habit of Relational Attentiveness**

Cultivating a habit of relational attentiveness brings about an approach to accessing socially-embodied theology that can be described as a phenomenological imagination. Merleau-Ponty apparently once declared that “phenomenology is accessible only through a phenomenological method.”\(^{129}\) One only understands phenomenology by practicing it. The reason for this is that phenomenology by definition is committed to “go back to the things themselves” (Husserl’s famous description of the phenomenological task) without “attempting to fix experience in predefined or overly abstract categories.”\(^{130}\) It was exactly the aim of this dissertation’s research journey to take serious the flow of lived experience as it takes on particular significance for members of the LC in their process of discernment. Through a convergence with their process of discernment, the research approach wanted to learn what it means to pay close attention to their playful and imaginative engagement with the LC’s discernment question. In doing so, it participates in their efforts to equally pay close attention to what emerges in their midst. It was a co-journey of co-learning on how to cultivate a habit of relational attentiveness.

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This approach to the research journey, and how its corresponding environment in the LC's discernment process was cultivated, has a particular history that informs it. This history will form the background for different levels of engagement in both the research and discernment processes. In this chapter, there will be a specific focus on how this history informs the first level of engagement related to this chapter's attempt to describe the process of accessing the LC's socially-embodied imagination.

A Turn Beyond Metaphysics and Positivism

A phenomenological approach is appropriate for a research design that seeks to avoid the pitfalls of either a Platonic metaphysics or positivistic epistemology. Phenomenology is known for its critical stance toward both “the positivist focus on an observed external reality” and “the mentalist view that there is no material reality.” As such, phenomenology's approach to knowledge as constituted within the relationality and cultural flows of everyday living experience (rather than the idealism of either another world or consciousness, or the objectivism of the empirical) is in conjunction with both the attempt earlier in this chapter to construct a playful mimesis that goes beyond a mere representational imagination, and a Trinitarian theology rooted in a relational ontology that will be developed in the last part of this chapter as an imaginatio Trinitatis. This imaginatio Trinitatis integrates a biblical-theological framework on the imago Dei with

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131 Some would argue that, even though classical phenomenology (especially in its Husserlian form) was intended to be a radical critique of metaphysics, it was not able to conceal its own metaphysical presuppositions. James K.A. Smith, “A Principle of Incarnation in Derrida's (Theologische?) Jugendschriften: Towards a Confessional Theology,” Modern Theology 18, no. 2 (2002): 219.

the philosophical insights on the _playful_ imagination so far explored in the previous part of this chapter.

Both the so-called _hermeneutical_ and _theological_ turns in the historical development of the phenomenological movement in the 20th century provides this dissertation’s research journey with the opportunity to consider a theology that funds the LC’s truth-seeking as an interpretative openness and attention to how God’s presence and activity emerge in-between them when they engage in a playful imagination.

Theologically, it represents a pneumatological openness to the eschatological in-breaking of God’s preferred and promised future in, among, and through them. From a philosophical and cultural anthropology perspective, it consider the dynamics of how this particular communities’ _social imaginaire_ in specific cultural flows are neither shaped as mere constructivist or representationalist publics, but rather as the emergence of how things are between them as it is shaped by various integral force fields within those cultural flows.

In order to put the hermeneutical and theological turn in phenomenology into perspective, a more thorough historical overview is necessary. The phenomenological movement in 20th century philosophy133 represents a philosophical _approach_ rather than a philosophical system. Dermot Moran describes phenomenology as “_a radical way of doing philosophy, a practice_ rather than a system.”134 Although phenomenology can be characterized in a variety of ways, the central motif of the phenomenological approach is

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133 It is the preference of many to describe phenomenology as a _movement_ to emphasize that it is “not stationary, but rather dynamic and evolving.” Susann M. Laverty, “Hermeneutic Phenomenology and Phenomenology: A Comparison of Historical and Methodological Considerations,” _International Journal of Qualitative Methods_ 2, no. 3 (2003): 3.

to describe “things just as they are, in the manner in which they appear.”\textsuperscript{135} As such, it represents a 20\textsuperscript{th} century movement in which philosophy is “returning... to the life of the living human subject” after the “arid and academic” neo-Kantian 19\textsuperscript{th} century philosophy.\textsuperscript{136}

Tracing the historical roots have to go back to the underlying philosophy of Edmund Husserl, founder of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century phenomenological movement (even though he was not the first person to employ the term \textit{phenomenology}).\textsuperscript{137} Most phenomenological methodologies find their roots in Husserl’s attempt “to develop a rigorous descriptive science of consciousness in which consciousness is always consciousness \textit{of}, and developed a method of inquiry for this purpose.”\textsuperscript{138} From methodological perspective, it is “not concerned with origins or a deductive exploration for invisible substances in causes, but rather a method for investigating and describing the presence of any phenomenon given to consciousness, precisely as it is given or experienced, in terms of the meaning that the phenomenon has for those experiencing

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{135} Ibid., xiii. Edmund Husserl coined the precept \textit{zu den sachen selbst} (“toward the things themselves”). Susan Kleiman, “Phenomenology: To Wonder and Search for Meanings,” \textit{Nurse Researcher} 11, no. 4 (2004), 8.
\item \textsuperscript{136} Moran, \textit{Introduction to Phenomenology}, 5.
\item \textsuperscript{137} Moran shows how the concept has 18\textsuperscript{th} century roots in Lambert, Herder, Kant, Fichte, and Hegel, as well as its influence on Husserl in the form of the “descriptive psychology” of Franz Brentano. Ibid., 6-9. See also Heimbrock, “From Data to Theory: Elements of Methodology in Empirical Phenomenological Research in Practical Theology,” 276. For a more detailed summary of Husserl’s foundational work, see Laverty, “Hermeneutic Phenomenology and Phenomenology: A Comparison of Historical and Methodological Considerations,” 3-6. For a broader historical overview of these origins of phenomenology, see Thomas Groenewald, “A Phenomenological Research Design Illustrated,” \textit{International Journal of Qualitative Methods} 3, no. 1 (2004): 3-5.
\item \textsuperscript{138} Baker, Wuest, and Noerager Stern, “Method Slurring: The Grounded Theory / Phenomenology Example,” 1356.
\end{itemize}
Husserl announced the phenomenological cry of “back to the things themselves” as a claim for the ability to carefully describe phenomena themselves, and therefore “to be attentive only to what is given in intuition.” In exploring this claim, Husserl attempts to develop a “descriptive science of consciousness” that underlies all forms of scientific knowledge. He proposes a number of different steps of achieving such an attentiveness to the given in phenomena themselves: the phenomenological *epoche*, or suspension of the natural attitude; methodological *reductions*, or alterations of viewpoint (including the *eidetic* and *transcendental* reduction). These steps can lead to the isolation of “the central essential features of the phenomena under investigation.” Husserl’s foundation represents the original phenomenological attempt to avoid the alternatives of *rationalism* and *empiricism* and to reject the *subject-object distinction* altogether by offering “a holistic approach to the relation between objectivity and consciousness, stressing the mediating role of the body in perception.”

Despite this effort, Husserlian phenomenology never really escaped what Paul Ricoeur called an *idealism*. A shift away from the classical Husserlian approach already started with Martin Heidegger’s critique on Husserl’s “too Cartesian and intellectualistic” account of human engagement in the world, and consequently Heidegger’s abandonment

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139 Kleiman, “Phenomenology: To Wonder and Search for Meanings,” 7-8.


141 The role of *intuition* was also stressed by other important philosophical contributions at the turn of the century, most notably Wilhelm Dilthey, Henri Bergson, and William James. Moran, *Introduction to Phenomenology*, 9.

142 Ibid.

143 Ibid., 11.

144 Ibid., 13.
of terms such as “consciousness” and “intentionality,” and his emphasis on *der-Weltsein* (“Being-in-the-world”) as “an irreducible ontological relation with the world.” 145

Heidegger represents a phenomenological shift towards “a radically historicized hermeneutics” accounting for an ontology of facticity and temporality that rejects a transcendental idealism. 146 For Heidegger, consciousness is not separate from the world, but is a formation of historically lived experience. Understanding is not the way we know the world, but the way we are. Pre-understanding is not something that we can set aside (bracket) for the sake of reducing phenomena to essences beyond a situatedness determined by such pre-understanding. In Heidegger, interpretation became critical, and the move was made from “pure” phenomenology to hermeneutical phenomenology.

This hermeneutical shift, that came to further maturity in the subsequent contributions of Hans-Georg Gadamer and Paul Ricoeur, brings with it at least two significant methodological implications. First, a much more socially-embodied concept of understanding emerged, which provides this dissertation’s research journey with the possibility to see its descriptive task as one that goes beyond consciousness to the imagination as a socially-embodied phenomenon shaped in and through the everyday cultural flows of being-in-the-world. In Husserl, despite the intent to overcome the Cartesian subject-object and mind-body dualisms, human beings are still understood as

145 Something that was shared by Levinas, Sartre, and Merleau Ponty in subsequent developments in the phenomenological movement. Ibid. For a detailed version of the phenomenological shift represented by Heidegger’s contribution, see Laverty, “Hermeneutic Phenomenology and Phenomenology: A Comparison of Historical and Methodological Considerations,” 7-9.

primarily knowers, with conscious awareness as the starting point in the creation of
knowledge.¹⁴⁷

Secondly, “bracketing” in the Husserlian sense, namely as a setting aside of pre-understanding and prejudices detached from tradition and situatedness, becomes an impossibility. This dissertation’s research journey also accepts the importance of fruitful prejudices, and the constitutive role of pre-understandings determined by both tradition (such as Word and sacrament in a specific Christian faith and ecclesial tradition) and cultural situatedness (such as the very particular shape of civil society and broader cultural features of the local Christian community’s context). In this sense, it follows Gadamer in emphasizing that method cannot produce objective and value free knowledge separate from the knower and all the prejudice that shapes knowledge. Through a fusion of horizons, understanding and interpretation cannot be separated as always an evolving process. For Gadamer, the Husserlian idealization is overcome in the fact that “language is already present in any acquisition of experience, and in it the individual ego comes to belong to a particular linguistic community.”¹⁴⁸

This hermeneutical shift represents an important methodological difference between Husserlian phenomenology and hermeneutical phenomenology. Many argue that the original phenomenological methodology is still foundational in the sense that it seeks truth independent from the biographical, social, or historical position of the interpreter, while hermeneutical phenomenology is non-foundational in its focus on the interpretive

¹⁴⁷ Gadamer is ruthless in his critique on Husserl at this point: “he (Husserl) still seems dominated by the one-sidedness that he criticizes, for he projects the idealized world of exact scientific experience into the original experience of the world, in that he makes perception, as something directed toward merely external physical appearances, the basis of all other experience.” Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 342.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., 342-43.
interaction between historically produced texts and the reader. In his critique on the
Husserlian idealism, Ricoeur says that the Husserlian demand for intuition is countered
by “the necessity for all understanding to be mediated by an interpretation.”

However, Ricoeur wants to move beyond Heidegger and even Gadamer with the
help of the critique of ideology “to compliment the critique of the object by a critique of
the subject.” Ricoeur questions the primacy of subjectivity through the theory of the
text as the hermeneutical axis. Ricoeur moves from recovering, or intentionality, or even
disclosing, to disclosure. It moves phenomenology out of a “parallelism” with
psychology by “subordinating the question of the author’s intention to that of the matter
of the text.” This dissertation’s research journey deliberately tried to avoid a
psychologizing approach to the imagination, and will focus on the interplay between
historically and culturally embodied texts within the life and context of the LC as
constitutive of how the socially-embodied, theo-cultural imagination is shaped.

More recent developments in phenomenology even give the Ricoeurian return to
the matter of the text another dimension with the emphasis on the disclosive nature of
what is at stake in the phenomenological description. For someone like Jean-Luc Marion
subordination to the matter of the text is to receive the phenomenon as being given. The
receptive and disclosive dynamic of givenness is now far removed from the intentional

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149 Laverty, Susann M., “Hermeneutic Phenomenology and Phenomenology: A Comparison of
Historical and Methodological Considerations,” International Journal of Qualitative Methods (September
2003), 16.

150 Paul Ricoeur and John B. Thompson, Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences: Essays on

151 Ibid., 109.

152 Ibid., 112.
and constructive nature of the Husserlian consciousness. In concurrence with Gadamer's understanding of play, and Ricoeur's understanding of the text, the subject-object and mind-body dualism collapse in an in-betweeness where the surprise and openness of the given transcends individual and collective consciousness.

This transceding possibility in the disclosive dynamic of the given is similar to Charles Taylor's definition of the social imaginaire. For him, the social imaginaire "extends beyond the immediate background understanding which makes sense of our particular practices..., because just as the practice without the understanding wouldn't make sense for us, and thus wouldn't be possible, so this understanding supposes, if it is to make sense, a wider grasp of our whole predicament, how we stand to each other, how we got to where we are, how we relate to other groups, etc." Moreover, Taylor says, "our grasp of the world does not consist simply of our holding inner representations of outer reality..., but these only make the sense that they do for us because they are thrown up [could we replace this with a Marion "givenness"?] in the course of an ongoing activity of coping with the world, as bodily, social and cultural beings.... This coping activity, and the understanding which inhabits it, is not primarily that of each of us as individuals; rather, we are each inducted into the practices of coping as social 'games' or activities... primordially, we are part of social action."

Some argue that the more recent contributions in French philosophy also represents a "theological turn" in the development of phenomenology "that distinguish it

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153 Taylor, A Secular Age, 172-73.

154 Ibid., 558.
decisively from the time of the first reception of Husserl and Heidegger.\footnote{Dominique Janicaud, Phenomenology and The "Theological Turn": The French Debate, 1st ed., Perspectives in Continental Philosophy (New York: Fordham University Press, 2000), 17.} This so-called \textit{theological turn} brings with it a renewed \textit{ouverture} ("opening") to the \textit{Autre} ("the Other" and the invisible), and to a \textit{donation} ("givenness").\footnote{Ibid.} To some extent it is already present in Sartre’s and Merleau-Ponty’s engagement with Heidegger to liberate themselves from Husserl’s "idealist metaphysics... where the \textit{cogitatio} continues to play a central role."\footnote{Ibid., 21.} But it is particularly evident in Levinas’ focus on "the Other."\footnote{George Drazenovich, “Towards a Levinasian Understanding of Christian Ethics: Emmanuel Levinas and the Phenomenology of the Other,” \textit{Crosscurrents} (2005): 37-54.} In referring to Levinas, Drazenovich says, "it is a transcendent human desire for meaning rooted in the existential experience of human relationships that seeks the Other (that Lévinas sometimes renders using the Biblical imagery of Stranger) in the face of the other."\footnote{Ibid.: 37.} This leads inevitably to a conclusion that there is no knowledge of God possible outside relationships with the other. Drazenovich says, "Unlike the Hegelian dialectic, the other is not like an allergy that needs to be assimilated into a systematic synthesis. The relationship is instead positive. It evokes an ethical response."\footnote{Ibid.: 43.}

Developments such as these raised the question whether it is possible to “bracket out” God as part of the phenomenological task. Husserl is quoted as saying, "the life of humans is nothing but a way to God. I try to reach this goal without theological proofs, methods, supports; namely, to arrive \textit{at God without God}. I, as it were, must eliminate God from my scientific existence in order to pave the way to God for humans who do not
have, as you do, the certainty of faith through the Church. I know my procedure could be
dangerous for me were I not a human deeply bound to God and a faithful Christian.\textsuperscript{161}

While many consider classical Husserlian phenomenology as an attempt to exclude God,\textsuperscript{162} others argue for the possibility of what many call a “phenomenological theology.” Phenomenological theology attempts to be a phenomenology of God, in the sense that “it is offered in the spirit of an original phenomenological investigation of a specific ‘region’ of experience recoverable through recognizably phenomenological techniques and strategies,” but that it “seeks to discover its Subject Matter, the Divine (\textit{theos}), in that web of intuitively articulable necessities in which phenomena are caught and seeks to do so by means of the reductive-eidetic-reconstructive techniques characteristic of phenomenology.”\textsuperscript{163} This dissertation’s research journey also accepts Bovell’s argument that it is impossible to exclude the God question from the \textit{epoche}. He concludes his article to say that, “Precisely because God both transcends and is somehow inextricably involved in the possibility and performance of the natural and theoretical attitudes, I think God poses a very interesting problem for doing phenomenology to which exclusion is not a very good answer.”\textsuperscript{164}

This dissertation’s research journey wants to take seriously the theological turn as a condition of possibility to do phenomenological research within a theological environment where God is considered an active participant within the cultural flows of


\textsuperscript{163} Laycock and Hart, \textit{Essays in Phenomenological Theology}, 2, 4.

\textsuperscript{164} Bovell, “Husserl's Phenomenological Reduction and the Exclusion of God,” 93.
what is disclosed in the socially-embodied imagination. James Smith says that what is at stake in the "theological turn" is "first of all, the matter of how that which is transcendent can make an appearance, and then following from this, how a discourse on transcendence could be possible."\textsuperscript{165} For Smith, "the phenomenological ego is haunted by a nonpresence, an absence, perhaps even a \textit{transcendence} – another, an Other."\textsuperscript{166} The theological turn in phenomenology brings the possibility of revelation and incarnation.\textsuperscript{167} In this dissertation's research journey, it is also considered to bring the pneumatological embodiment and eschatological openness necessary for the LC as a theological community that discerns their participation in God's presence and activity amidst the cultural flows of their context, for the sake of God's preferred and promised future for them.

\textbf{The Phenomenological Imagination}

This history of phenomenology is relevant to the history of the imagination. Richard Kearney says, "The phenomenological movement elucidates potentialities of imagination which Edmund Husserl, its inaugurator, believed were neglected in most previous philosophies."\textsuperscript{168} He continues to single out phenomenology's celebration of imagination's value over and against other theories that reduces the imagination to the dualism of Platonic metaphysics, the representationalism of imitation, and the reification

\textsuperscript{165} Smith, "A Principle of Incarnation in Derrida's (Theologische?) Jugendschriften: Towards a Confessional Theology," 218.

\textsuperscript{166} Ibid.: 220.

\textsuperscript{167} Ibid.: 225.

of the imagination in the mind rather than a feature of living consciousness. Given the hermeneutical turn referred to in the section above on the history of phenomenology, it is important to take the phenomenological development in relationship to the imagination through Heidegger's contribution (which this dissertation will return to in chapter 3 on the hermeneutical imagination). However, it is also necessary to look more carefully at Husserl's contribution regarding the imagination's phenomenological relevance (and vice versa).

Richard Kearney indicates at this relationship by beginning with Husserl's Ideas (1913). After rejecting both inductive and deductive methodologies, Husserl suggests that the imagination is one of the most central "modes of consciousness" that does not operate on assumptions of either empiricism or rationalism. One of his main emphasis in this regard is to construe the image not as something internal to consciousness, but as a relation, or "an act of consciousness directed to an object beyond consciousness." This is of course connected to his theory of consciousness that consciousness is always consciousness of something. The world is transcendent to consciousness, unlike someone like Hume who reduces the world to inner sensations or ideas. As such, the imagination is distinguished from both the things in the world and other modes of consciousness.

What then, asks Kearney, "does imagination do for phenomenology?" There are four important aspects from how Kearney explores this question. First, "Things are apprehended in their essence (eidos), Husserl claims, when they are grasped not only in

169 Ibid.

170 Ibid., 14.

171 Ibid., 15.

172 Ibid., 18-29.
their actuality but also in their possibility – the latter being the special preserve of imagination.173 Imagination is important for the eidetic way of knowledge that discovers the possible in the disclosure of essences. In this way, Husserl offends the natural attitude that refuses to go beyond empirically observable data. Moreover, from a constructive perspective, the imagination is positioned "as an indispensable agency for the disclosure and intuition of meaning."174

Second, "by bracketing or neutralizing our normal 'perceptual' relation to things we enter an imaginative perspective from which the teeming flux of consciousness may be apprehended in all its possible permutations."175 Consciousness is an intentional activity rather than a cause or an effect, and the imagination discloses the intentionality of consciousness. Kearney says, "Because the image is not a copy of the datum of being, but a pure creation of consciousness, it can best reveal the essence of consciousness to itself as a perceptual movement towards meaning. In this way, the classical poles of consciousness as passive tabula rasa or active intellection are replaced by a more bipolar notion of consciousness as a reciprocal rapport with what is other than itself."176

Third, the imagination provides a "liberty of variation," namely "to detach itself form the perceptual data and reflect upon them in the form of an as if mode of consciousness where they can be alternated and adjusted at will for the purposes of clarity and definition."177 This as if mode is central to Husserl's understanding of the importance

173 Ibid., 19.
174 Ibid.
175 Ibid., 20.
176 Ibid., 21.
177 Ibid., 22.
of reduction. It is important to notice that reduction does not mean a positivistic narrowing of meanings to facts, but rather "a leading back to (re-ducere) the essential structures of phenomena." The imagination enables consciousness to always return to the realm of possibility.

Fourth, "Imagination leads to an intuition of essences, which Husserl designates as 'universals not conditioned by any fact'." The imagination allows for a continuous suspension of the actual to become open series of possibility, and therefore, "to envision alternative modes of experience transcending our present state of affairs" (the so-called phenomenological attitude of free variation). This identification of imaginableness and possibility is even made more explicit in Husserl's fourth meditation of his Cartesian Meditations (1929). However, the question remains whether Husserl's role for the imagination in consciousness ever really becomes more than "a mere projection of the self, or an encounter with something other than the self." That is why subsequent developments, especially the ontological and hermeneutical turns of Heidegger and Gadamer, are so important. From the perspective of the imagination, it would require a full account of how the social imaginaire takes the imagination out of its psychological paradigms. This dissertation will return to that task in chapter 3.

In this chapter, the goal was to set up the historical and theoretical background for the research journey's phenomenological approach to accessing the LC's socially-embodied imagination as an embedded journey within their journey of discernment. This

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178 Ibid.
179 Ibid., 23.
180 Ibid.
181 Ibid., 30.
dissertation suggests that what is at stake in such an approach, is a habit of relational attentiveness. It is a habit that is cultivated in the playful imagination of the LC's participation with others during their focus group engagements with the LC's question of discernment.

Accessing through Relational Attentiveness

From a research perspective, phenomenology has a very particular posture with regard to addressing the question of "what are data?" Literally translated from the Latin *datum*, it means *that which is given*. Husserl describes this with the word *givenness*. According to Husserl, "gaining knowledge about reality starts always with what is given." The challenge is this regard "is to approach 'living reality'... not preoccupied by a specific filter, called a 'hypothesis.'"\(^{182}\) We need to recognize that there is no *pure* "phenomenological method" for research. Heimbrock says, "We can only identify some characteristic elements for a research approach that follows phenomenological theory; better still, we can identify a research 'habit'."\(^{183}\) The first level of engagement of the LC's focus groups represents such an attempt to access the imagination through an attentiveness to what is given in relationship with others. As one of the staff members said, when she explained during the Staff Focus group event why she included a picture of someone’s ear, "I think God is there when you’re truly *listening* to another person."

\(^{182}\) Heimbrock, "From Data to Theory: Elements of Methodology in Empirical Phenomenological Research in Practical Theology," 281.

\(^{183}\) Ibid.: 294.
The Phenomenological Approach: Level I

Amedeo Giorgi claims that in order for a qualitative scientific research method to qualify as phenomenological, it would have to employ description within the attitude of the phenomenological reduction, and seek the most invariant meanings for a context. This involves a thematization of the phenomenon, which refers to "the totality of lived experience" that belongs to research participants as "the presence of any given precisely as it is given or experienced." What is researched is "the full range of 'givenness', no matter how partial or marginal, that are present, and in terms of the meaning that the phenomena have for the experiencing subjects." Giorgi refers to "the strict meaning of phenomena" as an "awareness of the system, 'embodied-self-world-others,' all of which (and aspects and parts of which) are intuitable, that is, presentable; and precisely as they are presented, without addition or deletion."

Giorgi's work is an example of what is called an empirical phenomenological approach, and is considered to be one of the most frequently applied phenomenological research methods. It involves "a return to experience in order to obtain comprehensive descriptions that provide the basis for a reflective structural analysis that portrays the essences of the experience." It is a method that seeks to disclose and elucidate

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185 Ibid.: 236-37.

186 Ibid.: 237.

187 Ibid.: 238.


189 Ibid., 13.
phenomena as they manifest themselves in their immediacy. This dissertation’s research journey followed a nuanced variant of the basic structure of Giorgi’s two-level approach to data collection and analysis.\textsuperscript{190} The first level of data was gathered as naïve descriptions obtained through their playful imagination of engaging their question of discernment; and the second level of data represents the theologically reflective analysis and interpretation of the first level data by the research participants. It is particularly during this second level (see chapter 3) that this dissertation’s research approach should be categorized as an interpretative rather than empirical phenomenological approach. The “primary target” of this second level is “the understanding of meaningful concrete relations implicit in the original description of experience \textit{in the context of a particular situation}.”\textsuperscript{191}

This two-level approach can be further outlined by way of von Eckartsberg’s three-steps method: (1) the problem and question formulation as the delineation of the focus of research; (2) the data generating situation as the descriptive narrative provided by participants; (3) the data analysis stage of explication and interpretation to reveal the structure, meaning, configuration, and coherence of the data’s occurrence.\textsuperscript{192} This kind of approach represents a heuristic process that incorporates “creative self-processes and self-discoveries.”\textsuperscript{193} It aims at the eureka moments of “striking realization” and the “aha” phenomenon within processes of discernment.\textsuperscript{194} In this dissertation’s research journey it

\textsuperscript{190} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{191} Ibid., 14.

\textsuperscript{192} Ibid., 15-16.

\textsuperscript{193} Ibid., 17.

\textsuperscript{194} Ibid.
started with a question that reflects the LC's discernment question. From the question, it follows an autobiographic, heuristic path of discovering the social significance of the community within their settings and relationships with God, themselves, and others in civil society as it emerged through their playful imagination.

Moustakas describes six phases on such a heuristic path: (1) the initial engagement; (2) immersion into the topic and question; (3) incubation; (4) illumination; (5) explication; (6) culmination of the research in a creative synthesis.195 For Moustakas, verification196 is achieved by making sure that the participants are co-authors of the data and analysis, sharing with each other the meanings and interpretations throughout the research process, and constantly seeking communal assessment for comprehensiveness and accuracy. Coding takes place through processes of thematization and communal ownership of accurate descriptive statements by the LC themselves, which differ from the way coding is usually done in other qualitative research methodologies (such as grounded theory).

In Husserl's understanding of *epoche* it means "to refrain from judgment, to abstain from or stay away from the everyday, ordinary way of perceiving things."197 Even though Husserl uses it from the vantage point of a pure or transcendental ego, which is rejected by later developments in phenomenology, it is still important to note that *epoche* "requires a new way of looking at things, a way that requires that we learn to see what

195 Ibid., 18.

196 While Moustakas describes this process as verification, this dissertation's research approach prefers the Action Research criteria of validity as described by Herr and Anderson. They identify 5 such criteria, namely dialogic and process validity, outcome validity, catalytic validity, democratic validity, and process validity. Herr and Anderson, *The Action Research Dissertation: A Guide for Students and Faculty*, 53-57.

stands before our eyes, what we can distinguish and describe.” This is what has been done during the first phase of playful and imaginative focus group events, but within the paradigm of a hermeneutical and theological phenomenology that allows for preunderstandings and an opening to the transcendence of God to be fully part of the process (instead of the Husserlian illusion of “bracketing”).

Following the *epoche* as a necessary first step is the *reduction*. The reduction refers to a leading back to the source of the meaning and existence of how the world is experienced. The reduction is followed by the *imaginative variation*. In quoting Husserl, Moustakas says, “the function of the Imaginative Variation is to arrive at a ‘structural differentiation among the infinite multiplicities of actual and possible cognitiones, that relate to the object in question and thus can somehow go together to make up the unity of an identifying synthesis.’” In the model that Mousakas uses “the structural essences of the Imaginative Variation are then integrated with the textural essences of the Transcendental-Phenomenological Reduction in order to arrive at a textural-structural synthesis of meanings and essences of the phenomenon or experiences being investigated.” This is represented by the second level of engagement as the participants’ analysis and interpretation of their own descriptions (see chapter 3).

**The Trinitarian Imagination: Participating Belonging**

A Hermeneutic of *Mimesis*, as the interpretation of accessing the LC’s socially-embodied theology through their playful imagination when they engage their discernment

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198 Ibid.

199 Ibid., 35.

200 Ibid., 36.
question about God’s future with relational attentiveness, opens up the possibility for theological reflection on God’s communion with them in the midst of such an engagement. The last section of this chapter will explore such a possibility through a trinitarian theology rooted in a relational ontology. Such an ontology shapes the LC’s landscapes of interwoven theological and cultural contours with relational impulses of belonging to God, each other, and the broader community. This section is an attempt to dwell in these impulses as they emerged during the research journey of accessing the LC’s socially-embodied theology, and to put them in conversation with trinitarian contributions shaped by a relational interpretation of the biblical *imago Dei*.

**Embracing Relationships, Diversity, and Openness**

One of the three threads that emerged during the process of interpreting (chapter 3 describes in more detail how this process of interpretation developed), and without a doubt the first and most dominant thread identified in the LC’s attentiveness to what emerged in their midst, was the extent to which the LC embraces a culture of *relationality, diversity, and openness* (see Appendix F).201 Their playful imagination and relational attentiveness made them realize how much they are focused on relationships, and how much they appreciate a culture of inclusiveness that reflects an increasing diversity. They have accessed their own culture of relationality, diversity, and openness as it is shaped by a convergence of theological and cultural flows among them.

Accessing their own culture of relationality, diversity, and openness first of all brought the recognition that the life of the LC is more about *relationships* than *programs*.

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201 The concept of *embracing* was the Governance Board’s choice of language, but the researcher finds it an appropriate metaphor for the trinitarian theology and communion ecclesiology suggested in this dissertation’s reflection on the LC’s journey.
The LC became a very active and busy local Christian community over the past few years. However, with that came the realization that what is much more needed right now is not more things to do, but to live more fully into their relational culture. They clearly identified a further deepening of relationships as the real challenge rather than an expansion through more programs or projects. What follows are detailed examples of how this thread emerged.

The Former Senior Warden group remembered the centrality of the dining hall in the 1950's, and sees the kitchen of today as an extension of that spirit of relationships and community. They see the kitchen as a place of “intergenerational connectiveness.”

When one of these Former Senior Wardens look back on the history of the LC she sees how “through hard times and difficult times in this parish, they stayed together as a community.” In fact, most of the memory is centered around the importance of relationships over the LC’s long history. They especially notice the vibrancy around children in the LC today, while there was a time that “there were no children.”

A Worship Team member says, “Relationship is very important, not ‘Lone Ranger’-ministry, but you’re trying to do things together...” When the Hospitality Ministry Group dwelled in the Scripture passage of the 5 loaves and 2 fishes, their imagination were caught at Jesus’ welcoming posture and his attentiveness to the needs of the community. They pointed out that it was about more than just a sharing of food, and recognized the important role of the boy who presented the basket for the food to be

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202 From the Former Senior Warden Focus Group Transcript.

203 Ibid.

204 Ibid.

205 From the Worship Team Focus Group Transcript.
shared. When this group was asked to design a menu that would reflect the future God is bringing forth in the LC, a number of courses suggested were expressions of *fellowship, diversity, and hospitality*. Examples are, “pineapple is a traditional sign of hospitality”; “open-faced sandwiches… is open… diverse… no secrets… no surprises”; “potato bread baked in Warren’s oven… (is) community bread.”

The Family Faith group dwelled in Mark 10:13-16, and reflected on the importance of touching (with reference to Jesus’ invitation to the children), as an indication of *intimacy* and *relationship*. Someone made the connection with the LC’s welcoming worship culture towards children: “I’ve been in churches where people have been so upset when there’s the noise versus getting like Jesus, the big picture, what a blessing to have the children and that’s where the kingdom is versus distractions from our perfect, perfect scripted worship service where we get to… this is where the kingdom is…”

Second, the emphasis on relationships brought forward the importance of both an *inward* and *outward* focus on cultivating relationships. It was already mentioned earlier in this dissertation that the LC has a strong focus on involvement in the broader community. They have accepted the challenge to extend this involvement beyond mere projects in which others in the broader community become objects of their acts of benevolence, and that therefore, this culture of relationality has as its challenge to cultivate community with these others that goes beyond programmatic relationships.

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206 From the Hospitality Ministry Focus Group Transcript.

207 From the Family Faith Focus Group Transcript.
When one of the open invitation focus groups engaged in a meditative “balloon ride” exercise, they looked down on the LC and her neighborhoods and communities, and one of them was seeing “mostly people... having fun. Dancing in the undercroft... I saw a lot of food gatherings and I saw more months of the project where we provide shelter for the homeless... how we can reach out to our community and how we can make an impact on the lives of people who don’t have... I also saw an overflowing nursery...”

In another open invitation focus group the relational aspect was specifically linked with compassion. One of the participants sees the LC as “welcoming... a congregation that cares... truly enjoys each other.” Someone else added, as “people of all different colors and backgrounds and professions...” For another one, the LC isn’t “a closed-up building... hence the smell of food and kids...”

Third, they realized that in their relational culture they embrace a world of diversity. This was clearly stimulated by the influence of families in the LC that come from ten different non-USA countries, and how much the LC’s culture has been enriched and changed through these families’ involvement. It even led to celebrating liturgy from one of these countries every year during the season of Epiphany (during the research journey, it was a liturgy from an African country). However, the diversity embraced reflects more than just cultural difference, but also includes the LC’s emphasis on intergenerational ministries, and an inclusiveness for people with different sexual orientations.

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208 From and Open Invitation Focus Group Transcript.

209 Ibid.

210 Ibid.
When the Family Faith group started sharing their favorite children's story books, the first one was "A Perfect Little Piglet" in the "Pooh-series," and the reason given why this is such an important children's story book was "it's just a great lesson in that God accepts everyone no matter our differences that make us all unique and wonderful." Somebody else expressed an appreciation for the diversity in the LC, and that three of her child's mentors are from different nationalities. Their reflection on the importance of relationships and diversity had a strong outward focus as well. It is best illustrated by "Kiki's Hats," which is a story "about this woman named Kiki who knits hats... and she gives them away on the condition that you have to take two and give one to someone else and so word starts to get out about this and they start being given all around – it’s sort of like a feeding the five thousand." Later in the conversation this aspect was especially connected to the project of providing shelter to the homeless, as an example of both the inward and outward nature of relationship: "I think for us living the Kiki's Hat'-vision while we're outward looking we also need the relationships we've got with one another." The conversation was summed up by someone by saying, "It's so important and I wonder if the future of God's bringing in forth is not more things – not more things, because I start to get tired when I think about more things – I mean the problem is – I keep thinking of new things – I like ideas – but then I start to feel the weight of it – maybe it's not more things, maybe it's less things, and more clarity and more depth, maybe it's more about deepening the relationships..."

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211 From the Family Faith Focus Group Transcript.

212 Ibid.

213 Ibid.

214 Ibid.
Using children as an example, a Godly Play teacher says, “the things that I imagine for the LC is expansion, celebrating diversity.” Another Godly Play teacher elaborates on this conversation by saying, “that is not just in terms of increasing the size, of population, but also an expanding mission, expanding the outreach, expanding of the number of people we impact.” This was illustrated by one of the Godly Play teachers’ lego model build as a circle with windows (referred to earlier). One of them explains, “…the windows are good, because you can get too insulated in a circle and never look out – so, I really like that you have a lot of openings to the outside world.” This prompted another teacher to point out that “there’s an arch too…,” which led another one to interpret it as “ways for the outside world to get in….”

One of the other Godly Play teachers especially put the emphasis on the intergenerational aspect of relationships in the LC: “I love singing with the children, drawing with them, whatever. I love having the children there comfortable in church. That was our first goal.” For another member of this group, it is intrinsically related to baptism: “There are several things I just love about baptisms. And one is the baptismal covenant, the last part, which is basically the Apostles’ Creed, ‘Will you strive for justice and peace among all people and respect the dignity of every human being? I will, with

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215 From the Godly Play Teachers Focus Group Transcript.
216 Ibid.
217 Ibid.
218 Ibid.
219 Ibid.
God's help.' And this is something we promise every time we do a baptism. I think it is very important."\(^{220}\)

Many of the pictures taken by Staff members reflected the theme of diversity. A picture of a lot of different color flowers was explained by the photographer as, "a lot of times when I sit in my spot in the back of the church, I see a lot of different heads and people, and they are all different textures and colors... they were just enjoying being there – they had no agenda other than to revel in this garden."\(^{221}\) Another staff member related this aspect to "God as community."\(^{222}\) And this led another staff member to show her appreciation for "the diversity of race in the church."\(^{223}\) Another staff person linked the importance of relationships and diversity with the LC's intergenerational focus, and especially to the importance of "laughter and joy."\(^{224}\)

Fourth, embracing a relational and diverse culture brings with it an appreciation of an openness to be who you are in the LC, and a realization that difference or otherness is not a threat but the very constitution of community or belonging. This openness is especially expressed in terms of accommodating differences of theological and religious opinions. A Godly Play teacher says, "I started thinking what are the characteristics of children and two things that I hadn't time to think about was openness and a lack of pre-conceived ideas..."\(^{225}\)

\(^{220}\) Ibid.

\(^{221}\) From the Staff Focus Group Transcript.

\(^{222}\) Ibid.

\(^{223}\) Ibid.

\(^{224}\) Ibid.

\(^{225}\) From the Godly Play Teachers Focus Group Transcript.
What are the theological possibilities that are opened up by the LC’s cultural dynamics of such high appreciation for relationships and diversity rather than other more programmatic priorities and preferences? If this is how their socially-embodied imagination is shaped by their playful engagement with the future they discern, and therefore, if this is the future that God is bringing forth in, among and through them in civil society, how can this ongoing conversation be enriched with biblical-theological conversation partners? This dissertation suggests a trinitarian theology rooted in a relational ontology, and shaped by the biblical imago Dei, as a theological redescription of the world that is opened up by the LC’s playful imagination.

The Biblical Imago Dei

This possibility of rooting the LC’s playful imagination in a trinitarian theology finds its biblical warrant from theological reflections on the biblical imago Dei. These reflections on the biblical imago Dei creates a warrant for a trinitarian imagination beyond a neo-platonic anthropology and a substantialist doctrine of the Trinity. Moreover, it opens up the theological possibility for a relational ontology that is rooted in God’s self-revelation in Christ and characterized by relationality as primary theo-cultural embodiment. This possibility becomes the Trinitarian argument for the LC’s socially-embodied theology as their missional imagination in civil society.

From Substantialist Anthropology to Relational Christology

The move from substantialist anthropology to relational Christology is made possible by the biblical witness to the self-revelation of God in Jesus Christ as the imago
Focusing on the New Testament *imago Dei* Christology as the core hermeneutic to a Trinitarian understanding of the *imago Dei* also brings with it the potential of drawing from Old Testament perspectives on the *imago Dei* while transforming it “with the belief that Jesus was the fulfillment of what God had intended from the beginning.” The central motive in this approach is the New Testament portrayal of Christ as “the image of the invisible God.” As such, Christ fulfills God’s creational intentions by being “the firstborn of creation” through whom all other things in creation were created.

This New Testament hymn is the culmination of the Old Testament tradition represented in Genesis 1:26-27 into an understanding of Christ as the one in whom the relationship of God and creation comes together. Jesus Christ is “the glue that hold all

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226 Emil Brunner once said that “the doctrine of the *imago Dei* determines the fate of every theology.” As quoted in Garrett Green, *Imagining God: Theology and the Religious Imagination* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 84.


229 Colossians 1:15. For the purposes of the scope of the argument in this dissertation, other references in the New Testament to *eikon* (e.g. John’s use of it in the Apocalypse) are not attended to. This argument only follows the Colossians hymn and Pauline literature.

230 Colossians 1:15-16.
things together."231 Through this, God brings renewal to all of creation in Christ (Colossians 3:10). This particular event of God's self-revelation in Christ constitutes the relationships within all of creation (Colossians 3:11; Galatians 3:28). This is what it means to be in the image of God. True anthropology is born out of a relational Christology that constitutes relationships between human beings and between human beings and the rest of creation by virtue of Christ as *imago Dei*.

Paul clearly makes extensive use of the Genesis creation tradition in explaining the nature of new creation in Christ and to "delineate what is real about the experience of God in Christ Jesus."232 Christ as *imago Dei* not only underscores the relationship between Creator and creation, but also brings the reality of the life of God into the midst of the "clay" of everyday human existence (with reference to Paul's metaphor in 2 Corinthians 4:7). By this happening, it is clear that the power and glory belongs to God and not to creation, but also that it becomes part of existence through the life of God in Christ as constitutive of relations in creation.

This understanding concurs with traditions in the ancient Near East, in which *eikons* were seen as representative of and mediating the presence of the deity who is physically absent. The *eikon* is not completely separate from the one represented, but actually participating in the deity it depicts. Conversely, the spirit of the deity actually indwelt the *eikon*.233 This is how Jesus Christ manifests the reality of God. It is important to notice that, in this tradition of understanding, the *eikon* is not representative in the

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232 Ibid.: 365.

sense of exactly imitating what the corresponding deity looks like, but rather representative by making the deity present. The *eikon* manifests the deity and the blessings that accompany that presence.\(^2\)\(^3\)\(^4\)

From this brief biblical account it becomes clear that theological anthropology is only possible through Christ as *imago Dei*. Grenz sums it up by saying that “the humankind created in the *imago Dei* is none other than this new humanity conformed to the *imago Christi*, and the *telos* toward which the OT creation narrative points is the eschatological community of glorified saints... the emergence of the new humanity provides the climax to the entire salvation-historical story and becomes the ultimate defining moment for the Genesis account of the creation of humankind in the *imago Dei*.”\(^2\)\(^3\)\(^5\)

Von Dehsen indicates how any anthropological point of departure is only a short step from then associating the *imago Dei* with external similarities between God and humans or with particular psychological, personal and intellectual characteristics of people.\(^2\)\(^3\)\(^6\) Instead, the *imago Dei* concerns “the purpose of relationship and responsibility of creation”\(^2\)\(^3\)\(^7\) made possible by the life of God as revealed in Christ as *imago Dei*. The function of Genesis 1:26-27 is “not so much as an ontological declaration about human nature,” but rather “as a prologue to all that follows in the biblical narrative” where Christ

\(^2\)\(^3\)\(^4\) Ibid.: 622.

\(^2\)\(^3\)\(^5\) Ibid.: 623. This view is affirmed by Old Testament scholars such as Westermann, who sees many problems with an approach to the Genesis narrative that presupposes the text to primarily saying something about people. Von Dehsen, “The Imago Dei in Genesis 1:26-27,” 261-62.


is the *imago Dei* and a new humanity is formed according to the image of Christ as the *imago Dei*. The *imago Dei* then becomes a theological statement about the identity of God rather than the “divine characteristics” of human beings.

This interpretation of the biblical *imago Dei* makes it possible in the rest of this section to root missional imagination in a relational understanding of the life of God as revealed in the relational reality constituted by Christ as *imago Dei*. The decisive movement from substantialist anthropology to relationality in the life of God, as revealed in Christ, becomes even clearer in the development of historical theological reflection based on the biblical *imago Dei*. By turning to this development in the next section of this chapter, *relationality* finds its shape as primary marker on the missional contours of a socially-embodied imagination in the world.

**The *Imago Dei* in Christian Theology**

Stanley Grenz mentions the “surprisingly little attention” given to Christ as *imago Dei* in most of evangelical systematic theologies over the years, and shows how it functions almost exclusively as an anthropological concept. Unfortunately, says Grenz, the concept is often “discerned from the act of creation in the primordial past” or merely provides “the backdrop within God’s creative activity for the introduction of the theme of human sinfulness.” Given the route taken so far in this section with regard to

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interpreting the biblical imago Dei, a theological proposal is presented in which the imago Dei finds a Trinitarian framework that eventually leads to imago Trinitatis as Christian theology’s fundamental category for the conditions of possibility of missional imagination.

Various theological interpretations of imago Dei developed over time. W. Sibley Tower gives a helpful summary\textsuperscript{242} of the variety of categories of interpretation that emerged: 1) the fullness of the eikon of God in the person of Jesus Christ (based on biblical scholarship mentioned in the previous section of this chapter); 2) distinguishing between the two nouns in Genesis 1:26, “image” and “likeness”, as a distinction between the natural and supernatural qualities of God in human beings (Irenaeus and Delitzsch); 3) the image as spiritual endowments of God in human beings, such as memory, self-awareness, rationality, intelligence, spirituality, and an immortal soul (Philo,\textsuperscript{243} Gregory of Nyssa, Augustine, Aquinas, Schleiermacher, Eichrodt, Fohrer); 4) the image as human ability to make moral decisions (G.W. Bromiley and Michael Morrison); 5) the image as “base” human emotions and qualities not shared with animals (Augustine, and rejected by Gregory of Nyssa); 6) the image as the human capacity for self-transcendence (Farley); 7) the image as reference to external appearance of human beings (Gunkel, Humbert, von Rad, Zimmerli); 8) the image as displayed when human beings serves as God’s deputy on earth (as expressed in a kind of “royal theology” of Hehn, von Rad, Wildberger, W.H. Schmidt); 9) the image as reference to human beings as God’s counterpart or partner (as a


\textsuperscript{243} For an extensive outline of Philo’s Middle Platonic understanding of eikon, see Krause, “Keeping It Real: The Image of God in the New Testament,” 362-63.
kind of "1-Thou" relationship in Buber,\textsuperscript{244} Brunner and Westermann); 10) the image in human beings consist in the division between female and male (as in Barth,\textsuperscript{245} indebted to Bonhoeffer).

However, all of the above alternatives lack a basic Trinitarian framework presented by the first alternative for an ontology of imagination that makes missional participation possible in the life of God in the world. As suggested by the interpretation of the biblical \textit{imago Dei}, an ontology of imagination rooted in such a Trinitarian understanding of the \textit{imago Dei} has to understand the relationality constituted by God's self-revelation in Christ. The biblical \textit{imago} only makes sense relationally.\textsuperscript{246}

No one after the Second World War has been cited as much on a relational view of the \textit{imago Dei} as Karl Barth.\textsuperscript{247} Influenced by Bonhoeffer, Barth's emphasis comes as a deliberate alternative to a more functional view of the \textit{imago}. He bases his understanding on the plural "our image" in Genesis 1:26 as reference to genuine relational plurality in the divine being. Although he does not think that it necessarily refers to the Trinity as such, he proposes that it can "properly be understood only against the background of the Christian doctrine of the Trinity."\textsuperscript{248} For Barth, the quality that resonates the divine image in human beings is exactly the differentiation and relationship

\textsuperscript{244} For using Buber's characterization of God as "the Face" in constructing an \textit{imago Dei} theology of the face, see Christopher Nugent, "Theological Table-Talk: The Face as Theology," \textit{Theology Today} 41, no. 3 (1984): 314-20.


\textsuperscript{246} Bryant, "\textit{Imago Dei}, Imagination, and Ecological Responsibility," 36.


\textsuperscript{248} From his \textit{Church Dogmatics} III/1, as quoted in Ibid.: 504.
that exist within the triune God. He sees this Old Testament *locus classicus* as an anticipation of the New Testament narratives on the triune nature of God. This position of Barth leads to the interpretation of Christ as God’s image in his preexistence *before he became* human, and therefore God’s image *as* human. Christ is the image of the actual eternal self-distinction of God in the persons of God.

As such, Christ as *imago Dei* “is the archetype of the vertical and horizontal relationship of all humanity to its respective divine and human sources.” In the words of Eberhard Jungel with reference to Acts 17:28, “ontologically, man is not at all grounded in himself as an essence. He cannot come to himself without already being in an Other.” However, Barth’s interpretation and subsequent discussions on the relational nature of the *imago Dei* were profoundly influenced by Martin Buber’s dialogical personalism. The Buberian impact made relationality almost an all-consuming nature, without attending to the question of what is related to what and how. As Ray S. Anderson says, “to abandon any ontological basis for the *imago* in favor of an existentialist or sociological function is not only unbiblical but ethically impotent.” As the argument unfolds in the rest of this section, the necessity of a relational ontology rooted in the life of the triune God will be addressed in such a manner that a very

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250 With reference to Edmund Schlink’s interpretation, as quoted in Otto, “The *Imago Dei* as *Familias*,” 505.

251 Ibid.: 507.

252 As quoted in Ibid.

253 As quoted in Ibid.: 509.
particular Trinitarian understanding of the *imago Dei* relationality emerges as the condition of possibility for missional imagination.

However, following Towner’s assessment, Barth’s interpretation of Genesis 1:26-27 puts us “on the best track of any” towards a theological interpretation of the *imago Dei*. Towner suggests that we turn to Douglas John Hall’s elaboration on a relational understanding of the *imago Dei* to further develop a particular Trinitarian framework for a theological interpretation of the *imago Dei*. Hall breaks completely with a substantialist approach to the *imago Dei* in which God is embodied in the physical, emotional or spiritual attributes of human beings. For Hall (as for Barth), the *imago* is “an inclination or proclivity occurring within the relationship” of human beings with God and all of creation. For Hall, this is “the essence of this creature’s nature and vocation” and the real meaning of stewardship.

Hall’s contribution to a relational rather than substantialist *imago Dei* in relationship to stewardship brings this section to its conclusion with the clear indication that the movement outlined in this section presents this dissertation with what Javier R. Alanis calls a “life-embodying and life-affirming doctrine of the church.” Missional finds it meaning through God’s self-revelation in Christ as *imago Dei*. The relational nature of this reality in which Christ as *imago Dei* is the *eikon* of God’s relation with the

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255 As quoted in Ibid.


entire creation frames missional within this primary relationship and shapes its content by the relationality involved in such an ontology.

The Imaginatio Trinitatis

From Imitating Agency to Embodied Pneumatology

The second Trinitarian condition of possibility for an ontology of imagination as socially-embodied missional imagination finds its warrant from theological and philosophical perspectives on *imago Trinitatis*. Imago Trinitatis, as a deliberate Trinitarian reflection on the biblical *imago Dei*, presents a missional trinitarianism with an ontological movement beyond an imitating approach to agency and a psychological approach to the doctrine of the Trinity. Moreover, it opens up the possibility for an ontology of imagination that is rooted in God’s self-revelation through the *Spirit of Christ* and constituted by embodiment as fundamentally shaping the missional contours of relationally oriented imagination in the world.

This warrant provides the argument in this dissertation with the opportunity to elaborate on the orientation towards relationality explored in the previous section. It enriches the conversation on a relational ontology with Trinitarian perspectives that shape the nature of relationality towards a socially-embodied understanding of missional imagination. This aspect becomes the Trinitarian argument for missional discernment within the embodied reality of God’s indwelling in all of creation.

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The Psychological *Imago Trinitatis*

The move from imitating agency to embodied pneumatology is made possible through the deconstruction of a psychological approach to *imago Trinitatis*. It simultaneously explores a constructive approach towards social embodiment rooted in *relation as the category of being*. However, relation as category of being is not primarily a speculative philosophical category but explicitly rooted in the self-revelation of the triune God in Christ through the Spirit. It is not rooted in an eternal, ontological relationship absolutely interior to the life of the triune God without any reference to reality outside the internal life of God, as was the case during scholasticism post Augustine’s theology of relations in his *De Trinitate*. This dissertation finds LaCugna’s critique on Augustine’s influence as the helpful insight to deconstruct a psychological approach to *imago Trinitatis*.

As LaCugna points out, Augustine’s theology of relations is rooted within a metaphysical ontology of the inner life of God and can only lead to the *imago Dei* as *imitation* of that inner reality of the Trinity. Augustine’s premise of the soul seeking to return to God leads him to view “the rational soul” as “a mirror (*speculum*) that reflects, if only dimly, the reality of God that eventually we shall see face to face.” As a consequence, the search for the image of the Trinity within the individual soul becomes decisive to the extend that LaCugna concludes, “if the soul of every human being contains the vestiges of the Trinity, then we need only look within ourselves to discover

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260 As Augustine is quoted in Ibid., 93.
God and God's *oikonomía*."261 This, of course, *de facto* makes Christ as *imago Dei* redundant and irrelevant to a theology of God, and therefore a true *imago Trinitatis* impossible. This is the case since "the true economy is that of the individual soul, whose interior structure discloses the reality of the Trinity."262

This focus on the individual apart from relations, says LaCugna, flows directly from an ontology that is defined by substance and ends up as a psychological approach to the mystery of the Trinity in which Trinity is cut off from the economy of salvation in Christ.263 As such, it also lays the foundation for an anthropology of "self-contained relationality" with a focus on the individual soul and a disembodiment from social realities.264 It brings with it the logical possibility of a disembodied ecclesiology that focuses on spiritualizing God's salvation in Christ within the walls of the church, rather than breaking open the walls of the church for the sake of missionally inviting participation into God's self-revelation in Christ as it ontologically plays out in the socially-embodied relations of all creation.

Pannenberg adds another extra, very important dimension to LaCugna's critique when he quotes from Augustine's *De Trinitate* to show that Augustine was mostly concerned about a consubstantiality between Father and Son in which the substantiality and essence of both were not dependent on their relationship as such.265 However, as

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261 Ibid., 101.

262 Ibid.

263 Ibid., 102-03.

264 Ibid., 103.

Pannenberg also credits the insight of Jenson in this regard, Augustine misses the point “that the relations between the persons are constitutive not merely for their distinctions but also for their deity.” Instead, Augustine thought of the three persons in the Trinity as sharing in the one deity “alone and directly” rather than “indirectly by way of the personal relations.”

Jenson’s contribution in fact, as Pannenberg rightly indicates, is the one that elaborates very clearly on how the Son is “of one being with the Father” in relational terms. Being as relational category rooted in God’s self-revelation in the economy of salvation moves out of a Greek oriented metaphysical ontology. It avoids a modalism in which God’s inner reality is located above time and the biblical narrative’s distinctions of the three persons as personae dramatis dei that play different roles in different stages of salvation history. Simultaneously, it avoids a subordinationism in which the Son and Spirit are “ontologically ‘below’ the Father.”

It is when Jenson is tracing the history of subordinationism from Justin Martyr to Origen that the origination of this particular kind of imago theology becomes clear. It comes from the Logos-theology of the apologists. It was especially Origen who “perfected the Logos-theology” by exploiting the late-antique notion of the aesthetic

\(^{266}\) Ibid.

\(^{267}\) Ibid., 324.


\(^{269}\) Ibid., 94.

\(^{270}\) Ibid., 95-96.

\(^{271}\) Ibid., 96.
"image." In this usage of "image," the image of something else is seen as a distinct mode of being. It is a Platonic ontological use of this notion in which the temporal world becomes the "moving image" of unmoving eternal being. Therefore, when Christ is the imago Dei it can only follow that he is that in a subordinationist way, as human beings are then also the images of the Image in a subordinate and imitating way.

The psychological imago Trinitatis, with its modalistic and subordinationalistic tendencies, results in a view on the relationship of the persons within the life of God as only relations of origin. The consequence is that agency is not only of a psychological nature, but that it establishes an imitating agency, which eventually leads to a disembodied ecclesiology. From this it is only a short step to the understanding of missiology as fundamentally the mission(s) of the Church rather than a missional Church that implies social embodiment. This is a theological position on missional imagination that resonates with a hermeneutic of mimesis as lens of interpreting the LC’s playful imagination.

The influence of Logos-theology rooted in the psychological imago caused what Jenson calls “a general theological instability” in the third- and fourth-century church. It took the subsequent theological development through and beyond the Arian controversy to the determinate influence of Athanasius on the meaning of homoousios to establish the route out of a psychological approach to a more relational understanding of imago Trinitatis. For Athanasius, “’homoousios with the Father’ means that ‘the Son is

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272 Ibid., 98.

273 As Plato is quoted in Ibid.

274 Ibid., 99.
the same one (as the Father), by resemblance to the Father,” and therefore the status of
the Son as *imago Dei* “is taken as itself constitutive for the one being of God.” Jenson
sums up the consequences of Athanasius’ thought, and therefore also the dogmatic
importance of the Nicene decisions and Constantinople’s subsequent reaffirmation
thereof, by saying,

That the Father and the Son are *homoousios* means that precisely the relation of
the Son to the Father belongs both to what it means to be God and to the fact of
their being God. The Son is indeed the image of the Father’s deity but the same
deuity. That there is God the Son is “proper to” the facts both of the Father’s being
the Father and of his being God. Thus the *Trinity* is God – if we presume, as
Athanasius did, extension of this thinking, mutatis mutandis, to the Spirit.

However, as Jenson indicates, what is still at stake despite the important direction
that came with Athanasius in the history of the doctrine of the Trinity remains the
question on how to make sure both polytheism and modalism are avoided without
resorting to subordinationism. The Cappadocian Fathers provided that impulse in the
decade after 370, the first Council of Constantinople in 381 brought that development to
its conclusion, and the Council of Chalcedon in 451 proclaimed both Nicea and
Constantinople as one creed and dogma for the whole church. Augustine in fact rejects
the central Athanasian and Cappadocian insight that the three persons of the Trinity are
God precisely by the relations between them. The “dissonance between the metaphysical
principles of the Greeks and the storytelling of the gospel” was also Augustine’s
undoing.

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275 As Athanasius is quoted and interpreted in Ibid., 103.
276 Ibid.
277 Ibid., 107.
278 Ibid., 112.
This in effect leads to a dysfunctional doctrine of the Trinity that became obsolete by the time of Schleiermacher. The important implication for Jenson is that “reversal of Augustine’s misstep is vital, for a religious fellowship in which the differentiating relations between Father, Son, and Spirit had ceased to shape ritual and theology would no longer be the church, no matter how otherwise dedicated it was to one or another Christian value or slogan.”  

This dissertation presents the influence of the Cappadocean Fathers as the impulse for a movement towards a more relational trinitarianism.

The Relational Imago Trinitatis

Zizioulas’ appreciation for the Cappadocian Fathers’ contribution is indeed for their ability to break with a Platonic thought pattern when considering the imago Dei. After sketching the Cappadocians’ historical context of reacting against Sabellianism and Eunomianism, Zizioulas refers to both the philosophical and anthropological implications of the Cappadocian contribution. On the philosophical implications, Zizioulas says, “the doctrine of the Trinity offered the occasion to the Cappadocians to express their distance both explicitly and implicitly from Platonism in particular and thus to introduce a new philosophy.”

Zizioulas makes particular mention of St Gregory of Nazianzus who refers to Plato “as having spoken of God as a creator which overflows with goodness and love,” and how Gregory rejects that kind of notion as “implying a process of natural or

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279 Ibid., 113-14.

280 Zizioulas and McPartland, Communion and Otherness: Further Studies in Personhood and the Church, 156-68.

281 Ibid., 161.
substantial generation of existence."\textsuperscript{282} He rejects the non-personal images about God and to speak of the generation of the Son or the spiration of the Spirit in terms of substantial growth. This was typical of the Cappadocian Fathers’ challenge to any philosophy that views nature or substance as preceding the person. They challenged this neoplatonic philosophy of their time through their Trinitarian theology that gives ontological primacy to the person as relational. For them, the particular was not secondary to being or nature, and by doing so, frees existence from the logical necessity of substance.\textsuperscript{283}

This Trinitarian rejection of platonic philosophy has profound anthropological implications. The human being as \textit{imago Dei} is not God by nature for Zizioulas, since human beings are \textit{created} with beginnings and are subject to limitations of space and time. Nevertheless, Zizioulas can claim that human beings are “called to exist in the way God exists.”\textsuperscript{284} Zizioulas bases this view on the Cappadocians’ distinction between nature and person. Nature or substance only points to the \textit{what} of something, while person or \textit{hypostasis} points to the \textit{how} of being. Zizioulas says, “the ‘image of God’ in man has precisely to do with this \textit{how}, not with the \textit{what} man is; it relates not to nature – man can never become God by nature – but to personhood.”\textsuperscript{285} Human beings are indeed capable of living according to the \textit{what}, but that can only entail “individuation leading to decomposition and finally death.”\textsuperscript{286} Living to the image of God, to the contrary, means living according to the image of God’s personhood and therefore “becoming God” as the

\textsuperscript{282} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{283} Ibid., 163-65.
\textsuperscript{284} Ibid., 165.
\textsuperscript{285} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{286} Ibid.
theosis of human beings. He says, "without an attempt to free the person from the necessity of nature one cannot be the ‘image of God’."

In this way the Cappadocian Fathers, through Zizioulas’ interpretation, promotes a relational understanding of personhood as an ontological concept in the ultimate sense.

Therefore, for Zizioulas, the person “constitutes the ‘way of being’ of God himself.” It also means that the person cannot exist in isolation. The other and relationship with the other gives identity to someone. Person does not mean individual, but relationship. The ability to be a person is revealed only to the extent that a human being relates to God and the rest of creation. Therefore, says Zizioulas, “the highest form of capacity for man is to be found in the notion of imago Dei,” which specifically cannot mean imago Dei in a deistic manner but rather trinitarianly understood as “imago Trinitatis.”

This view of an anthropology of the imago Dei that is relationally constituted by the imago Trinitatis in Christ through the Spirit is an integral part of S. Mark Heim’s use of Zizioulas’ interpretation of the Cappadocean Fathers. The consequence for Heim is that the imago Trinitatis does not imply that human beings are either the “divine alter ego’s” of God or “impersonal entities capable only of extrinsic and functional

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287 Ibid., 166.
288 Ibid.
289 Ibid., 168-69.
290 Ibid., 248.
291 Ibid., 249.
292 For Heim’s account of Zizioulas’ relational ontology of personhood rooted in the nature of God’s being as the communion of persons, see S. Mark Heim, The Depth of the Riches: A Trinitarian Theology of Religious Ends (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 2001), 168-74.
interactions with others and God," but rather that human beings are "intrinsically constituted by relation." Heim says,

Salvation (the Christian religious end) involves an internal regeneration of the human person and participation of the human person in the internal divine life (communion) of God, as well as an inner communion with other persons. The image of God in humans is preeminently the communion-nature, the being-as-communion which makes such an end possible. This is the focus of closeness with God as it relates to the Christian religious end, and the characteristic source of its divergence from the Muslim end.

However, it is important to look at Zizioulas' relational ontology of personhood rooted in the triune God's being as communion from both Christological and Pneumatological perspectives. Christ as imago Dei is indeed "the ontological ground of every man," as constitutive of an anthropology rooted in such a relational Trinitarian ontology. Nevertheless, it is "a conditioning of Christology by pneumatology" that prevents Christ as imago Dei from becoming imitatio Christi. Zizioulas says, Christology... does not offer Christ to anthropology as a model for imitation... for this would be perhaps of an ethical but certainly not of an ontological significance to anthropology.

It is also important to see that the relationship between Christology and Pneumatology is not a relation of origin, since "the Spirit is not to be brought into the picture after the figure of Christ... (but) Christology is pneumatologically conditioned in

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293 Ibid., 247.
294 Ibid., 235.
295 Zizioulas and McPartland, Communion and Otherness: Further Studies in Personhood and the Church, 243.
296 Ibid., 244.
297 Ibid.
its very roots.” This contribution puts the *imago Dei* even more within the relational reality of God’s being and moves it beyond any possibility of an *imitating Dei* to a true *imago Trinitatis* as pneumatological embodiment. Zizioulas says, “in each man’s relation to Christ, the Spirit is not simply an assistant to the individual in reaching Christ, but the in, in which he is participant in Christ… in the Spirit and into Christ.”

The relational nature of *imago Trinitatis*, as Christology’s conditioning by embodied pneumatology, presents the last section of this argument with the Trinitarian roots for missional imagination with an ontology that is socially-embodied and relationally-oriented beyond the ethics of mere imitating agency.

**From Functional Ecclesiology to Missional Eschatology**

The third Trinitarian condition of possibility for an ontology of imagination as socially-embodied missional imagination finds its warrant from philosophical and cultural anthropological insights for the development of *imaginatio Trinitatis*. The *imaginatio Trinitatis* as the trinitarianly-rooted and socially-embodied missional imagination presents a missional trinitarianism with an ontological movement beyond a functional ecclesiology and a doctrine of the Trinity that views the persons in the life of the triune God in only relations of origin. Moreover, it opens up the possibility for an ontology of imagination that is rooted in God’s self-revelation *in Christ and through the Spirit of God* and constituted by *eschatology* as fundamentally shaping the missional contours of relationally- and socially-embodied imagination in the world. It becomes the

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298 Ibid.
299 Ibid.
philosophical and cultural anthropological argument for missional discernment within the
relationally embodied reality of God’s inculturation in all of creation.

The Socially-Embodied Imaginatio Trinitatis

This dissertation proposes to access the socially-embodied imaginatio Trinitatis as the relational ontology of a missional trinitarianism through what has been referred to as the social imaginary. This argument takes as its point of departure that the socially-embodied relations in both ecclesia and society are always more than the simple collection of individuals. Even beyond and prior to a variety of determining human conditions, a public is always a construct rather than a mere given. In the words of Habermas, the “criterion of publicness” always refer to the “communication, whether in words or action.”300 The argument in this dissertation follows Graham Ward’s suggestion that what is “disclosed” in the construction of the public (“that makes the public appear to be a natural phenomenon, a given”) is the “social ontology” of “being-in-relation.”301 This also follows the development of the argument in this dissertation of a socially-embodied relational ontology that moves beyond the possibility of thinking about being-in-relation as any anthropological or biological a priori, but as produced in the very being-in-relation itself.

This concurs with the hermeneutical turn and the phenomenological approach to imaginative lifeworlds302 that helps us understand that our being is always a being-in-the-


301 Ibid.

world.\textsuperscript{303} We are thrown into the world, not as empty or neutral beings, but as people formed through fragments of languages, images and words that all play a part in shaping our imagination of what it means to exist in the world.\textsuperscript{304} Imagination has been caught up in the misconception that mental images are entities in an individual. It stems from grammatical violations of the use of the words “see”, “mental”, “image”, “imagination.”\textsuperscript{305} That means also that imagination is socially and historically constituted and conditioning the subjectivity of agency.\textsuperscript{306}

A socially-embodied understanding of imagination also builds on an antirepresentationalism approach to imagination, which highlights the value of imaginatively constructing new perspectives on our world as a prelude to changing it. It authorizes the creative power of imagination beyond imitation.\textsuperscript{307} Moral imagination as the ability to perceive and imagine moral situations and possibilities in specific social and

\textsuperscript{303} Garrett Green, \textit{Theology, Hermeneutics, and Imagination: The Crisis of Interpretation at the End of Modernity} (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2000). Paul Avis also traces the history of the fate of imagination through modernity into postmodernity. Imagination developed in modernity as the counterpart of rational discourse. A modernistic view of the latter sees reason as the vehicle of knowledge and progress, while imagination is associated with superstition and illusion. The first is the source of truth and the second the source of falsity. In postmodernity the reverse might be true and “everything has the potential to become a symbol, but nothing is a symbol of the transcendent.” The same logic apply to both modernity and postmodernity in relation to the imagination, divorcing it from rational discourse. Paul D. L. Avis, \textit{God and the Creative Imagination:: Metaphor, Symbol, and Myth in Religion and Theology} (New York: Routledge, 1999), 14-29.

\textsuperscript{304} Melissa Freeman, “Performing the Event of Understanding in Hermeneutic Conversations with Narrative Texts,” \textit{Qualitative Inquiry} 13, no. 1 (2007): 928.


cultural contexts that shape who they are and how they live.\textsuperscript{308} This is important for missional discernment. Imagination changes the learning environment by shifting the focus from knowledge as "learning about" to "learning to be" as a socially-embodied reality rather than discerning through abstraction from actual lifeworlds.\textsuperscript{309} Socially transformative discernment through imagination happens in the integration of theology learning to cultivate a social identity that is ecological in outlook.\textsuperscript{310} As such, Ward says the social imaginary constitutes the public as "being a collective agency" that "perpetuates further images, stories, discourses and practices that constitute and disseminate the imaginary."\textsuperscript{311}

\textit{Imaginatio Trinitatis} as Missional Discernment

This dissertation explores the Trinitarian conditions of possibilities and missional contours towards a Trinitarian theology of imagination. As such, it proposes an \textit{ontology of imagination} rooted in the life of the triune God as a \textit{missional trinitarianism} for such ecological imagination. \textit{Imaginatio Trinitatis} is the culmination of an understanding of a socially-embodied imagination rooted in an ontology of relationality through Trinitarian theology. The development of an argument towards \textit{imaginatio Trinitatis} moves beyond substantialist anthropology, imitating \textit{imago Christi} and functional ecclesiology to a


\textsuperscript{311} Ward, \textit{Cultural Transformation and Religious Practice}, 128.
relational and pneumatologically embodied *imago Trinitatis* open to the eschatological future of the triune God.

In doing so, *missional contours* emerge around the primary marker of relationality, and are fundamentally shaped by embodiment. Missional imagination as relationally oriented and socially-embodied is embedded in discernment that is open to the eschatology of the triune God in relation to all of creation. It presents the LC with the vocation to engage in missional discernment that is characterized by practices and habits open to this future of God. The LC participates in the relationality of God’s communion with the world and is constituted in its missional identity through a socially-embodied existence. The missional Church trusts the power of communion with the Spirit for transforming her own identity to the image of Christ and for participating in God’s communion with the world.
CHAPTER 3

BILDUNG: CULTIVATING THE SOCIAL IMAGINAIRE

And now I know why
St. John (that dirty old man)
said God was a four-letter word
and Hegel (the shameless logician)
thought the world was God’s plaything.
Can’t you see what careless love can do?¹

This chapter explores the cultivation of the LC’s socially-embodied imagination in civil society (social imaginaire) when accessed (through relational and phenomenological attentiveness) as the possibility of their playful (mimesis) imaginatio Trinitatis. Chapter 2 described the attempt of this dissertation’s research journey to access such a possibility, while this chapter explores how the cultivation of such a possibility takes place in the same process. In doing so, this chapter explores the possibility of cultivation through the hermeneutical lens of Bildung as both a critique of the productive imagination (with Immanuel Kant’s Einbildungskraft as main representative) and an alternative possibility (mainly through Hans-Georg Gadamer) of transcending a mere productive understanding of the imagination through the textual event of interpretation. Such a hermeneutic of Bildung illuminates the possibility of the LC’s socially-embodied theology in civil society as the cultivation of their transformative social imaginaire.

¹ Keen, “Godsong,” 93.
This chapter’s exploration takes place from within the LC’s process of *interpreting* what emerged in their playful imagination. From a phenomenological research point of view, this refers to a second level of a *reflectiveness* on the *imaginative variations* of themes and questions that emerged through the process of playful imagination. It represents the cultivation of a *hermeneutical imagination* that emerged subsequent to the ontological turn (Heidegger) of moving beyond a Kantian influenced *idealism* and *romanticism*. From a theological perspective, it creates an opportunity for exploring a *pneumatological imagination* of cultivating the movement and force fields of the Spirit’s agency and transformation in, among, and through the LC in civil society. This hermeneutics of *Bildung* that opens up a hermeneutical imagination from within the LC’s habit of reflectiveness on their playful imagination around their question of discernment becomes the philosophical conversation partner to a pneumatological imagination of God’s communion with the LC.

These reflections are opened up by the emergence of themes and questions from within the LC’s habit of relational attentiveness to their playful imagination of engaging their discernment question. The emergence of these themes and questions opens up the possibility for cultivation and transformation through a habit of reflectiveness on how God is bring forth the future in, among, and through them in civil society.

**God’s Movement: The Discernment Disclosure**

The themes and questions that emerged from the LC’s reflection on their playful imagination of engaging their discernment question gave stimulus to their conversation on the movement and energy of God in their midst. It was an interpretative process through a variety of levels of critically reflective conversations during which the LC were
identifying themes, raising questions, and articulating threads that describe the LC’s culture constituted by God’s communion with them. These theo-cultural contours are shaping a landscape of continuity with God’s faithfulness in the past, and God’s ongoing process of communion with them into their preferred and promised future.

**Emerging Themes**

The focus groups presented the Governance Board with a rich tapestry of imaginative expressions on how they imagine the future God is bringing forth among them. These expressions were all stimulated and facilitated by their playful engagement with each other through imaginative activities (described in chapter 2). The Governance Board received full transcripts of the events, and paid careful attention to these conversations by not only reading these transcripts, but also by communally reflecting on the themes that emerged from these transcripts. The communal reflections on these focus group events, through reading and paying attention to the emerging themes, are captured in a map of *emerging themes* (see Appendix G).

The transcriptions of focus group events were sent out to small groups of Governance Board members to read in preparation for their upcoming reflection meetings. For three such meetings, the Governance Board was divided in small groups that each received a different transcript to read in advance. They were asked to especially pay attention to these transcripts in three particular ways: (1) what are the main themes emerging from this transcribed focus group event?; (2) where are their imaginations caught when reading through this focus group event transcription?; (3) what questions do they have (in general or as follow-up conversation with members of this focus group)
after reading the transcript, attending to themes emerging, and reflecting on where their imaginations are caught?

Each of these Governance Board reflection meetings was structured in the following way: (1) each small group (each consisting of members who all read the same transcript) would reflect separately on their specific transcript (answering the questions mentioned above in conversation with each other); (2) each small group would report back to the entire Governance Board on the emerging themes, imaginations, and questions, which was captured during the feedback in the mindmap mentioned above (Appendix G); (3) the rest of the Governance Board members would then get an opportunity to be in conversation and reflection with each small group about their interpretations.

Developing the Threads

After the emerging themes were identified, and further reflected upon via follow-up questions during these Governance Board meetings, the Governance Board asked a smaller group of their members to enter a next round of interpretation for the sake of reducing these themes to a few descriptive threads. These were not only main threads of the emerged themes as overall descriptions of the culture of the LC, but also the interpretations of how God’s movement in, among, and through them were disclosed to them on their discernment journey. The three threads (Appendix F) emerged to this smaller group after processing the Governance Board’s reflections and interpretations (Appendix G) during two two-hour meetings. The Governance Board accepted the interpretation of this smaller group at their next Governance Board meeting.
The first thread was articulated as relationships-diversity-openness (already mentioned in chapter 2). The second thread was articulated as Eucharist-Mystery-Spiritual Practices (which will be elaborated on later in this chapter). The third thread was articulated as continuity-change-abundance (which will be elaborated on in chapter 4. The smaller group that identified the three threads also identified a category of follow-up and critical questions that emerged during the original Governance Board's interpretations of the focus group events.

It is especially this category of follow-up questions that gives insight in the Governance Board's more specifically critical moments during their process of reflections. These questions reflect a variety of different concerns. First, the recognition that the emergence of these threads immediately also raises the question of how to live more fully into what is disclosed to them as these main threads of their theo-cultural landscape. Second, the realization that despite the indication of how their outreach to others has influenced their articulation of these threads, the theo-cultural landscapes described are still to a large extent excluding the participation of others from their neighborhoods and larger community. Third, the awareness of the necessity to continue the conversations on many of the dominant emerging themes for the sake of exploring them in even more depth, as well as the importance of sustaining this process of discernment into the future. The recognition evolved over time in this process that these

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2 See Appendix G where these questions appear among the identified emerging themes.

3 The LC frequently use the language of “to live more fully into” as their articulation of their participation in their theo-cultural identity.
threads are not to function as ideology, but as fields of possibility that open up the future as an ongoing conversation about the future that God is bringing forth among them.\(^4\)

The desire to live more fully into what emerged to them as their socially-embodied theo-cultural landscape is especially clear with regard to the thread that describes how they embrace relationships and diversity. It is illustrated by questions reflecting their 2007 discernment impulses (see attachment A), especially in relation to their desire to focus more on intergenerational formation: “how can we even be more intergenerational?”; “what can we do to help foster the values of family faith groups?”; “how do we draw families without children into these conversations?”; and “is there anything we can do to support them or create opportunity for growth?” (Appendix G).

However, the desire to live more fully into what emerged was most clear in their concern for how to engage the other from their immediate neighborhoods and larger community. Even though there was a strong affirmation of what is already true of the LC’s emphasis on reaching out to the larger community, there was always the simultaneous sensitivity and concern that this focus will get lost in the energy for the LC’s so-called more inward journey. There is especially an awareness for continuing to cultivate the LC’s hospitality culture (which many new members describe as the reason why they have decided to join the LC), and that their engagement through a variety of community projects are not necessarily helping them to build real relationships and community with these others beyond them being objects of the LC’s benevolence. These concerns are expressed in questions such as “who do we reach out to?”; “Could we use

\(^4\) This will be elaborated on later on in this chapter with the help of Paul Ricoeur’s distinction between ideology and utopia as features of the social imaginaire.
their space rather than trying to get them here?"; “how do we bring the beauty that we see in the world back into the LC?” (Appendix G)

One of the main learnings for them during this process was how important it became to view discernment as a habit of ongoing conversation about the future that God is bringing forth among them rather than seeing discernment as intervention during times when problems need to be solved. They realized that what is emerging now is not cast in stone, and that what is required is to continue asking the question “how do we know where God is leading us?” (Appendix G). In another sense, this process was only the beginning of how their curiosity was stimulated by what emerged in their midst. A good example is how they were surprised by what came out of the Hospitality Ministry Group’s event. The surprise wasn’t so much that food would be a dominant cultural feature of the life of the LC (this was clear already from the 2007 appreciative inquiry process – see attachment A), but how the Hospitality Ministry group expressed their theology of food, and how they connected their sense experiences around food with spirituality. This surprise even turned into a desire of the Governance Board for the Hospitality Ministry Group to prepare the meals on the designed menus for them, and it stimulated their thoughts to wonder “how do we think theologically about the importance of food in the LC?” They realized the importance of food in the LC, because several times during the imaginative balloon ride exercises into the future, the first thing that people smelled about the future is the food coming out of the kitchen that has a central place in their future visions. In follow-up reflections, it was a usual pattern for the question to come up how this kitchen can become an influential part of God’s preferred
and promised future for them in relationship with their immediate neighborhoods and broader community.

Therefore, once the discovery was made that the discernment process is not producing a document containing nicely formulated action plans of how to implement a blueprint of God’s future for them, the desire gained momentum for how to sustain this process as an ongoing conversation about the LC’s socially-embodied imagination in civil society. Questions were asked about “what riches do we keep with us, and what do we leave behind, in order to move forward?” or “how do we get more people to participate” in this ongoing conversation? (see appendix G). Chapter 4 will continue to show how this process led to probably the most important dynamic stimulated by this process, namely the cultivation of increased energy and immense ownership for an ongoing conversation based on what emerged at this stage as an indication of their socially-embodied imagination for God’s preferred and promised future in civil society. Their process of reflecting on and responding to the focus group imaginations contained the very impulses for an ongoing process of transformation into God’s future.

**Transforming Reflections**

Focusing on how the LC has begun to cultivate an ongoing conversation through their process of interpretive reflection on how they have engaged their question of discernment creates the opportunity to invite Peter Block back into this dissertation’s conversation about how to access, cultivate, and assess the LC’s socially-embodied theology as their missional imagination in civil society. It was already indicated in the first chapter of this dissertation that the research question was asked with an interest in missional transformation, and for taking up the challenge of how local christian
communities (in this case, the LC) can be public moral companions (Gary Simpson’s term) in civil society. Peter Block’s already mentioned book on how to structure the belonging of communities (in chapter 2 with regard to the power of the question) is especially relevant to how transformation takes place in communities.

In the introduction of his book, Block makes it clear that “the essential challenge is to transform the isolation and self-interest within our communities into connectedness and caring for the whole.” Therefore, the “core question” for Block is “what is the means through which those of us who care about the whole community can create a future for ourselves that is not just an improvement, but one of a different nature from what we now have?” He warns that his book will not make a lot of sense to those who believe that their communities “are basically doing well and all that’s needed is to continuously improve them.” And this may very well be one of the biggest challenges for the LC, because they are currently (at the time of this dissertation’s research journey) thinking of themselves as basically doing very well. However, this dissertation’s research journey took off from the assumption that, given the conversations mentioned in the first chapter on today’s missional and civil society challenges for local Christian communities, what is needed is deep transformation for the sake of participation in God’s mission in the world. The journey of accessing the LC’s socially-embodied theology (as indicated in chapter 2) suggest that God is moving in, among, and through the LC in

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5 Block, *Community: The Structure of Belonging*, 1.

6 Ibid., 5.

7 Ibid., xiii.

8 In the words of a Governance Board member during the Annual Meeting presentation when he explained his original skepticism about the need for another discernment phase (see attachment J), “we have wonderful staff, good energy, and a decent budget...”
profound ways, and that they have accessed their own socially-embodied imagination with the dynamics and impulses given to them by the Spirit of God to continue their journey of missional transformation.

The LC is on a journey of discovering how to expand what Block calls a "shared sense of belonging" that "is shaped by the idea that only when we are connected and care for the well-being of the whole that a civil and democratic society is created." Block's initial indication of how such transformation takes place in a specific community may very well be encouraging words to where the LC find themselves on the journey, and given their excitement about the current discernment process and the possibilities it holds for ongoing conversations:

What makes community building so complex is that it occurs in an infinite number of small steps, sometimes in quiet moments that we notice out of the corner of our eye. It calls for us to treat as important many things that we thought were incidental. An after-thought becomes the point; a comment made in passing defines who we are more than all that came before. If the artist is one who captures the nuance of experience, then this is whom each of us must become. The need to see through the eyes of the artist reflects the intimate nature of community, even if it is occurring among large groups of people. The key to creating or transforming community, then, is to see the power in the small but important elements of being with others. The shift we seek needs to be embodied in each invitation we make, each relationship we encounter, and each meeting we attend. For at the most operational and practical level, after all the thinking about policy, strategy, mission, and milestones, it gets down to this: How are we going to be when we gather together?  

The way in which the above quote from Block ends reminds a lot of one of the basic definition of the social imaginaire, namely Charles Taylor's description of "the way in which they (a community) imagine their social existence, how they fit together with others, how things go on between them and their fellows, the expectations which are

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9 Block, Community: The Structure of Belonging, 9.

10 Ibid., 9-10.
normally met, and the deeper normative notions and images which underlie these expectations." 11 Therefore, that which emerged to the LC as threads are really a description of who they are when they fit together with others, and when they meet their expectations of what it means to be a community. If so, then it is an indication of the importance of not only accessing the social imaginaire as the way in which people are gathering and doing things together, but also how to cultivate that for the sake of that community's transformation.

This chapter will further explore what is at stake in an attempt to cultivate the LC's social imaginaire, from both the perspectives of cultural and theological transformation. It will be explored from within the LC’s own impulses of critical reflection, and brought into conversation with a variety of conversation partners from the history of imagination, hermeneutical phenomenology, cultural anthropology, and a pneumatologically oriented theology. The attempt to do so continues to pursue a journey of not introducing universal and abstracted theories of ideal local Christian communities into the LC’s ongoing conversation, and deliberately avoiding a theological project that would create a gap between the LC’s socially-embodied imagination and some theological typology or ideology. It takes serious Block’s reminder of paying attention (from the corner of the eye) to the infinite number of quiet moments emerging from within where the LC find themselves right now in their journey of discerning their participation in God’s mission in the world, and seeks out the transformation impulses emerging in that process.

11 Taylor, A Secular Age, 171.
In the very first chapter of his book, Block gives some “insights into transformation.”¹² He says, “social fabric is created one room at a time,” and “it is formed from small steps that ask ‘Who do we want in the room?’ and ‘What is the new conversation that we want to occur?’”¹³ Deciding who to invite to the conversation, and facilitating the conversation that we are interested in cultivating between those in the room enable the building of relationships, the structuring of belonging, and moving the action forward. Summing up his insights on how collective transformation takes place, he says,

These insights include ideas on focusing on gifts, on associational life, and on the way all transformation occurs through language. Also critical are insights about the contexts that govern the conversations and the willingness to speak into the future. Two additional strands in the fabric of community explored here are the need for each small step to capture a quality of aliveness and the need for it to evoke in an organic way.”¹⁴

These insights provide this dissertation’s research journey with a reminder of three important dynamics discovered through accessing the LC’s socially-embodied imagination. First, what Block calls a focusing on gifts. It clearly was the intention of the Governance Board right from the beginning that the discernment question should emphasize the discernment occasion as when we (as the people of the LC) bring together our greatest desires and biggest gifts (Appendix B). They set the tone for what became the overwhelming atmosphere of the focus group events, namely to not see this as an opportunity for problem-solving or focusing on what may be wrong somewhere, but to access their imagination from within the abundance of what they have received in

¹² Block, Community: The Structure of Belonging, 11-28.
¹³ Ibid., 11.
¹⁴ Ibid.
tradition, relationships, and gifts. It translated into a theological awareness that God was always with the LC in history, and that God is still in communion with the LC through the abundance of the gifts of the Spirit.

It makes such a profound difference if conversations are not about “problem diagnosis, gap analysis, weaknesses, and what’s wrong with me, you, and the rest of the world.” It was expressed wonderfully by a LC participant in the Worship Team Focus Group event when she explained how the Eucharist transformed her self-understanding from a primary definition of failure to a focus on God’s transforming agency in her life, and how it changed her liturgical practice during Eucharist:

For me, and it was something very freeing when I finally internalized it, was the part where “and made us worthy to stand before you.” Um, having grown up in the church with the 1928 Book of Common Prayer — when you are used to “although we are unworthy.” That’s what’s been sticking you — your unworthiness. Yes, you’ve been redeemed, but the focus was on you are unworthy rather than you are “made worthy to stand before God.” Which is why when I finally accepted that — that’s why I stand, even before it became customary in this parish, I stood (during Eucharist).

An awareness of limitations and shortfalls, and the short step from there to employing an act of labeling the other, diminishes the capacity of people to fulfill their potential, and moreover, exposes an underlying theological skepticism about God’s abundance through the power of God’s communion with God’s people. This is true about congregations, and it is also true about the world. It is especially crucial for a missional posture of a community that primarily confess their reliance on God’s mission in the world (including the church) rather than the missions of the church in the world.

Second, the way in which the LC’s conversations speak into the future evolved in an organic way. No attempt was made to load the conversation rooms with another

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15 Ibid., 13.
agenda other than an interest in how the participants engage the discernment question of how they imagine God is bringing forth the future among them. Most of what turned out to be a very high degree of ownership for the process, and the extremely high level of energy to continue the conversation can be attributed to the organic way in which the process unfolded. This provided an atmosphere to take on their missional challenge not through the frustration of how to get enough people involved to do all the important projects in the community, or through an anxiety of how to become some ideal church (even a missional one!), but through an acceptance that empowerment and ownership take place through an evolving conversation between everyone that is invited to be in the room. Above all, it helped to create an environment in which they seek the openness for always continuing to explore how and where the Spirit is leading these conversations (which will be further addressed in chapter 4).

The big shift in this regard is represented by the difference between, on the one hand, an environment of selling an already decided vision, goals, purpose, and destiny, and on the other hand, creating an environment of possibility. Possibility, says Block, is “a declaration of what we create in the world each time we show up.”\(^{16}\) It enters the room just because those participating in the conversation have walked in the door. It is best illustrated by an already mentioned (in a footnote earlier in this chapter) testimony of one of the LC’s Governance Board members (at the LC’s annual meeting) when he confessed that he started the process with a fair amount of skepticism:

I must confess that I was initially skeptical about this process. I was skeptical because I didn’t think we needed it. When I think of discernment, I think of having to make hard choices in tough times, something that’s not at all pleasant.

\(^{16}\) Ibid., 16.
We've been there before but we're not there now. We have wonderful staff, good energy, and a decent budget...

I also suspected that this was just going be a variation of the same old deadly process of defining our mission, then our values, and then our action plan-- just dressed up a bit in church jargon.

Fortunately, I was wrong, very wrong. Instead, this turned out to be a process of imagining. And it wasn't deadly at all. It was fun and life-giving. Those silly kids' exercises that we started with opened up our creativity and imagination about who we are what we can be.

And the process revealed the deep structure of our collective desires. These three elements--relationality--wonder, and abundance--are core dimensions that excite us and energize us. When they're present in our activities, be they worship, hospitality, or service, we become energized. When they're lacking, either in our group activities or our personal ones, we lose interest, and we lose direction.

These elements are, of course, not written in stone. They merely represent our current understanding and will change over time. So now that we've identified these key elements, what's next? More imagining of course! It's fun and uplifting. Now that we better understand the elements that give us energy, we can start imagining how we can more fully incorporate them into our activities.

So when do we start our follow-up? Right now!

Third, and leading from the second above, the research journey embedded in the discernment journey became one journey of discovering how transformation occur through language. "All transformation is linguistic," says Block. Change comes through cultivating habits of speaking and listening that enable conversations that we could not have before. This aspect, as the critical reflection on participants' imaginative expressions through playful activities, is crucial for understanding how the imagination is shaped and cultivated. For illuminating this aspect of the formation of imagination, this dissertation has to continue the historical journey in tracing the developments of the history of imagination. This time the journey goes in the direction of the modern era influenced by the post-Kantian dynamics.

17 Ibid., 15.
The Social Imaginaire: Engaging the Discernment Reflections

The LC’s socially-embodied imagination in civil society is cultivated through an ongoing process of interpretation from within the conversations stimulated by a playful engagement with their discernment question. It began with the Governance Board’s reflections on the transcripts of the focus group events that led to the identification of themes and questions as the stimuli for ongoing conversation and interpretation. It was taken to a next level of identifying threads that capture the theo-cultural contours of how the socially-embodied imagination was shaped through this process of conversation and interpretation. Before dwelling further in what has emerged during this process, it is appropriate to invite conversations partners into this process for the sake of illuminating what is at stake in cultivating the imagination through a process of ongoing conversation and interpretation.

An understanding of the textual dynamics of cultivating the social imaginaire needs as its background a deconstruction of the productive and creative imagination. The next section will trace the history of the imagination in this regard. Against that background, a different understanding will be explored through Gadamer’s exposition of Bildung rather than the productive imagination of the Kantian Einbildungskraft and the creative imagination of the Romantic era. Gadamer’s Bildung will function as a transition for constructing the social imaginaire as a transformative process through language (using Paul Ricoeur’s understanding of the text as primary example). Ricoeur’s insights on the centrality of the text not only lead him to a particular conceptualization of a social imaginaire, but also provides the opportunity for linking this linguistic turn of a hermeneutical imagination with other conversations on the social imaginaire in
philosophy and cultural anthropology. A hermeneutic of Bildung becomes the lens for understanding the cultivation of the LC’s socially-embodied theology in civil society as a social imaginaire. In summary, what is cultivated when accessing the LC’s playful imagination, is the social imaginaire shaped by the theo-cultural contours of their socially-embodied theology produced in the ongoing conversation and interpretations about their discernment question.

A Textual Bildung

The history of the emergence of a productive and creative Einbildungskraft becomes the background in this dissertation for exploring an alternative in Gadamer’s so-called rehabilitation of Bildung, and how that different interpretation of Bildung brings about a focus on the text (language) as constitutive feature of the social imaginaire’s transformative potential. The background on the emergence of Einbildungskraft takes the historical journey through Kant and the German Idealists (again from the perspective of Richard Kearney’s archeology of the imagination), before Gadamer’s reinterpretation of Bildung creates an opportunity for exploring Ricoeur’s understanding of the social imaginaire.

The Productive and Creative Einbildungskraft

The modern turn brings with it a radical shift in the history of imagination. Kearney says, “The mimetic paradigm of imagining is replaced by the productive paradigm.”18 The imagination now changes from an intermediary agency to affirming the creative power of human beings. The imagination becomes the immediate source of its

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18 Kearney, The Wake of Imagination, 155.
own truth, capable of inventing a world out of its human resources rather than being accountable to a power higher than itself. The reflecting mirror metaphor of mimesis is replaced for the projecting lamp metaphor of Einbildungskraft. Kearney says, "meaning is no longer primarily considered as a transcendent property of divine being; it is now hailed as a transcendental product of the human mind." 19

It was already evident during the Renaissance humanism that the anthropological gets privileged over the onto-theological. As will turn out to be the case in Gadamer's use of the humanist tradition, that in itself does not necessarily lead to a productive or creative imagination. It was only with Immanuel Kant and the German Idealists in the late 18th and 19th century that the productive imagination was officially recognized. Kant in particular represents the Copernican Revolution in this regard. Already in the first edition of his Critique of Pure Reason (published in 1781) he announced the imagination as "the common 'unknown root' of the two stems of human cognition – understanding and sensation." 20 Kant now declares the imagination as the primary and indispensable precondition of all knowledge, and in doing so, turning traditional epistemology entirely on its head. "Nothing could be known about the world unless it was first preformed and transformed by the synthetic power of imagination (Einbildungskraft)." 21

The Copernican Revolution of Kant replaced Being with the human mind as the center of the universe. Instead of being the transcendent origin of meaning, Being is now turned around as the presentation of the human subject, or in other words, as the

19 Ibid.
20 Ibid., 156.
21 Ibid., 157.
production of the human imagination. The implication for the imagination is that it
“ceases to be a copy, or a copy of a copy, and assumes the role of ultimate origin.”22 This
Kantian revolution has its transitional stage between the scholasticism of the 13th and 14th
century and Kant through significant developments of Renaissance mysticism,
Cartesianism, and Empiricism. It set the stage for a Transcendental Imagination that
would find its fulfillment in Kant, and subsequently the emergence of German Idealism
and Romanticism.

Renaissance Mysticism

Paracelsus and Bruno are two of the most prominent proponents of the virtus
imaginativa of the Renaissance period. Paracelsus uses a solar metaphor to describe the
human being’s desire to be absolutely everything he or she wants to be. For him, the
imagination is “the inner sun that moves in its own sphere”, and “whose light is not
tangible but which can set flame to a house.”23 Imagination as the divine flame within
human beings are now far removed from Prometheus who stole the fire that belongs to
someone else. For Bruno, the imagination is the creative source of the forms of human
thought. It is a spiritus phantasticus “which enables mortals to transcend their finite
condition and become one with the secret rhythms of the cosmos,” while the material
world “is there to be transformed by man’s own imaginative power in accordance with a
hidden cosmic design.”24 As such, the imagination becomes the first vestment of the
Spirit’s work to create both human reason and the human body. Even though thinkers like

22 Ibid., 158.
23 As quoted in Ibid., 159.
24 Ibid., 160.
Bruno were still rejected by the Church as heresy, it is now clear how they represent important predecessors for the Kantian revolution.

Cartesianism

Descartes is another transitional figure as the first thinker to bring a rupture with scholasticism. With his \textit{cogito ergo sum}, the source of meaning is solidly located in human subjectivity. Kearney says, “Whereas medieval onto-theology had spoken of truth as a referential correspondence of subject to object, Descartes argued that truth results from the reflexive conformity of the subject to his own thought.”\textsuperscript{25} Descartes brings with him the beginnings of providing metaphysics with an anthropological foundation.

Descartes still held the view that imagination is the intermediary between mind and body, and the image was still considered to be a quasi-material residue of sensory experience in relationship to the superiority of reason, but this would soon change with the dawn of humanism represented by him. The Cartesian hostility to the imagination that is still present would be shared by rationalist philosophers of the 17\textsuperscript{th} century such as Spinoza and Leibniz. These thinkers shared with Descartes “that because the \textit{cogito} is the autonomous source of judgment there is little or no need to represent our truth through the mediation of images.”\textsuperscript{26} This is the kind of environment which Kant inherited and radically transformed.

Empiricism

Kant claims that David Hume played a big role in compelling him to rethink the basis of metaphysics. Hume showed “how knowledge could dispense with all appeals to

\textsuperscript{25} Ibid., 161.

\textsuperscript{26} Ibid., 162.
transcendent beings or deities, how it could establish its own foundation in the immanence of reason,” and end up becoming a radical skeptic because of this belief.27 John Locke, who was very weary of the irrationalist effects of the imagination on the scientific ideal of empiricism, was Hume’s mentor in accepting this negative assessment of the imagination, but he pushed it to its limits of becoming an extreme fictionalism. Kearney writes, “Discarding both the ‘innate ideas’ of Descartes and the unknowable ‘substance’ of Locke (a leftover from scholasticism), Hume declared that all human knowledge was derived from the association of image-ideas.”28 The imagination was reduced to the psychological regularities of resemblance, contiguity, and causality that all govern the connection between image-ideas.

Kant

When Kant speaks of a transcendental imagination, it means that imagination is the hidden condition of all knowledge, as an “art concealed in the depths of the human soul.”29 As such, “the transcendental imagination is that which grounds the objectivity of the object in the subjectivity of the subject – rather than in some ‘transcendent’ order beyond man.”30 It is the precondition of experience, namely that which makes experience possible in the first place.31

27 Ibid., 163.
28 Ibid., 164.
29 As quoted from the Critique of Pure Reason in Ibid., 167.
30 Ibid., 168.
31 Kant says, “I entitle transcendental all knowledge which is occupied not so much with objects as with the mode of our knowledge of objects in so far as this mode of knowledge is to be possible a priori.” As quoted in Ibid.
Kant differs from his Cartesian and empiricist predecessors in this very 
transcendental basis for the claim of privileging human subjectivity. Kant takes the final 
step in taking the imagination out of a mimetic paradigm by shifting it to the paradigm of 
transcendental formation. With Kant, "imagination thus ceases to be an arbitrary or 
relativizing function... it becomes instead the sine qua non of all genuine knowledge."  
Imagination as a priori function is the active faculty that synthesizes sensory appearance 
with consciousness, and therefore called Einbildungskraft.  Kearney explains further, 

Kant then proceeds to extend the productive role of imagination into what he 
terms the "unity of transcendental apperception." The synthesis of perceptions 
might well remain arbitrary unless its rules of "association" and "affinity" 
(provided by the imagination) were themselves related to a connected whole of 
understanding. But this is only possible if the productive synthesis of my 
consciousness of myself as the ultimate source of unity. For it is only because I 
ascribe all perceptions to one consciousness (i.e. original apperception) that I can 
say of my perceptions that I am conscious of them. This consciousness is an a 
priori rule of transcendental imagination; and, as such, it precedes and governs 
the empirical rules of the reproductive imagination. It is that "unity of 
apperception" which ensures that every perception apprehended by my 
understanding has a proper and necessary place with respect to all knowledge that 
is mine.  

It is true that, later in the Critique of Judgment, Kant puts a greater emphasis on 
the role of the imagination in aesthetics and the arts rather than just a mediating role 
between the sensible given and the concepts of understanding, and that he never 
employed the Einbildungskraft in his philosophy of religion.  However, it is the 

32 Ibid., 169.  
33 Kant borrowed the notion of Einbildungskraft from the psychological theory of Johann Nikolaus 
Tetens. See Garrett Green, Imagining God: Theology and the Religious Imagination (New York: Harper & 
34 Kearney, The Wake of Imagination, 170.  
35 Green points out that Kant used the language of Vorstellung (representation) for religion as 
imagination. Green, Imagining God: Theology and the Religious Imagination, 14. For a more detailed
Einbildungskraft that took Kant's contribution on the imagination "into a full-blown idealism by his immediate successors in Germany." 36

German Idealism: Fichte and Schelling

There is continuity between Kant's transcendental imagination and the idealism of Fichte and Schelling. This continuity, says Kearney, is sometimes overlooked due to rationalist interpretations of Kant in the neo-Kantian philosophies of the last two centuries. 37 The German idealists seem to categorize all faculties of the mind under the productive imagination (Die Produktive Einbildungskraft).

Fichte (in his The Vocation of Man) "brushes aside Kant's famous division between the 'phenomenal' world which can be known, and the 'noumenal' world which cannot," so that even being-in-itself is a direct product of the "genuine transcendental idealism." 38 All of reality is a product of the imagination. Imagination is the possibility of being, and even reason is made possible by the imagination. The implication is that "reason itself becomes identified with the power of imagination to provide access to 'the spiritual order of essential being', an order where it operates as 'pure activity, absolutely by itself alone, having no need of any instrument outside of itself - absolute freedom'." 39 This is also the impulse for the humanist identification of the imagination with freedom.

summary of Kant's use of the imagination in both the Critique of Pure Reason and Critique of Judgment, see Bryant, Faith and the Play of Imagination: On the Role of Imagination in Religion, 65-84.

36 Green, Imagining God: Theology and the Religious Imagination, 16.

37 According to Kearney, Heidegger "was one of the first modern commentators to advert to this neglected connection..." Kearney, The Wake of Imagination, 177.

38 Ibid., 78.

39 Ibid.
Schelling (in his *The System of Transcendental Idealism*) defines imagination "as that creative power which reconciles the age-old oppositions of Western metaphysics – freedom and necessity, being and becoming, the universal and the particular, the eternal and the temporal, and even the human and the divine."40 Nothing seems to be exempt from the imagination, or as Kearney puts it, imagination becomes "the order behind disorder, the coherence within confusion – the very alpha and omega of the universe itself."41 Schelling himself considered transcendental idealism as the end of the old metaphysics and the beginning of a new romantic era. This creative imagination lays the foundation for even identifying the imagination with the Divine Mind by "collapsing the onto-theological dichotomy between divine and human creation."42

It is clear that with this kind of idealism the imagination is not perceived as an imitation of God’s original being or subservient to reason, but to include everything (including God, world, reason, and sensation). It lays the foundation for the era of romanticism. Green says, "The exalted position of the *Einbildungskraft* in Fichte and Schelling is an early indication of the tendency, reaching its culmination in Romanticism, to make of imagination the supreme human faculty."43

Romanticism

The English romantic, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, is one of the best examples of what is at stake for the imagination from a romantic point of view. He was, by his own recognition, influenced by Schelling. In his *Biographia*, Coledridge coins the term

40 Ibid., 178-79.

41 Ibid., 179.

42 Ibid., 180.

esemplastic “to refer to the imagination’s power to ‘shape into one’.” Kearney quotes directly from Coleridge to show the direct correlation between esemplastic and Einbildungskraft, namely that both express the power of the imagination to form the many into one. Coleridge continues to deliberately distinguish between mimesis as fantasy and this In-Eins-Bildung as the productive imagination. This understanding of imagination laid the foundation for an endorsement of the creative imagination by many other romantic writers, such as Wordsworth, Blake, and Shelley.

Cultivating a Textual Bildung

In addressing the dynamics of cultivating the social imaginaire, and against the background of a critique of the productive or creative Einbildungskraft, this dissertation returns to Gadamer’s understanding of the relationship between truth and method. Gadamer’s critique of German Idealism is central to his hermeneutics, and at the core of how he explores the relationship between truth and method. Even though Gadamer is indebted to the German Idealism tradition for an emphasis on reason’s self-reflectiveness, he critiques that tradition for not recognizing how reason is situated in history. For this reason, German Idealism is still stuck in “a Cartesian model of absolute self-reflection.”

This is exactly the point where Heidegger’s influence on Gadamer becomes important for an ontological shift beyond idealism. Truth is constituted as an event of being rather than

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44 Kearney, The Wake of Imagination, 181-82.


46 Kristin Gjesdal suggests that, although there are plenty of studies of Gadamer’s relation to Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Heidegger, and Habermas, “his reading of Kant, Fichte, Schleiermacher, the Romantics, and Hegel, however, has for the most part been left unvisited.” Kristin Gjesdal, Gadamer and the Legacy of German Idealism (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 1.

47 Ibid., 2.
through an autonomous self-reflecting subjectivity. This defines understanding as “the experience of a world-disclosive truth that is ontologically prior to the critical-reflective capacities of the individual interpreter.”48 This insight creates the opportunity to not only illuminate the LC’s process of conversation about and interpretation of their socially-embodied theology (accessed through a playful imagination) as such an event of disclosure into which they were drawn by their playfulness, but also how participation in this event is transformative in itself for the sake of their missional discernment on how to participate in God’s mission in civil society.

This dissertation suggests that Gadamer’s effort of rehabilitating Bildung is the hermeneutical key to interpret the possibilities of the LC’s self-understanding and transformation through the world-disclosive texts shaping their socially-embodied imagination. Gadamer begins his exploration of Bildung in Truth and Method by considering the significance of the humanist tradition for the human sciences, and immediately enter the debate on “the problem of method.”49 He wants to show that “what makes the human sciences into sciences can be understood more easily from the tradition of the concept of Bildung than from the modern idea of scientific method.”50 In these opening sections of Truth and Method, Gadamer indicates the self-understanding of 19th century human sciences by analogy of the natural sciences as a concern to establish “similarities, regularities, and conformities to law which would make it possible to predict individual phenomena and processes.”51 Gadamer points out that the problem

48 Ibid.
49 Gadamer, Truth and Method, 3.
50 Ibid., 16.
51 Ibid., 3.
with this approach is that “The individual case does not serve only to confirm a law from which practical predictions can be made. Its ideal is rather to understand the phenomenon itself in its unique and historical concreteness.”

Gadamer then continues to deconstruct the alternative of many who acknowledge the distinction between the human and natural sciences based on their difference in kind and intention, namely to give the human sciences a fundamentally negative description by connecting the practice of induction to psychological rather than logical conditions. Even more important for Gadamer to embark on his own investigation is the attempt of the “historical school” to justify the human sciences’ methodological independence from the natural sciences. Gadamer concludes that even Dilthey did not really progress beyond Helmholtz, and “however strongly Dilthey defended the epistemological independence of the human sciences, what is called ‘method’ in modern science remains the same everywhere and is only displayed in an especially exemplary form in the natural sciences.”

After this brief introduction to show that in this history “the human sciences have no method of their own,” but “they follow Kant in modeling the idea of science and knowledge on the natural sciences and seeking the distinctive feature of the human sciences in the artistic element (artistic feeling, artistic induction),” Gadamer wants to move beyond this unconvincing argument based on the Kantian distinctions of nature and

52 Ibid., 4.

53 With reference to Herman Helmholtz. Ibid., 5.

54 With reference to J.G. Droysen, and especially Wilhelm Dilthey. Ibid., 5-6.

55 Ibid., 7.

56 Ibid.
freedom. In doing so, Gadamer takes up the idea of Bildung, "the concept of self-formation, education, or cultivation (Bildung), which... was perhaps the greatest idea of the eighteenth century, and it is this concept which is the atmosphere breathed by the human sciences of the nineteenth century, even if they are unable to offer any epistemological justification for it."57

Using Herder's basic definition of Bildung as "rising up to humanity through culture," Gadamer shows how "Bildung is intimately associated with the idea of culture and designates primarily the properly human way of developing one's natural talents and capacities."58 This understanding of Bildung already takes on a different meaning than how Kant used the term for "'cultivating' a capacity (or 'natural talent'), which as such is an act of freedom by the acting subject" rather than a self-formation.59 For Gadamer, Bildung no longer means culture, but "rather, the rise of the word Bildung evokes the ancient mystical tradition according to which man carries in his soul the image of God, after whom he is fashioned, and which man must cultivate in himself."60 It is in Bildung as a process of cultivation that humanism "does not rest on a fixed notion of what it is to be human or to possess a reason. To be human is to have no such algorithmic notion of oneself. Humanism is rather an unending quest for civility in human affairs that can only

57 Ibid., 8.
58 Ibid., 9.
59 Ibid.
60 Ibid., 10.
be achieved or exercised in the process of culture and the cultivation of one's own talents."  

Gadamer points to a number of important consequences when Bildung takes on this shift in meaning from the Kantian understanding: first, “the result of Bildung is not achieved in the manner of a technical construction, but grows out of an inner process of formation and cultivation, and therefore constantly remains in a state of continual Bildung”; second, “in having no goals outside itself, the concept of Bildung transcends that of the mere cultivation of given talents, from which concept it is derived”; third, “in Bildung… that by which and through which one is formed becomes completely one’s own.”

It is important to notice that, therefore, “humanity is not something one already has, or some skill one could learn once and for all. Rather, it is a sense or direction that one attempts to cultivate.” From a theological perspective, this is where Gadamer’s earlier reference of cultivating the image of God in ourselves fits. The previous chapter already explored the consequences of such a process when the imago Dei is considered to be relational rather than substantial. It resonates with the way in which Gadamer reclaims Bildung based on the assumption of not a static human essence, but an open process of self-cultivation through relationships with the other. As Grondin puts it, “for humanism, it is precisely the ‘essence’ of mankind not to have an essence since it is able to surpass any fixed essence one could assign to it.”

From a missional perspective, Gadamer

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62 Gadamer, Truth and Method, 10.

63 Grondin, “Gadamer on Humanism.”

64 Ibid.
provides a philosophical connection to understand *missional* not as an ideological blueprint of an ideal church, but rather the cultivation of a sense of God's movement in the world, and the cultivation of a direction to participate in God's movement in the world. In this sense, *missional* is cultivating a *relational posture* rather than a *substantive essence*.

These consequences that Gadamer spells out come forward more clearly in Hegel's understanding of *Bildung*. In Hegel, it became clear that "the being of Geist (spirit) has an essential connection with the idea of Bildung." The Hegelian turn brings with it a break with the immediate and the particular through "the universal nature of human Bildung to constitute itself as a universal intellectual being." *Bildung* becomes the ability of abstraction and the task of rising to the universal. Gadamer says, "In his *Phenomenology of Spirit* Hegel works out the genesis of a truly free self-consciousness 'in-and-for-itself,' and he shows that the essence of work is to form the thing rather than consume it." *Bildung* in Hegel brings about "the distancing from the immediacy of desire, of personal need and private interest, and the exacting demand of a universal." Practically it means "to reconcile itself with itself, to recognize oneself in other being," and theoretically it means to "deal with something that is not immediate, something that is alien, with something that belongs to memory and to thought." 

66 Ibid.
67 Ibid.
68 Ibid., 12.
69 Ibid.
Gadamer concludes that the basic idea of Hegel is correct, namely “to recognize one’s own in the alien, to become at home in it, is the basic movement of spirit, whose being consists only in returning to itself from what is other.” Cultivation in this sense became the process of recognition beyond a mere naturalness but always from within the given. Gadamer says,

Every single individual who raises himself out of his natural being to the spiritual finds in the language, customs, and institutions of his people a pre-given body of material which, as in learning to speak, he has to make his own. Thus every individual is always engaged in the process of Bildung and in getting beyond his naturalness, inasmuch as the world into which he is growing is one that is humanly constituted through language and custom.

*Bildung* represents a return to oneself as presupposition for alienation. Although Gadamer accepts this basic idea, he cannot go all the way with Hegel, “for Hegel sees Bildung as brought to completion through the movement of alienation and appropriation in a complete mastery of substance, in the dissolution of all concrete being...” Gadamer wants to accept Bildung as an element of the spirit without connecting it with Hegel’s absolute spirit. For Gadamer, this means “keeping oneself open to what is other – to other, more universal points of view” that “embraces a sense of proportion and distance in relation to itself, and hence consists in rising above itself to universality.” The implication is to look at oneself and one’s private purposes “in the way that others see them.”

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70 Ibid., 13.
71 Ibid.
72 Ibid.
73 Ibid., 15.
74 Ibid.
However, these more universal viewpoints are never a “fixed applicable yardstick,” and always the viewpoints of others.⁷⁵ At this point, Gadamer would rather compare Bildung with the characteristics of a sense. “For every sense – e.g., the sense of sight – is already universal in that it embraces its sphere, remains open to a particular field, and grasps the distinctions within what is opened to it in this way.”⁷⁶ Grondin explains, “if one has to ‘build’ or ‘form’ oneself through Bildung, one will naturally be open to other points of view, to different perspectives than one's own. The main characteristic of humanism is thus this thankful openness to the enlightening perspectives of others and of those who have preceded us and bequeathed to us the opportunity of their experience.”⁷⁷

Therefore, when we are always in a process of appropriating differently our traditions and the wisdom of others, we are cultivating the truth among us in ways that can never be adequately described in terms of methodical science. In doing so, we are making sure that we are not only truly human, but also live into an openness with others that creates the possibilities of change and transformation. In one sense, nothing new can emerge from point zero as if we can jump our own traditions that shape us, but simultaneously, the openness of the dialogue with the other also ensure the critical moments of learning and changing through the encounter with the other. In fact, Gadamer should not be misunderstood at this point. He is not arguing for a romanticized view on tradition or a justification of the status quo. Grondin says, “As a matter of fact, we do not

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⁷⁵ Ibid., 15-16.
⁷⁶ Ibid., 16.
⁷⁷ Grondin, “Gadamer on Humanism.”
learn anything through positive experiences because they only confirm what we already know. Hermeneutical insight only sinks in when we have been contradicted by events which force us to change or adjust our perspectives.”78

Grondin suggests that Gadamer’s turn to humanism in this regard was unique in the German philosophical tradition that did not always attend that closely to humanism as have some Latin countries, and it also “enable us to understand what is profoundly at stake, and strikingly different, in the philosophies of Heidegger and Gadamer.”79 For Grondin, even though Gadamer is so profoundly influenced by Heidegger, Gadamer-seizes to be Heideggerian at this very point where Gadamer is a humanist, and Heidegger is not. The question about the possibility of humanism embedded in the promises of self-formation is not an insignificant one in the aftermaths of the World Wars at the turn of the 20th century and the shock of Auschwitz, as well as the dominant European philosophical culture of existentialism with its exclusive concentration on the human predicament.

Even though it is not evident that Gadamer ever engaged Heidegger directly on this issue, it is clear from their philosophical arguments in this regard that Gadamer is defending the humanist tradition while Heidegger is repudiating it. The difference is not only clear in Gadamer’s legitimation of the human sciences based on the humaniora as cornerstone of a humanist education (even though human sciences are called Geisteswissenschaften in the German tradition), but more importantly, through the above mentioned opening of his Truth and Method with “a rehabilitation of the forgotten

78 Ibid.
79 Ibid.
humanist tradition." Gadamer agrees with Heidegger on the dominance of methodical science in contemporary culture, and how this came about as a Kantian consequence of excluding the humanities from science. Grondin says, "where Heidegger denounces the pervasive essence of technology, Gadamer points to the false claims of method." Gadamer argues the problem emerged exactly because of the abandonment of the humanist tradition through the Kantian influence.

Therefore, Gadamer makes an effort to reclaim the humanist tradition for the sake of overcoming the Kantian influence that resulted in the cognitive devaluation of anything that does not adhere to the strict methodological criteria of so-called exact sciences. He wants to reclaim some core humanist notions of, for example, common sense, taste, judgment, from their relegation to the so-called subjective sphere of life that is devoid of any scientific import.

Gadamer’s starting point in attending to the humanist tradition is Vico’s appeal to the *sensus communis* (common sense) and the humanist ideal of *eloquentia* (eloquent speaking). What interest Gadamer in Vico is the focus of *sensus communis* on "the probable, the verisimilar" as "the sense that founds community." Gadamer says,

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80 Ibid.
81 Heidegger sees “technology as the last flagpole of metaphysics or humanism that that reduces Being to the functionalism for human purposes…” because “…metaphysics is characterized by the at first tacit rise to prominence of the human being who imposes himself as the source from which the whole of Being becomes accountable, an accountability that culminates in the essence of technology and technological manipulation (that was carried to its extreme by Facism). Metaphysics, humanism and the essence of technology form an intertwined whole for Heidegger. This is why Heidegger wants to take some distance regarding the blinding evidence of humanism. To Heidegger’s mind, humanism is not what is going to save us from the impending catastrophe of humankind, rather it could very well be what got us into trouble in the first place.” Ibid.
83 Ibid., 19.
According to Vico, what gives the human will its direction is not the abstract universality of reason but the concrete universality represented by the community of a group, a people, a nation, or the whole human race." This communal sense does not refer to knowledge based on argumentation, but the ability to discover what is evident (verisimile). It refers to *phronesis* (practical knowledge) as another kind of knowledge directed towards the concrete situation. Gadamer says, "The grasp and moral control of the concrete situation require subsuming what is given under the universal – that is, the goal that one is pursuing so that the right thing may result." 

Such a *phronesis* is not simply a practical shrewdness or general cleverness, but "the distinction between what should and should not be done includes the distinction between the proper and the improper and thus presupposes a moral attitude..." What is also important for the purposes of this dissertation’s research journey from within the LC’s lived experiences is that the *sensus communis* “is acquired through living in the community and is determined by its structures and aims." The results are that reasoned proof as a universal is not sufficient enough, because circumstance play a decisive role.

Gadamer moves on from Vico to Shaftesbury, and his influence on the 18th century. Shaftesbury describes his evaluation of the social significance of *wit* and *humor* as *sensus communis*. He stands in the humanist tradition that considers the *sensus communis* as “love of the community or society, natural affection, humanity,

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^84 Ibid.

^85 Ibid.

^86 Ibid., 20.

^87 Ibid.
obligingness.”88 In this sense, the *sensus communis* seems mostly to be a virtue of social intercourse, but it nevertheless has a moral and even metaphysical base. In referencing Henri Bergson, Gadamer says it refers to the “milieu social”: “while the other senses relate us to things, ‘good sense’ governs our relations with persons.”89 For Bergson, this understanding of *sensus communis* “avoids both the mistakes of the scientific dogmatists who are looking for social laws and those of the metaphysical utopians,” and therefore, “there is, properly speaking, no method, but rather a certain way of acting.”90

It is significant that, for Gadamer, Pietism also functions as an important example in this regard. Gadamer indicates how especially Oetinger relied on Shaftesbury’s understanding of the *sensus communis*. He quotes Oetinger who said, “The sensus communis is concerned only with things that all men see daily before them, things that hold an entire society together, things that are concerned as much with truths and statements as with the arrangements and patterns comprised in statements…”91 Oetinger not only reacts against a rationalist understanding of the *sensus communis*, but also gives it an explicit hermeneutical application. For this pietist, the presence of God consists in life itself. Gadamer says, “divine power operates in the form of the instinct and inner stimulation to discover the traces of God and to recognize what has the greatest connection with human happiness and life.”92 In this sense, the *sensus communis* is a gift of God.

88 Ibid., 22.
89 Ibid., 23.
90 Ibid.
91 Ibid., 24.
From this it is clear that cultivation as Bildung isn’t something to be mastered, and it does not have a predefined goal. It is a way of being in the world for the sake of being in the world. It is a cultural posture rather than a cultural essence. Only through cultivating a sense of the whole, the world, the other, can one come to understand oneself. In appropriating the language of our own culture, we are extending ourselves beyond ourselves. Such a cultivation of the whole as a movement beyond the self into communion with the other opens up the in-between spaces for the emergence of truth in what God is up to in the world.

However, how do we know that cultivation in this sense is not another way of justifying the centeredness of the self? Especially if it is dominated by the Hegelian spirit of eventually encountering the other for the sake of the self. Isn’t it just another way of immersing oneself even more deeply into your own culture? Gadamer understands it as an inner resonance between the cultivated community and the appearance of truth in larger context. Bildung only happens through intersubjective agreement between others. Gadamer provides a communal understanding of Bildung, unlike Nietzsche’s genius as the only true practitioner of Bildung. Cultivation is an endless process of fusion of horizons within the conflict of interpretations (Ricoeur) or sites of contestation (Appadurai). All meaning depends on its interpretative context of particular engagements. Only through Bildung is horizons expanded, and are new ones emerging through a multification of hermeneutical experiences. It is a non-foundationalist and non-teleological theory of culture. Human formation is simultaneously the event of human transformation. This is why Ricoeur’s understanding of the text become important to compliment Gadamer’s understanding of Bildung.
In the work of Paul Ricoeur, the interpretative and textual nature of how the imagination is cultivated is taken to its fullest consequences. Mark Wallace says, “Ricoeur argues that selfhood begins not with the philosophical hubris that the subject is an autonomous self but with awareness that the subject enters consciousness already formed by the symbolic systems within one’s culture... always already interpenetrated by the founding symbols and stories that constitute one’s communal heritage.” The journey to selfhood takes place when the figurative possibilities imagined by text-worlds are appropriated. This chapter will explore Ricoeur’s important contribution in the light of the Bildung discussion above when the question is addressed further below on the possibilities of a rehabilitated Bildung from the Einbildungskraft for a phenomenological approach to cultivating the imagination (especially with regard to the social imaginaire).

**The Hermeneutical Imagination: A Habit of Critical Reflectiveness**

This dissertation’s research journey of cultivating the LC’s socially-embodied theology in civil society became part of the LC’s playful engagement with the other for the sake of their communal interpretation of the future that God is bringing forth among them. In doing so, the second level of phenomenological research entered landscapes shaped by the fusion of world-texts of interpretation that goes far beyond mere descriptions of these imaginative engagements in the discernment process (the first level covered in chapter 2). To understand what is at stake during this phase of a phenomenological approach, and its significance for the LC’s journey of discernment, this section first of all needs to establish the phenomenological approach as a

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hermeneutical endeavor through an ontological turn beyond idealism. In doing so, a hermeneutical phenomenology will set the stage for a more thorough encounter with the social imaginaire, especially in relation to its transformative function.

A Turn Beyond Idealism

A brief mentioning again of the pivotal role of Heidegger will be appropriate as background to the significance of a hermeneutical turn in the development of phenomenology. Heidegger was not only a student of Husserl, but also his successor. Heidegger went beyond Husserl’s idealism and essentialism with an ontology of being in all its temporality. In the light of this dissertation’s tracing of the history of imagination (earlier in this chapter), it is worth noticing that Heidegger also presented a radical rereading of Kant’s Einbildungskraft. In fact, the importance of Kant’s Einbildungskraft for Heidegger’s understanding of Dasein led to his book on Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics (published two years after Being and Time). Heidegger considers Kant’s Einbildungskraft as a watershed, because of Kant’s discovery that all our knowledge of being derives from the “finitude of human subjectivity.”

Kearney sums up the significance of this development by emphasizing the insight that “pure reason could not reach the objects of experience except through the sensible intuition of time and space: that is, through the finite limits laid down by imagination.” Heidegger insisted that with Kant comes the shift from imagination’s mediating role to the imagination as formative center of both intuition (sensation) and thought.

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94 Kearney, Poetics of Imagining: Modern to Post-Modern, 46.

95 Ibid.
This means that imagination is presupposed by intuition and thought rather than a mediatory function afterwards. This has been argued substantially in the previous section on Kant’s transcendental and productive imagination.

Kant helped Heidegger interpret being in terms of time, and therefore showing how “all metaphysical determinations of being are ultimately related to time.” It leads Heidegger to his own understanding of Dasein. Without equating Dasein with Kant’s interpretation of the imagination (due to Kant’s own revisions in the second edition of Critique of Pure Reason, as well as subsequent reluctance by Schelling, Fichte, and Jacobi to extrapolate the full ontological implications of Kant), it has the same temporalizing and projective powers of Einbildungskraft. It refers to the creative possibility of being. Kearney sums it up, “no Sein without Dasein; no Dasein without time; and no time without imagination.”

Through Kant, Heidegger brought the full ontological turn necessary for subsequent hermeneutical turns that came with Gadamer and Ricoeur.

The Hermeneutical Imagination

The hermeneutical turn takes the ontological shift into the relationship between the imagination and language. In the case of Paul Ricoeur, it was certainly made possible by the above mentioned Heideggerian rereading of Kant’s transcendental imagination. Kearney says, “what is indisputable is that Heidegger’s rereading of the Kantian concept

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96 Heidegger argues this shift in his treatment of Kant’s transcendental imagination in the first edition of his Critique of Pure Reason.

97 Kearney, Poetics of Imagining: Modern to Post-Modern, 49.

98 Ibid., 54.
imagination as a pathway leading to, rather than away from, the truth of being." 99 The Heideggerian turn made possible the *hermeneutical phenomenology* of both Gadamer and Ricoeur. It is especially Ricoeur who’s work embodies the phenomenological shift from *description* to *interpretation*, and with that the fulfillment of a linguistic turn. 100

Ricoeur replaces “the visual model” of the phenomenological “immediate *appearance* to consciousness” with “the verbal” of a hermeneutical phenomenology, namely the ability “to say one thing in terms of another, or to say several things at the same time, thereby creating something new.” 101 Ricoeur expresses his dissatisfaction with both the productive and the reproductive imagination that respectively privileging the subject and the object, and calls it a “state of confusion.” 102 He then asks, “Do these aporias themselves betray a fault in the philosophy of imagination or the structural feature of imagination itself which it would be the task of philosophy to take account of?” 103 Ricoeur, of course, wants to answer yes to both parts of his question.

For Ricoeur, the “fault” is due to the lack of a properly hermeneutic account of the imagination that acknowledges the *symbolizing* power of the imagination. Kearney refers to this power as the ability “to transform given meanings into new ones,” and to construct the future as a horizon of possibility and hope. 104 Focusing on this power,

99 Ibid., 144.


101 Kearney, *Poetics of Imagining: Modern to Post-Modern*, 145.

102 Quote in Ibid., 147.

103 Ibid.

Ricoeur tries to overcome the antagonism between will and necessity, and says, “we have thought too much in terms of a will which submits and not enough in terms of an imagination which opens up.” This opening up takes place primarily through the verbal, and therefore, “imagination comes into play in that moment when a new meaning emerges from out of the ruins of the literal interpretation.”

A decisive point for Ricoeur is his claim that what matters in the imagination is less the content than the function of images. Kearney explains, “for new meanings to come into being they need to be spoken or uttered in the form of new verbal images.” Therefore, a phenomenological account of appearances only makes sense as a hermeneutical account of meaning. This view of Ricoeur helps this dissertation’s research journey with its discovery that imagination can only be recognized as such when there is an economy of response to a demand for new meaning (a term that Graham Ward uses, and to which this dissertation return later in this chapter). Kearney says this is a view of imagination that “liberates the reader into a free space of possibility, suspending the reference to the immediate world of perception (both the author’s and the reader’s) and thereby disclosing ‘new ways of being in the world.’” Ricoeur talks about the text’s ability to redescribe the world.

As such, the imagination functions as an ontological event. It is not a “decorative excess or effusion of subjectivity, but the capacity of language to open up new

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105 Kearney, Poetics of Imagining: Modern to Post-Modern, 147.
106 Ibid.
107 Ibid., 148.
108 As quoted in Ibid., 149.
It is the "disclosure of unprecedented worlds, an opening onto possible worlds which transcend the limits of our actual world." The attempt of accessing the LC’s socially-embodied imagination is more than just a first level description of an empirical reality, but looks beyond description to another level of cultivating possible worlds opened up by such an economy of responsiveness. It cultivates the in-between space of emerging realities shaped by the LC’s socially-embodied imagination that not only transcends subjectivity and intersubjectivity, but also transforms the existing status quo. The LC’s three emerging threads indicate the contours of such possible landscapes that evolve in an ongoing conversation about the future that God is bringing forth among them. The hermeneutical function of the imagination goes beyond some objective or structural analysis of texts, or for that matter, some existential or subjective analysis of texts, to the possible worlds that these texts are opening up. These opening up of new worlds enable us to have new understandings of ourselves as being-in-the-world. It helps the LC to understand their socially-embodied existence in civil society.

It is important to state once more, from yet another angle, that this opening up of socially-embodied possibilities is not only an interpretive exercise, but that it cultivates projects of action. Ricoeur says, “imagination has a projective function which pertains to the very dynamism of action.” The imagination produces “imaginative variations” of the world, “therefore offering us the freedom to conceive of the world in other ways and

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109 Ibid.

110 Ibid.

111 See especially Ricoeur, From Text to Action, 144-67.

112 Kearney, Poetics of Imagining: Modern to Post-Modern, 149.
to undertake forms of action which might lead to its transformation."\textsuperscript{113} Cultivating the imagination brings about social transformation. There is no action possible without the imagination, says Ricoeur. This leads to this dissertation’s emphasis on the social imaginaire as an understanding of the possibilities of missional transformation from within the cultural flows in civil society.

The social imaginaire, as constitutive of social reality, refers to “a whole set of collective stories and histories which need not bear the signature of any individual author, and which exercise a formative influence on our modes of action and behaviour in society.”\textsuperscript{114} Ricoeur elaborates on the social imaginaire with the help of his notions of ideology and utopia. In his Lectures on Ideology and Utopia (1986), Ricoeur considers these two notions as functions of the social imaginaire. Kearney sums up Ricoeur’s understanding of these two functions by saying, “though both constitute sets of collective images which motivate a society towards a certain mode of thinking and acting, ideology tends towards ‘integration’ (preserving a sense of shared identity) while ‘utopia’ works in the opposite direction of rupture (introducing a sense of novelty, difference, discontinuity). Ricoeur explains,

On the one hand, imagination may function to preserve an order. In this case the function of the imagination is to stage a process of identification that mirrors the order. Imagination has the appearance of a picture. On the other hand, though, imagination may have a disruptive function; it may work as a breakthrough. Its image in this case is productive, an imagining of something else, the elsewhere. In each of its three roles, ideology represents the first kind of imagination; it has a

\textsuperscript{113} Ibid. It is exactly with regard to the possibility of transformation that Graham Ward find Ricoeur’s particular understanding of the social imaginaire relevant (even in comparison with Charles Taylor). Ward says, “the social imaginary is the practical functioning of the imagination in and between people.” Ward, Cultural Transformation and Religious Practice, 130.

\textsuperscript{114} Kearney, Poetics of Imagining: Modern to Post-Modern, 165.
function of preservation, of conservation. Utopia, in contrast, represents the second kind of imagination; it is always the glance from nowhere.\footnote{As quoted in Ibid.}

It is exactly the text's ability to redescribing the world in a transformative way that links the imagination to utopia. It is clear that Ricoeur would rather see utopia on the side of Kant's productive imagination, "affirming its power not only as a critique of ideology (in so far as it distances us from what is given) but also as a projection of possible social worlds."\footnote{Ibid., 166.} The local Christian community participates in such a \textit{social imaginaire} as its socially-embodied existence from within the cultural flows of civil society. It motives and guides members of such a community from within both its cultural and theological impulses.

The importance of ideology critique comes into play when the \textit{social imaginaire} becomes an ideological stability through "a mystificatory discourse which serves to uncritically vindicate or glorify the established political powers," and therefore causing the symbols of a community to "become fixed and fetishized" in serving "lies."\footnote{Ibid.} While no community can overcome its embeddedness and also indebtedness to the \textit{social imaginaire}, it is also in continuous need of a critique of ideology from within the \textit{social imaginaire}. Utopia needs to provide this rupture by remaining suspicious of ideological power. It is the function of imagination to always pro-ject to \textit{elsewhere} as a \textit{no place} of a \textit{not yet}.

However, there is not only always the danger that a utopian imaginary can become ideological when fixated in its own right, but also "if the social imaginary of
utopia becomes too far removed from the society it is proposing to liberate, it runs the risk of a total schism which ultimately degenerates into repression." Ricoeur therefore talks about the "dangerously schizophrenic utopian discourse which projects a static future without ever producing the conditions of its realization." In such instance utopia becomes detached from the experience of past and present. This is the danger in a local Christian community that engages in discernment processes based on gap models, or that simply import some universal view into the particularity via an imitative process of imagination.

It is therefore important for Ricoeur to see the ideological and utopian as indispensable to each other, namely "ideology as a symbolic confirmation of the past and utopia as a symbolic opening towards the future..." Kearney says, "once cut off from each other, they fall into extreme forms of political pathology: the one incarcerating us in the past, the other sacrificing us to the future." Kearney also links Ricoeur in this regard with Herbert Marcuse's view that all authentic utopias are therefore grounded in recollection, and that critique is also a tradition (which seems to be Gadamer's counter argument against Habermas' critique). Kearney uses the kingdom metaphor to describe this: "The biblical promise of a kingdom thus serves as an image which reconnects the future with the past – with tradition, in the best sense of the word, as an ongoing narrative project, as a possibility which demands to be realized." Gou's future is always a

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118 Ibid., 167.
119 Ibid.
120 Ibid.
121 Ibid.
122 Ibid.
preferred and promised future that gives birth to the new from within the simultaneity of continuity and rupture (to which this dissertation returns in chapter 4).

The possibility of the social imaginaire understood in a way similar to Ricoeur brings with it the possibility to understand cultivation as a process of socially-embodied transformation from within the LC's embeddedness in the cultural flows of civil society. We first attend to this from a cultural perspective on transformative agency, before we turn to a pneumatological perspective on a theology of agency within such socially-embodied imagination.

Cultivation Through Critical Reflectiveness

Phenomenological Approach: Level II

From the perspective of this dissertation's research journey, the LC's critical reflections as their economy of responsiveness to their engagement with the LC's discernment question represents a second level of engagement in a typical phenomenological approach to research. This second level is usually referred to as an analysis phase following the first phase of description. Smith (et al) is adamant that an interpretative phenomenological analysis does not have "a single 'method' for working with data," and that there is flexibility in how such an interpretative phase develops. However, what is important in this phase though, is to have an "analytic focus" that "directs our analytic attention towards our participants' attempts to make sense of their experiences."124


124 Ibid.
In this sense, both the LC's attempts to make sense out of the emerging themes from their focus group engagements with their discernment question (reflected in appendices F-G), and the above mentioned theoretical conversation partners' indication of a hermeneutical and linguistic understanding of transformation from within the social imaginaire (through Heidegger's ontological turn, and Gadamer and Ricoeur's hermeneutical turn) seems to connect with this second level focus in a phenomenological approach to research. Appendices F-G reflect the LC's "set of common processes (e.g. moving from the particular to the shared, and from the descriptive to the interpretative)" to make sense out of the future that God is bringing forth in, among, and through them.\footnote{Ibid.}

The way in which the LC's interpretative attempts developed is in line with the typical way in which phenomenological research will proceed on this level, namely "the identification of the emergent patterns (i.e. themes) within the experiential material, emphasizing both convergence and divergence, commonality and nuance..."; then, "the development of a 'dialogue' between the researchers... on what it might mean for participants to have these concerns... leading in turn to the development of a more interpretative account"; and finally, "the development of a structure, frame or gestalt which illustrates the relationships between themes."\footnote{Ibid.}

The main narrative of this dissertation is an attempt to follow closely the LC's own process of discernment by "the organization of all of this material in a format which allows for analyzed data to be traced right through the process, from initial comments on the transcript, through initial clustering and thematic development, into the final structure..."
of themes."\textsuperscript{127} Even the approach followed in this dissertation to stay close to the details of the narratives of the three emerging threads by integrating these narratives into each of chapters 2-4, and in fact, elaborating theologically and theoretically around these narratives based on the production of theology that emerges from these narratives, can be seen as an illustration of the importance of phenomenological research to "the development of a full narrative, evidenced by a detailed commentary on data extracts, which takes the reader through this interpretation, usually theme-by-theme, and... often supported by some form of visual guide..."\textsuperscript{128} The entire chapter 4 is devoted to the final stage in such a phenomenological approach, namely to present the LC's reflections on their "perceptions, conceptions and processes."\textsuperscript{129}

Smith (et. al) recommends flexibility and creativity for engaging the lived experience of participants, and rejects the phenomenological approach as a step by step method to be implemented in any particular or sequential way. The important point of this level of research is to facilitate an active engagement of the participants with data, and to create an environment of critical and interpretative reflections on what is emerging in such an active engagement with the data. The LC's process reflected in appendices F and G is such a process of engagement. They were identifying the themes, and eventually articulating the threads, through a process of reducing the volume of detail "whilst maintaining complexity, in terms of mapping interrelationships, connections and patterns..."\textsuperscript{130}

\textsuperscript{127} Ibid., 80.
\textsuperscript{128} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{129} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{130} Ibid., 91.
This process of critical reflectiveness on their data represents not only an analytical mode of moving from the particular to the holistic, but primarily as the cultivation of a social imaginaire shaped by the fusion of a variety of cultural and theological texts. It is a process of producing theology from within the theo-cultural contours of their socially-embodied understanding of what it means to be the church in civil society. A theological reflection on how this process of critical reflectiveness unfolded gives an opportunity to explore this process as the LC’s pneumatological imagination.

**The Pneumatological Imagination: Cultural Transformation**

This dissertation’s research interest in cultivation is similar to the question that Graham Ward poses with regard to social transformation. Behind Ward’s interest in how cultures change is the question of “how does the theological project (Christian, in this instance) become a transformative public practice with respect to the cultures that contextualise it?” In asking this question, he explores the relationship between critical interpretation as production of knowledge and cultural transformation. In doing this, he also tries to bridge the gulf between critical theory’s concern for power and ideology and the hermeneutical concern for reference and meaning. He says, “To insist upon a radical separation between hermeneutics and critical theory… can make the critical intervention appear to be a dogmatic truth-claim, a truth-claim that cannot itself be negotiated, criticized, refined, denied. The very fact that critique can foster a range of further critical responses is founded upon the interpretative act that necessarily precedes the critical one.”

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132 Ibid., 62.
Ward suggests that “the micro-modifications that take place in any culture, causing it to shift in time, are the results of the endless relays of interpretative acts,” and “critique operates within these micro-modifications.” He grants the fact that there are different levels of critique, but critique in itself is always “an internal reflection within an ongoing process of transformation that issues from/in reading, citing, reciting and interpreting various cultural activities.” This approach leads to a view of socially-embodied meaning, because “there is the continuation of the production of beliefs, concepts and values constituting a culture...,” and “there is formation – the formation of persons and their self-understanding and self-evaluation.”

Ward agrees with Gadamer’s understanding of a fusion of horizons, even though he would have liked Gadamer to be more concerned about the critical engagement between horizons. His critique of Gadamer is that “his project of philosophical hermeneutics investigated the movement of truth through historical traditions as they operate over time, but it never critically engaged the idealism and ideology of the tradition upon which it reflected.” Nevertheless, Ward agrees with someone like Richard Bernstein that Gadamer’s analysis of the Wirkungsgeschichtliche Bewusstsein helps to relate cultural hermeneutics with “wedding practical wisdom (phronesis) with the learned skill of handling language (techne) and habits of everyday living (praxis).”

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133 Ibid., 63.
134 Ibid.
135 Ibid.
136 Ibid., 64.
137 Ibid., 65.
Referring to Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Ward then brings the practical philosophical focus of Gadamer's cultural hermeneutics in relationship with ethics contra idealism:

The activity of interpretation is conducted alongside and with respect to other people and the many cultural forms that are the products of the interaction between people (institutions, tools, art-forms). I am agreeing here with some remarks critiquing idealism by Dietrich Bonhoeffer: “Concrete personal being arises from the concrete situation... On the epistemological and metaphysical path one never reaches the reality of the other.” Cultural hermeneutics is concerned with the concrete reality of others. The ethical nature of such a project — in contradiction to idealism — becomes evident when we recall another statement by Bonhoeffer: “From the ethical standpoint man is not ‘immediately’ mind by and in himself, but only in responsibility to ‘another’.” Recognising that relations to others are not the properties of individual people, but ontologically prior to all understanding of individuality, cultural hermeneutics examines that relational responsibility to another.138

It is at this point of his argument that Ward uses a concept that this dissertation finds relevant to the process of discernment in the LC. Ward talks about “an economy of ‘response’ (my italics) that crosses over and integrates in any such appropriation of the different domains of the epistemological, the ontological, the linguistic, the cultural, the political and the ethical.”139 An economy of response renders complex the subject-object dichotomy when it operates within the intrinsically related web of embodied reflection between self and other. Ward thinks that cultural hermeneutics not only takes philosophical hermeneutics into everyday life practices, but gives it a better chance to cultivate the critical engagement between horizons.

Ward finds it also important then to connect this understanding of an economy of response with Gadamer’s account of recognition (Anerkennung). Gadamer is indebted to Hegel here, and Hegel uses it for a kind of nearness of a position that implies a distance.

138 Ibid.
139 Ibid., 65-66.
h refers to a glimpsing rather than grasping of knowledge. Ward understands cultural hermeneutics to explore such recognition much more as a critical engagement and contestation between horizons than philosophical hermeneutics' moment of appropriation seems to indicate. As indicated earlier in this chapter (in the section on “Developing the Threads”), the unfolding process produced moments of recognition from within the LC’s economy of response when a critical reflectiveness emerged as a focus on how to live more fully into what has emerged, and as a desire to explore what this means if extended to include others from within their civil society context.

As such, the critical engagement furnishes a direction or what Ward calls a “projection.” And, very importantly, “pro-jects are governed by a utopian moment associated with ‘recognition.’ Recognition is fundamental to the process of affirming and being defined by tradition to the extent that other possibilities of identification are rejected. Hegel uses recognition in terms of a social ontology. For him, it refers both to the subject’s recognition of itself in and through its social engagement with the other, and the recognition of one’s own existence by the other. Therefore, recognition is the social transformation “that comes about by the positive evaluation of another position with respect to one’s own.”

For Gadamer (as indicated in the previous chapter), recognition is related to the emergence and revelation that take place in the play of art as a web of hermeneutical, political, epistemological, and ontological activity. Ward says, “Recognition is a

140 Ibid., 67.
141 Ibid., 89.
142 Ibid.
143 Ibid.
hermeneutical activity and a hermeneutical experience in which a critical knowledge of what is considered important is both communicated and constituted."\textsuperscript{144} This makes critical knowledge dialectical as inseparable from the \textit{economy of response}. Ward says, "Recognition always installs, then, a questioning; and the experience of recognition is an experience of being questioned."\textsuperscript{145} Ward draws his conclusion,

Knowledge is not an acquisition and recognition is not simply a mental act... Recognition and knowledge are embodied operations implicated in the complex economies of responding to the world as sensate, material, intersubjective and cognitive beings. Cultural hermeneutics would emphasise that this critical knowledge of difference and affinity was not a possession, but, as Hegel saw, an achievement through practices of learning in which these things are always being received again non-identically, while still in question and arriving. The utopian moment in recognition arises from understanding that the whole is not yet – the recognition is never absolute. Nevertheless, there is here a work in progress, a work sustained by the hope of personal and social transformation, governed by what Honneth calls "a state of communicatively lived freedom."\textsuperscript{146}

Therefore, recognition projects a future from within a cultural embeddedness. In this sense, pro-jects are associated with \textit{intentions}. When Ward speaks about \textit{intentionality}, he is "limiting intentions here neither to acts of individual willing nor to the property of certain mental states..."\textsuperscript{147} Instead, Ward says, "phenomenological investigation into seeing \textit{as}, and the recent turn in philosophical attention to the operations of desire, have rendered accounts of \textit{intentionality} complex."\textsuperscript{148} Ward is especially critical of any atomistic understandings of \textit{intentionality}, and is "arguing for the constitution or formation of personhood or the sense of self as agent within traditions

\textsuperscript{144} Ibid., 90.
\textsuperscript{145} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{146} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{147} Ibid., 91.
\textsuperscript{148} Ibid.
and practices of traditions of knowledge, within communities (even if those communities turn out to be imaginary or neo-tribal voluntary societies).”149 In quoting Charles Taylor, Ward emphasizes the fact that the self is “always already in some interpretation (and) constituted as human by the fact.”150

Given the fact that belief and desire are always in-formed, intentionality is always in-formed. This does not mean for Ward that agency or action is culturally determined, because “responsibility lies in the way the economies of intention, response and recognition intersect in the will-to-act.”151 He applies it to theology: “A Christian of a certain tradition is enjoined by the founding texts of the Christian faith (as espoused and evaluated by that particular tradition) to read the signs of the times. Hence the subsequent reading or cultural engagement becomes a project because it is governed by a purpose rooted in one of the dominant axes of a particular standpoint – to seek to understand the activity of God in the world with respect to present grace and future salvation, or to present grace as an intimation of an eternal salvation.”152

Ward makes mention of the fact that the Greek word to discern (diakrinein), also means to judge. So “discernment is the constitution and passing of a judgment,” and “the judgment is arrived at through the comparative relations established between the claims and beliefs of the traditions that have formed a way of seeing the world and the ‘signs of the times’ or the way the world presents itself.”153 This brings Ward to say that “acts of

149 Ibid., 93.
150 Ibid.
151 Ibid.
152 Ibid., 94.
153 Ibid., 94-95.
discernment with respect to the cultural milieu are orientated towards the future and so are intentional,” and “while they are rooted in local acts of personal and communal willing and desiring... they are not reduced to these acts.” In this regard, he explicitly links the issue of agency with Christian pneumatology, “for the Christian tradition informing the negotiation place these acts of discernment and understanding within a pneumatology central to an understanding of God-with-us.”

Embracing Mystery, the Eucharist, and Spiritual Practices

The LC's production of theology provides the soils for exploring God's transformative agency from within their economy of responsiveness to discerning God's future in, among, and through them. The second thread identified from within the LC's process of critical reflectiveness gives a clue to the theo-cultural contours cultivating these soils, especially from the point of view how God's presence and activity function within their socially-embodied theology. This thread is described as Mystery-Eucharist-Spiritual Practices, and it reflects the emerging themes of wonder, awe, and humility.

The appropriate response to God's presence and activity is often expressed in mystical metaphors of wonder and awe. The Eucharist emerged as the central liturgical moment of embodying the mysterious presence of God in the midst of the LC. The mystical presence of God embodied in the Eucharist evokes an understanding of responding to this presence through discernment and spiritual practices. God's mystical presence asks for a posture of humility, and a focus on a life of discernment shaped by spiritual practices.

154 Ibid., 95.
155 Ibid.
156 The identification of the Eucharist with God's mysterious presence allows for the possibility to interpret presence as God's communion with the world through the Spirit of the crucified Christ.
During this process of interpretation, the habits and practices of living into God's presence was explicitly linked to the work of the *Holy Spirit*.

One of the dominant ways in which wonder and awe for God's mystical presence emerged was through the notion of *beauty*, and usually through an imagination stimulated by the beauty of *nature*. The following is a good example as an explanation of a painted illustration (figure 2.1) by an Art Ministry Focus Group participant when engaging the LC's discernment question.

"Ok, let me see – I need to step back – I guess what I did is, I feel – by the way – I chose this scene specifically, because I need to look out the window. I feel that nature is all [unintelligible] a metaphor – for God in a sense of God's presence or the Spirit of God. In nature we see it all the time, we see the beauty and the love – the imperfections as well as some of that. I did it kind of intuitively and let it flow without thinking and what I did was – as it evolved and I started looking at it [unintelligible], I start putting in things that I wanted to give more meaning to and using as metaphors, so, unlike the mountains we're climbing – we have the committee. We have some roots in some of the history of it going back to 12 years – we have some mountains to climb – so, a lot of my method is using metaphors. So, the jaggedness or the climbing the rock, the mountains, hills to climb, new places to travel, the branching out of new growing, new growth, meaning the little buds growing on the branching, and still with the presence of God in the sky and the heavens coming down – so almost like I'm incorporating earth and heaven and where I'd see the committee or if everyone is giving their parts or their gifts and sharing it within the congregation, we all have different journeys and paths that we have travelled, some may be more difficult, some might be easier, some might be harder to climb, some obstacles we have to do, but yet to see there's continual growth and new spirit growing within yet God is present in that. So, that's what is happening in nature..."
Quiet a number of pictures taken by the staff members were related to, as one staff member put it, “how many things God put on this earth just for the sheer beauty of them.” Many of the Staff members’ reflections related mystery, awe, and wonder to God and beauty. Someone also used the metaphor of “God is light.” For her “it’s a very important image for me and I... when I was going through a period of distress I received incredibly powerful images of light in both scripture and visual images. So, ever since then I’m very aware of the presence of light all around us and how God is all around us in every place, in every time.” The Hospitality Ministry Group also related “beauty” to the “wonderful things” that God gave us.

Wonder emerged as a dominant metaphor to describe the response to the mysterious nature of God’s communion with the world. A participant at the Family Faith focus group meeting connected “wonderment” to the life of her little child,

...she just soaks everything in, she is just constantly learning, constantly looking and constantly in that phase of wonderment and I was reminded last week by a retreat that I was about just stopping and pausing and watching when they’re in that wonderment, because I don’t have to be moving so quickly – you know.
we’re changing diapers, there’s a million things going on, but just to watch her in
that wonderment and watching her in that state of learning is so amazing – it’s so
amazing and it’s hard to put words around it – you know, you barely have time in
your life like that, other than when you’re a child and most can still remember it –
the only way to live it is re-living it through your children.

Someone else then responded by affirming her own feeling that “adults needed to
learn how to play and to engage in wonder... have that sense of wonder and it’s so easy
to lose and of the best gifts of having a child – it’s worth all the sleepless hours...”

Many times mystery signified a yearning for a connection with a “higher” God
(figure 2.2). The height in one of the Godly Play teachers’ lego models symbolized for
them “what we’re reaching for is a connection to God... with the image that God is
high.”

Figure 2.2. Reaching for God

The following (figure 2.3) is another illustration from a participant in the Art
Ministry focus group event, with the explanation that “essentially what it is, is a man
reaching up... a yearning to touch God...”.
It is this context that a strong longing for healing emerged during several of the focus group events. It coincides with a recent liturgical development to have prayers of healing taking place in the side chapel simultaneous to the Eucharist being served during the main Sunday morning worship service. Frequently, somebody would walk directly from receiving the Eucharist at the altar to the side chapel for the laying on of hands and a prayer of healing. One of the Worship Team members thought of “the work that we are doing with the healing on the first Sundays (it changed recently to every Sunday – my insert) and... I just think that’s a very special thing about this place (which has subsequently been expanded to happen on all Sundays).” This led to somebody else using the slogan, “The church is not a home for saints; it’s a hospital for sinners,” which means “for people to feel that they can come, and they’re hurting and things aren’t going well in their personal lives, whatever. But that they should be here. It’s not just a place for people who are doing well economically and socially, and so on and so forth. This can be... it is truly a place for healing.” Someone else said during one of the open invitation focus group events, “I came here tonight with just the (unintelligible) in mind healing, healing.
If I could hope that this church is about anything, it would be that for us — starting with us. I mean, because, forget about healing everybody else until we’re really healed ourselves. And then, open it up…”

Wonder and awe for God’s mysterious presence often gave rise to thanksgiving, and then sometimes with the obvious connection between thanksgiving and the Eucharist. A Hospitality Ministry Group event participant illustrated it with how she experiences pomegranates: “you know, it’s just so beautiful and, you know, it’s like one of those things where you have to automatically give thanks… this is the last meal kind of thing.”

One of the children books shared by participants at the Family Faith group was “Thanksgiving is for Giving Thanks,” and it was specifically linked to the Eucharist: “It is too big of a word right now (for her little child), but I was thinking that one day when she discovers that Eucharist means thanksgiving or Eucharisto – I give thanks – that would be interesting – that’s a thanksgiving meal every Sunday.”

Given the emphasis on mystery and healing, it is perhaps not surprising then that the Holy Spirit is the Person of the triune God most associated with bringing God’s transformative power into the lives of people, and also bringing people together in communion. Figure 2.4 is a visual illustration of this, with the description of, “This is (it just came to me) my vision of the Holy Spirit coming into our lives within the church and how all of our lives are connected together with the Holy Spirit. All those colors are all the people here in this church and on earth who have the Holy Spirit in their lives.”
Some associated the Spirit with energy. The painting in figure 2.5 is described as such an illustration, and also how this energy has a communal meaning: “This one is also the same thing, but more – just the energy – the energy of the Holy Spirit in our lives and in our church family. I first started thinking a little differently – these were going to be pictures and energy coming from the pictures to the greater community…”

During the Staff’s focus group meeting, somebody referred to how, for her, “God is in energy, often when you sense the Spirit there is energy.” During the Family Faith group’s conversation, the leading of the Spirit was talked about in terms of “Godly presence throughout your life – nothing is too out of bounds,” as an analogy for the children story book character, Bunny, who’s “mommy is still there to follow him wherever he goes.” Later on during the same conversation, somebody else talks about it
in relationship to her experience of the LC: “...we just kind of feel the Spirit moving in this wonderful energy and it’s kind of beyond us. I’ve been a part of churches – trying so hard to do the right thing – and they never – you know – it’s beyond you.”

The Spirit is seen as God’s presence radiating through everything. As an Art Ministry focus group member explained figure 2.6, “I was somehow thinking of God, or the Holy Spirit as being the light or the sun in the center and somehow that was going to radiate out into different spheres or circles of expression and then... Actually, what I was doing, was doing the gradations of color and then it ended up at being back at the yellow – the Holy Spirit again…” (below).

As mentioned earlier, this connection between the Spirit and experiences of wonder and awe in how God is present and active in mysterious ways was often linked to a corresponding response of a focus on spiritual practices. Staff members frequently refer to postures of humility in the LC. As one staff member said, with reference to a picture that she took of a very modest looking plant, “I often feel that there are people in our congregation who are very quiet and you never really know very much about them until you at some point you get to know them and you realize they’re just way more interesting than you ever really thought about.” Many of the foods suggested by the
Hospitality Ministry Group for their menu were representing *simplicity* as an important spiritual practice. During the Family Faith group’s reflections, it was referred to as “the simplicity of a child.”

During the Former Governance Board Leaders focus group it was related to the importance of *discernment*. Commenting on a certain phase in the LC’s history, someone said, “I put the discernment and more discernment (meaning he wrote a sticky note on the importance of discernment). I think when we first did the discernment, I thought okay, we’re done… Yes, I think everyone now, in the community, has the idea that discernment is a part of who we are. But it took us a while to get there.” The issue of discernment was also key to one of the most prominent conversations during one of the open invitation focus group meetings. It was around the question whether “is God somebody you have a dialogue with or is God somebody that tells you what to do?” A big part of answering this question centered around the problem with “the triumphalism of God” (based on dwelling in Philippians 2:1-11, especially the reference to “Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others.”)

The importance of discernment in the posture of Philippians 1:1-11 was connected in this focus group to the importance of *listening* to others for the sake of “acting in their best interest.” *Listening* was specifically mentioned as a key *spiritual practice* in the Staff’s reflection on the pictures that they took. Someone asked, “what would the LC look like in the future if it is more intentionally a listening community?”
An Art Ministry Group member explained figure 2.7 by saying, “I started with an eye because in two ways, I think the church starts with ‘I’ – you know, I’m here – so part of it is my personal experience, but then it’s also what we see and so what the people in the church in itself see is kind of in the center and that’s kind of a lot of different colors in there. And as different peoples interests, gifts and so forth come out, they interweave with each other, because I was thinking like the Hospitality Ministry Group that reaches out to everybody in the Parish and beyond sometimes. And this ministry, when the art is hung the people who aren’t in the art ministry see the art and it reaches out and sometime goes out into the community. So, there are tendrils that come out and those are community members coming in, our stuff going out – reaching out and then there’s still some people outside. And there’s different ways of doing it – some are straight, jagged, whatever – we all have different ways of whatever… being approached and approaching – and then there is still some people who need to be reached and we haven’t managed to connect with them yet.”
The Biblical Holy Spirit

The prominence of the work of the Spirit in the LC’s experience of God’s mysterious presence and activity in their midst, gives this dissertation an opportunity to invite theological partners to the conversation about God’s transformative agency in, among, and through the LC. Inviting these conversation partners in has the purpose of illuminating the LC’s own discernment the Spirit’s communion with them as they proceed their conversation of producing their own theology of what it means to participate in the Spirit’s presence and activity in the world. It creates the opportunity to explore contributions on pneumatology that can play into the LC’s preference to think of God’s mysterious presence and activity as God’s movement and energy in their midst. The metaphors of movement and energy lead this dissertation to the contribution of especially Pannenberg that puts pneumatology in conversation with modern physics. This conversation will also provide an opportunity to explore a more public understanding of the Spirit’s agency than other more psychologizing understandings of the Spirit’s work.

However, this sections starts the pneumatological conversation in relation to a distinction made earlier in this chapter with regard to Bildung. Much of what is at stake in the agency of the Spirit relates to the difference between Hegel’s absolute spirit and the biblical Spirit. A pneumatology of cultivation that connects with the hermeneutic of Bildung discussed earlier in this chapter needs a different perspective on the Hegelian notion of self-formation that needs the other for the sake of the self’s development. This distinction will be explored via Michael Welker’s pneumatology.

Welker’s contribution emphasizes that the biblical Spirit is the Spirit of Christ that constitutes an intricate connection between Christ and the Spirit. The agency of the Spirit,
in distinction from the Hegelian *Bildung*, cultivates a decentering of the self into relationships with the other and for the sake of the world. John Zizioulas calls the interrelationship between Spirit and Christ a pneumatologically constituted Christology. This emphasis via the contribution of Zizioulas also helps this chapter to make a pneumatological connection with the *imaginatio Trinitatis* discussion in chapter 1 based on the biblical *imago Dei*.

Welker and Zizioulas lay the foundation in this section for exploring a pneumatological imagination that is public, and that constitutes a socially-embodied theology from within the theo-cultural contours of the relationships between people. It is, first of all, a public pneumatology that transcends a religious subjectivization of the truth in the Spirit. And secondly, it is an understanding of the work of the Spirit in the in-between spaces of interrelational environments. An exploration of the public Spirit will lead into Pannenberg’s use of the *force fields* metaphor, especially as it is related to an understanding of the public and transformative work of the Spirit. Such a public pneumatology is also connected with the imagination through Walter Brueggeman’s interpretation of a *third world* of truth established by the Spirit as an in-between space that transcends subjectivity and intersubjectivity. It is an attempt to relate pneumatology with the philosophical conversation on cultivating an environment of discernment for the sake of the LC’s participation in God’s mission in the world.

**From Hegel’s Spirit to a Pneumatologically Constituted Christology**

Welker distinguishes between the Spirit of God and the spirit that shaped the Western world. The latter “exhibits another constitution, other interests, other goals, and
other power structures than the Spirit of God."\(^{157}\) This spirit “acquires plausibility and trust and possesses an almost boundless power of expansion,” and has therefore “been frequently confused with the Spirit of God.”\(^{158}\) Welker continues to show how theologies have been developed that identified this spirit with the Spirit of God. It is a spirit “that cultivates and spreads individual and community self-relations in the sense of self-certainty, self-possession, and the constant increase of this self-relation that serves self-production.”\(^{159}\) Over and against this spirit “that gives power over all that is experienced and encountered, inasmuch as this spirit subsumes it under and integrates it into the unity of this spirit’s self-relationship,” there is the Spirit of God “who becomes manifest and enables human beings to have a share in the Spirit by... exercising an influence that reaches into diverse contexts and by enabling people from diverse contexts to strengthen each other and to serve each other, promoting what is best for each other.”\(^{160}\)

This does not mean that “the moment of the giving up of self through self-externalization” is not included in the spirit of the Western world, but only insofar as it is “a point of transition on the way to heightened self-development.”\(^{161}\) Welker discusses the spirit of the Western world in the light of Aristotle and Hegel, and attribute to both the aims of “the abstract, private person and of the stratified, monocentric institution, as


\(^{158}\) Ibid.

\(^{159}\) Ibid., 280.

\(^{160}\) Ibid., 281.

\(^{161}\) Ibid.
well as... the cognitive or cognitively controllable domination of the world." he sums it up: "Only in coming 'to itself' can this spirit go 'beyond itself'; only for the sake of producing itself more completely can it withdraw itself." On the other hand, the Spirit of God "places people in the community of conscious solidarity, the community of responsibility and love of persons who can accept their own finitude and perishability, who can live with the clear consciousness of the perishability of their relative world and reality because they know that in and beyond this perishability, they are ordained to participate in the divine glory and in its extension."  

The Spirit of God promotes "free self-withdrawal for the benefit of their fellow creatures," and create persons that are "aware of their public significance and worth in view of the significance and worth of their fellow creatures, and in view of God's glorification." The Spirit of God creates people who spread a "force field" that is different from the power of the spirit of the Western world, because it "is guided by and empathetic sensitivity to life in suffering," and "for liberation from the dangerous self-stabilizations and self-immunizations of monocentric forms of order." This is fundamentally different than the spirit of the Western world that promotes "the interconnection between the continuity of sure self-relation and the activity of

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162 Ibid.
163 Ibid., 282.
164 Ibid.
165 Ibid.
166 Ibid.
increasingly putting what is other at one's own disposal, as well as – in the context of this interconnection – the feeling of heightened pleasure...”167

The Aristotelian vision of “God is Spirit” gets to the concept of the person of the Spirit as “self-referential, outside the world and yet related to it, comprehending everything and thus perfect, controlling everything and at the same time at one with itself.”168 This vision then also becomes the standard and ideal for human personhood and agency. Welker would even identify the Aristotelian spirit as “an ancestor of the modern cogito,” namely “the power that thinks itself insofar as it takes part in and receives a part in what is thought.”169 What is important about this spirit is that “the medium in which this spirit lives is thought, and the form of this spirit is relation to itself in the relation to another.”170 It therefore does not lose itself in relation to another, but the other becomes a means for this thinking self-actualization. In this sense, Spirit becomes the activity of thinking.

Divine agency in this context is a matter of self-actualization and self-experience, namely “The divine is the spirit that, in the relation that partakes of what is thought and appropriates it for itself, makes itself objective to itself and becomes objective to itself.”171 Aristotle calls this life, but it refers to the energeia of spirit, and the Divinity is activity. Agency and self-actualization becomes interconnected. Welker says, “this self-actualization includes both the activity, the ‘en-act-edness’ of thinking, and that which is

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167 Ibid., 283.
168 Ibid., 284.
169 Ibid., 285.
170 Ibid.
171 Ibid., 286.
brought forth, that which is made objective, to which thinking relates itself."172 In summary, Welker quotes Aristotle on "God is Spirit": "We assert therefore that the Divinity is a living being, eternal and complete, so that life and continuous and eternal existence belong to the Divinity, for this is the essence of the Divinity."173

The subject and object became unified in Aristotle, so that Spirit "is the capacity, in the act of thinking, of participating and receiving a share in that which is thought and in that which is."174 It is a process of participation in which one is actively related to oneself. It is an active appropriation in which the divine spirit becomes sensible of itself. Hegel extended and completed this Aristotelian thought. Hegel appreciates Aristotle’s achievement to emphasize that "thought which thinks itself is the acme of concreteness and certainty."175 However, his critique is that Aristotle "comprehended only a principle, that he remained in the element of abstract thought."176 For Hegel, "In the spirit and as spirit it is not only an individual who becomes certain of herself. Communities, institutions, states, conditions of the world – in short, a world becomes conscious of itself in a step-by-step manner."177

Compared to a theological pneumatology, Welker says, both Aristotle and Hegel "avoiding the challenges and offering naïve solutions."178 One example, "it is impossible

172 Ibid., 287.
173 Ibid.
174 Ibid.
175 Ibid., 290.
176 Ibid.
177 Ibid., 290-91.
178 Ibid., 292.
for intellectual self-possession to bring change and redemption... to a society defined by
the principle of egotism that disintegrates community, and by the principle of the
deception that masks this egotism."179 Even though Hegel "offers a vastly superior
alternative" to Aristotle with his emphasis on "self-relation of a historical world," it still
is a case of "the civil community reproduces, recognizes, protects, and maintains itself in
the individual citizen; the association, in the associate; the faith-community, in the
community member."180 In comparison, "the Spirit of God is definitely expected as
something other than self-generation, self-attestation, perception of itself, and return into
itself in otherness."181

Welker says, "The Spirit of God does not deliver, preserve, and renew by
engaging in a mere self-perception that creates the unity of an all-infusing self-attestation
and return into self."182 For Welker, "a theology of the Holy Spirit must see through the
fixed concentration, common to both Hegel and Aristotle, on the unity of (1) self-relation
capable of potentiation, (2) intellectually operative control, and (3) pleasure."183 The
Spirit of God "can appear unclear and numinous," even though that does not mean the
Spirit is "an incomprehensible entity, dissipating into indeterminate shapelessness."184
Welker sums up the difference of the Spirit of God in relationship to the spirit in Aristotle
and Hegel:

179 Ibid.
180 Ibid., 292-93.
181 Ibid., 295.
182 Ibid.
183 Ibid.
184 Ibid., 296.
Their own pleasure does not depend on constant self-identification and the connected maximized control. Their pleasure is bound up with the liberating opening of new life possibilities for other persons, with the experiences of overcoming, for the benefit of others, powers and forces that are oppressive and hostile to life. Their own pleasure is bound up with the experience of a power that also acts through them; a power that leads them beyond their own experiences, conceptions, and ideals; a power that has enlisted their services in order to protect, liberate, renew, and enliven other creatures.\footnote{Ibid., 297.}

The Spirit of God is the Spirit of Christ with an orientation to the crucified and risen Christ, which is a power "expressed in the constitution of the community of the body of Christ, in liberation from paralysis by sin, and in liberation for valid life."\footnote{Ibid.}

It is important to connect Welker’s distinction between the spirit of Hegel and the Spirit of the Bible with the biblical conversation on the \textit{imago Dei} in chapter 2. In chapter 2, the \textit{imago Dei} conversation opened up a trinitarian imagination based on a relational ontology of belonging. The intra-trinitarian love of God is the same love that constitutes God’s relationship with the world, and that embraces the world in \textit{koinonia}. As John Zizioulas argues, a human being becomes an \textit{image of God} in and through this relational ontology constituted by the life of God and God’s \textit{koinonia} with the world, because "...he exists as God Himself exists, he takes on God’s ‘way of being’... a way of relationship with the world, with other people and with God, an event of communion, and that is why it cannot be realized as the achievement of an individual, but only as an ecclesial fact."\footnote{John Zizioulas, \textit{Being as Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church} (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1985), 15.} This is the basis of Zizioulas’ \textit{communion ecclesiology} rooted in a relational ontology. In this communion ecclesiology, Christology and pneumatology
feature as inseparable within an integrated trinitarian understanding of such a relational ontology and communion ecclesiology.

Based on biblical texts such as John 7:39 (where the Spirit is given by Christ) and the birth or baptist narratives of Jesus in Matthew, Luke, and Mark (where there is no Christ before the Spirit is at work), it is clear that there is a mutuality rather than priority in the relationship between Christ and Spirit. Zizioulas calls this integration a pneumatologically constituted Christology, and that therefore, “the Holy Spirit is not one who aids us in bridging the distance between Christ and ourselves, but he is the person of the Trinity who actually realizes in history that which we call Christ... our Christology is essentially conditioned by pneumatology, not just secondarily... in fact it is constituted pneumatologically.”

This trinitarian understanding of how the Spirit creates the ontological dynamics of communion for Christology, and therefore also ecclesiology, forms the trinitarian basis for a pneumatologically constituted theology of agency and transformation. Just as it is not good enough to think of Christology as the objective aspect, and pneumatology as the subjective aspect of such a relational ontology constituted by the life of the triune God, it is also not appropriate to only think of pneumatology in relation to ecclesiology, but rather as constitutive of ecclesiology. In Zizioulas’ words of explaining pneumatology as an ontological category of ecclesiology, “Pneumatology does not refer to the well-being but to the very being of the Church.”

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188 Ibid., 110-11.
189 Ibid., 132.
The Pneumatological Imagination

A pneumatological imagination stimulated by a biblical Spirit that is not self-serving, and that is guided by a pneumatologically constituted Christology that is sensitive for the world of the other, lays the foundation for the work of the Spirit as public agent of transformation from within the communion with God and others. Such a public Spirit is not only the Holy Mystery as horizon for human subjectivity (Rahner), but also the agent that creates force fields of transformation (Pannenberg) in the in-between worlds of the transcendence of subjectivity and intersubjectivity (Brueggeman).

From Religious Subjectivization to Public Transformation

Such an ontological grounding of a pneumatologically constituted theology of agency and transformation assumes, in the words of Karl Rahner, that “God is the Holy Mystery who is the ground and horizon of human subjectivity.”\(^{190}\) For Rahner, the life of a human being finds its ultimate meaning in its openness to God. Rahner’s *transcendental method* is an attempt to show that there is a natural orientation to the Holy Mystery, called God. There is an openness in humanity to receive revelation. Even though Rahner’s transcendental method has to be qualified in an attempt to avoid a natural theology, and perhaps framed within a trinitarian understanding of a pneumatologically constituted Christology at the core of revelation, his articulation helps to ground human subjectivity in the life of God.

For Rahner, “not only are humans by nature open to God (*potentia oboedientalis*), they are also always supernaturally elevated by God in that transcendental openness so

that such elevation becomes an actual experience of God in every human life... so that God’s presence becomes an existential, a constitutive element, in every person’s humanity.”

The mystery of the agency of the Spirit is exactly in how God is at work within this innermost center of human existence. However, this is always taking place in relationship with others. Rahner says, “The act of personal love for another human being is therefore the all-embracing basic act... which gives meaning, direction and measure to everything else.” In his controversial “anonymous Christian” argument, Rahner uses Yves Congar’s mystical body of Christ metaphor of the Church to argue for “a state of being of explicit faith prior to the hearing of the gospel when a person can respond positively to the grace of God.” For Rahner, this is only possible through the Spirit.

Similar to Rahner, Pannenberg also argues for a universal understanding of the Spirit’s agency in terms of a naturally religious openness to God. Therefore, his pneumatology is interwoven with all the other major loci in his systematic theology. Pannenberg is more concerned with a privatization of faith and theology, and therefore argues for pneumatology as a public discipline. The agency of the Spirit is relevant to common concerns, since there is not special religious truths detached from the everyday cultural flows of life. That is why Pannenberg would consider science and theology as two separate fields with a similar object of study, namely creation. Pannenberg deconstructs a subjectivization of truth and the Spirit for the sake of a public and universal truth of the agency of the Spirit. In doing this, he is critical of pneumatology

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191 As quoted in Ibid.
192 As quoted in Ibid., 113.
193 Ibid., 116.
taking a secondary place in theology, and especially in a restriction of the Spirit’s agency
to only soteriology.

Pannenberg’s trinitarian understanding of this agency of the Spirit is important for
this dissertation’s conversation on Bildung, and the theological difficulty with a Hegelian
understanding of self-cultivation. Pannenberg talks about self-differentiation as the act of
giving oneself to the other, and therefore cultivating one’s identity through the other.
However, he corrects the traditional understanding of trinitarian self-differentiation in
which refers to the bringing forth of the second and third persons through the Father, and
therefore prioritize the Father. For Pannenberg, self-differentiation means that the
Father’s identity is dependent on the Son and the Spirit, and vice versa.\(^{194}\) Pannenberg
rejects the filioque, because he is concerned about allocating a secondary and subordinate
role to the Spirit.

The In-Between Third World

Borrowing from as many sources as Mary Warnock’s work in the field of
education, Garrett Green and David Bryant’s work in theology, Richard Kearney’s work
in ethics, and Maria Harris’ work in the field of theological education and nurturing,
Brueggemann develops a particular construction for the role of theological
imagination.\(^{195}\) Brueggemann talks about a “third world” of imagination.\(^{196}\) But the

\(^{194}\) Wolfhart Pannenberg, Systematic Theology, 3 vols., vol. 1-3 (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans,

\(^{195}\) Walter Brueggemann, Texts under Negotiation: The Bible and Postmodern Imagination

\(^{196}\) Walter Brueggemann, Interpretation and Obedience: From Faithful Reading to Faithful Living
particular theological understanding of this “third world” makes an essential difference in understanding the role of the imagination.

Brueggemann develops his understanding of the role of imagination against the background of the work of the clinical psychologist, Paul Pruyser, who links the work of D.W. Winnicott and the theory of Sigmund Freud. Winnicott develops Freud’s theory of autistic world and realistic world into the possibilities of a third world. Whereas Freud considers the development of a self-world as the only serious alternative when the real world crushes, Winnicott brings a corrective to this Freudian view by using the example of the relationship between a baby and his/her mother. For Winnicott, the baby is not, as Freud suggests, a sealed-off organism but takes clues and receives life precisely in relationship with the mother. For that to happen though, the baby must experience the mother as existing completely in response to and for the sake of the child. The mother represents the real world of uncompromising food, attention and caring.

But the argument goes further. The most important aspect of Winnicott’s contribution in this regard is the insight that, as the baby grows up, he/she discovers a “transitional object” which belongs wholly neither to the autistic world nor to the realistic world, but stands between them and is the paradoxical combining of the autistic and realistic worlds. This normally refers to some special object, like a doll, teddy bear or security blanket that clearly has special force and significance for the child and is respected by the family.¹⁹⁷ This transitional object and the transitional sphere is a product

¹⁹⁷ Ibid., 10-11.
of the imagination. It is an imaginative construct of a third world beyond the self and real
world constructs.198

However, the point of the development of an argument in this section is to show
the importance of a focus on the “in-between”/third world possibilities that are opening
up in and through the power of the “go-between” pneumatological imagination. It
changes imagination from a mere constructivist notion to its receptive possibilities. Here
Brueggemann is influenced by both the work of Green and Bryant.199 Whereas Green
emphasizes the “see as”-language of imagination as a theological understanding of how
human agency is embedded in the receiving of what God imagines,200 Bryant proposes
that the “see as”-language of a more passive posture needs to be enriched by the equally
importance of the “take as”-language to also emphasize a more assertive role for the
imagination.201 Therefore, Bryant proposes a theological understanding of imagination
that frames the complex nature of the relationship between God’s agency and human
agency within a more integrative dynamic that enables both a constructive and receptive
approach to the role of imagination. This is a theological position that stresses the
importance of recognize pneumatology and anthropology as “two sides of the same
coin.”

A pneumatology of imagination that embraces God’s imagination of a different
world as well as the human agency of imagined worlds is fed by the conjunction of

198 Ibid., 11.
199 Brueggemann, Texts under Negotiation: The Bible and Postmodern Imagination, 14-16.
200 Green, Imagining God: Theology and the Religious Imagination, 70-74, 138-41.
201 David J. Bryant, Faith and the Play of Imagination: On the Role of Imagination in Religion
(Macon, GA: Mercer, 1989), 101-05.
scriptural and cultural sources. It assumes that God is at work in the world in all its cultural dimensions and as constructed by the windows and mirrors of scripture. It opens up the possibilities for God’s preferred and promised future through the formation provided by memory.\(^2\) It involves both memory and promise.\(^3\) Memory and promise are the pointers of direction for the cultivation of a missional imagination.

The Public Force Fields

Pannenberg uses the force field metaphor in a section of his Systematic Theology on “The Creation of the World.”\(^4\) The reason for this lies in the context of Pannenberg’s larger theological project that wants to avoid at all cost the privatization of Christian doctrine and faith, and wants to make sure pneumatology is not restricted to soteriology. In this sense, also pneumatology should avoid a relegation to the interior life of individual believers apart from creation, science, and the consummation of God’s Kingdom.\(^5\) Therefore, his pneumatology is not a separate doctrine in his Systematic Theology, but integrated into the rest of his theological project. The doctrine of the Spirit should be interwoven with all loci.

For Pannenberg, the “biblical starting point” for considering this metaphor is the Spirit of God as “the life-giving principle, to which all creatures owe life, movement, and


\(^5\) Ibid., 1:47-48.
activity” (Psalm 104:30). This means that “the Spirit of God is the creative principle of movement as well as life.” Christoph Shwobel says, for Pannenberg, the Spirit is “the principle of the active presence of the transcendent God with his creation,” and “the medium of the participation of created life in the trinitarian divine life.” Against this background, the force field metaphor came up when Pannenberg considers the possibility for this understanding of the Spirit of God to be reconciled with modern understandings of physics.

Pannenberg describes the theme of moving forces in physics as follows,

To describe movement and change physics has developed the concept of force or energy working on bodies and thus producing movement. Classical dynamics tried to trace the concept of force back to that of the body and the impulses that move it, and in this way to base all physics on the body and the relations between bodies. Descartes sought to describe the mechanical effects of bodies upon one another as the transfer of movement from the one to the other.

Newton found inertia in bodies (vis insita) but did not limit the forces working upon them (vis impressa) to the transfer of movement. He thus worked out the idea of force that is independent of bodies... Unlike Descartes, Newton took into account nonmaterial forces that act through the soul in analogy to bodily movement. One such force was gravity, which Newton viewed as an expression of the moving of the universe by God with space as his instrument.

Borrowing from these developments of modern physics, and especially from Michael Faraday, allows Pannenberg to then conclude that “The Spirit of God can be understood as the supreme field of power that pervades all of creation. Each infinite event or being is to be considered as a special manifestation of that field, and their movements

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206 Ibid., 76.
207 Ibid., 79.
are responsive to its forces.”

Pannenberg also finds support for these scientific theories “in the metaphysical origin of the field concept” that goes back via Stoicism to pre-Socratic philosophy. In this regard, he pays specific attention to the Stoic doctrine of the divine *pneuma* as a possible precursor for the modern field concept.

This does not mean that Pannenberg thinks metaphors from these scientific theories hold up all the way. He warns from the outset that “direct theological interpretation of the field theories of physics” may not be possible, and that “these theories can be seen only as approximations to the reality that is also the subject of theological statements about creation.” He still wants to insist that “the future of the consummation in the Kingdom of God predominates,” and therefore, “theological talk about the dynamics of the Spirit of God in creation differs in this regard from the field theories of physics that work in terms of natural laws.”

He is also careful to indicate that “the person of the Holy Spirit is not himself to be understood as the field but as a unique manifestation (singularity) of the field of the divine essentiality.”

Pannenberg’s use of the field concept in his pneumatology is related to his doctrine of the Trinity. In fact, he calls the doctrine of God as the reason why he introduces the field metaphor. In his criticism of a “traditional way of speaking about

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212 Ibid., 2:83.


214 Ibid., 2:83. Despite Pannenberg’s carefulness in this regard, many critique his analogy from field theory. In the words of Ted Peters, Pannenberg brings himself to the “dangers of trying to float a theological assertion aboard a scientific ship” while “intellectual waters can change suddenly.” As quoted in Karkkainen, “The Working of the Spirit of God in Creation and in the People of God: The Pneumatology of Wolfhart Pannenberg,” 21.
God as thought the reference were to subjectivity (nous)" leads him to the insight "that it is more in keeping with what the Bible says about God as Spirit, or about the Spirit of God, to view what is meant as a dynamic field that is structured in trinitarian fashion, so that the person of the Holy Spirit is one of the personal concretions of the essence of God as Spirit in distinction from the Father and the Son."215 Rather than the typical way of looking at God as reason or will, Pannenberg describes the relational essence of God as spirit. In this sense, the essence of God is "a field of creative presence, a comprehensive field of force that releases event after event into finite existence" as "the ‘field’ in which creation and history exist."216

Such a trinitarian pneumatology related to the field metaphor is also relevant to anthropology. For Pannenberg, "The human person is not to be seen in terms of an ‘I’ who exists prior to experience of the world. The immediate perception of the totality of a person’s existence is important for his or her identity development" as "the ‘field’ (or ‘feeling’) in which a person lives."217 In the first volume of his Systematic Theology, he laid the foundation for this connection when he says, "The deity as field can find equal manifestation in all three persons. Even a number of human persons can be brought together in a living fellowship by a common spirit. In the human fellowship, of course, each individual can evade the common spirit... The trinitarian persons, however, are not

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217 As quoted in Ibid.
independent of the Spirit of love that binds them. They are simply manifestations and
forms – eternal forms – of the one divine essence.”\textsuperscript{218}

In Pannenberg’s view of how such a trinitarian pneumatology relates to all of
creation, he describes life as \textit{ecstatic}. Karkkainen sums it up, “The Spirit is the ‘force’
that lifts creatures above their environment and orients them toward the future. So the
Spirit as force field is the most comprehensive and powerful field in which creatures
move.”\textsuperscript{219} This understanding of life as ecstatic also has implications for the role of the
Spirit in the Christian community. In the third volume of his \textit{Systematic Theology},
Pannenberg discusses the work of the Spirit as lifting up individual believers above their
particularity into participation with Christ, and into fellowship with other believers. This,
he says, is especially accentuated in the Eucharist where the Spirit mediates Christ’s
presence among God’s people.\textsuperscript{220} This perspective becomes important for this
dissertation’s argument for a missional ecclesiology beyond ecclesiastical mission, and
specifically related to an understanding of the Spirit’s transformative agency in, among,
and through the LC (which this chapter returns to in the next section).

In the light of Pannenberg’s trinitarian foundation for the Spirit as the relational
essence of God, it is surprising to some that he does not use a more \textit{interpersonal}
metaphor than the fairly \textit{impersonal} field metaphor. Karkkainen asks the question,
“Would not a human, interpersonal analogy be more appropriate for speaking about the

\textsuperscript{218} Pannenberg, \textit{Systematic Theology}, 1:383. In this same passage, Pannenberg also makes it clear
that the Spirit as the essence of the common deity does not mean that the Spirit cannot be a person as well
“that stands over and against the Father and the Son as his own center of action.”

\textsuperscript{219} Karkkainen, “The Working of the Spirit of God in Creation and in the People of God: The
Pneumatology of Wolfhart Pannenberg.” 25.

Karkkainen is not suggesting that the field language should completely be discarded, “since its potential for building bridges between science and the public sphere is undisputed.” He is suggesting that using more than one analogy might have been more appropriate, especially if more relational metaphors would have been considered with regard to the Spirit’s soteriological and ecclesiological role.

This type of critique is consistent with recent considerations of more appropriate scientific analogies than the Newtonian one that Pannenberg is indebted to. Wolfgang Vondey discusses the methodological shift in the sciences during the 20th century in which an Einsteinian paradigm is located in a completely different cosmological framework than a Newtonian paradigm. Vondey says that both Pannenberg’s “idea of the universal *pneuma* and the existence of an undivided whole of space and time... gather support from Newtonian physics, not from Einstein’s theory of relativity.” In exploring the possibilities for pneumatology after Einstein, Vodney also suggests *relationality* as one such an opportunity. He quotes from Einstein’s autobiographical notes where Einstein remarks almost apologetically, “Newton, forgive me... The concept that you created are even today still guiding our thinking in physics, although we now know that they will have to be replaced... if we aim at a profounder understanding of

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222 Ibid.


224 Ibid.: 25.

225 The other opportunities mentioned are order, rationality, symmetry, and movement. Ibid.: 27-36.
relationships." John Polkinghorne makes this kind of distinction between the Einsteinian and Newtonian paradigms too when he says, "Newtonian physics had pictured physical processes as involving the collisions of individual atoms moving in the container of absolute space and... absolute time. Einstein’s... relativistic physics put an end to that separable picture" by tying “together space, time, and matter in a single package deal of mutual influence.”

Relevant to the emergence of movement as metaphor for the Spirit in the LC’s pneumatological imagination, the possibility of more relational scientific analogies also relates to the possibility of movement. Vodney says, “The concepts of change, process, movement, and organization emerge from the supposed relational order and symmetry of the cosmos and have become fundamental concepts in today’s physical cosmology. Yet, a pneumatological approach to the Spirit as movement of and in the cosmos has not been proposed." The force field metaphor is an attractive pneumatological metaphor for describing the theo-cultural contours of the LC’s socially-embodied imagination, and especially to put the emphasis on the public nature of such a social imaginaire. If there is such a possibility to view public force fields as relational (Einsteinian paradigm) then the presence and activity (movement) of the Spirit is not only integrated with the playful and communal imagination where the LC gather in relational attentiveness, but also the transformative agency where they gather in critical reflectiveness on the future that God

226 Ibid.: 30.
227 As quoted in Ibid.
228 Ibid.: 34.
is bringing forth among them. The next section will look closer at this possibility of the Spirit's transformative agency in, among, and through the LC in civil society.

From Ecclesiastical Mission to Missional Ecclesiology

God's Agency

The local Christian community's pneumatological imagination starts with the history of ecclesiology in which the church can never understand itself simply from itself alone, but "it can only truly comprehend its mission and its meaning, its roles and its functions in relation to others."229 From a missional church perspective, that understand mission as the church's participation in the missio Dei, the first relationship relevant to an ecclesiology is the church's relationship to the trinitarian history of God's dealings with the world. From within the triune God's history with the world, the church lives "with its eyes fixed on Christ... in the Holy Spirit and thus is itself the beginning and earnest of the future of the new creation."230

As such, the church always participates in the power of the Spirit. Ecclesiological agency is primarily defined pneumatologically. Defining it in this way takes agency out of what Moltmann calls "the idealistic spiritual history of human subjectivity," and places it in "the dialectical process of interactions which is opened up and urged on by the future of the thing that is entirely new."231 From a theological perspective, pneumatology embraces all matters of agency. As such, human agency is intrinsically related to God's

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230 Ibid., 33.

231 Ibid., 34.
history in Christ, and also eschatologically defined in terms of God's preferred and promised future. The Spirit of God holds together the achievement of Christ and the promise of the future at the intersection with human agency. Moltmann writes, “The experiences and powers of the Spirit mediate the presence of the history of Christ and the future of the new creation. What is called ‘the church’ is this mediation.”

This mediation needs to be put in the right context to define ecclesiological agency. Mediation here cannot mean that the church is the primary agent of God’s salvation in the world. The history of the triune God tells us that God took care of that in Godself through the history of the Son and the Spirit. Moltmann suggests a reverse question, namely “does the church come through the salvation of the world?” The way in which he answers this is also the beginning for a definition of ecclesiological agency in the world: “If a single and special phenomenon like the church wants to understand itself in the history of God’s dealings with the world, then it has to conceive itself in the movement of this history, for it is itself standing in the midst of that movement, not above it and not at its end.” For Moltmann this means that “the living quality of God’s relationship to the world... can only be understood properly through the knowledge which that relationship moves and enlivens,” and “this then means the livingness of God which has moved out of itself, which cannot be fixed by any definition, but can only be understood through participating and engaged knowledge.”

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232 Ibid., 35.
233 Ibid., 52.
234 Ibid.
235 Ibid.
The conclusion is that "the church can only understand its own position or abode in participation in the movement of the history of God's dealings with the world, and therefore as one element in this movement." As a consequence, "it is not the church that has a mission of salvation to fulfill to the world; it is the mission of the Son and the Spirit through the Father that includes the church, creating a church as it goes on its way." And therefore also, "It is not the church that administers the Spirit... The Spirit 'administers' the church..." This articulation credits the church with a participatory agency in the primary agency of God's presence and activity in the entire creation. The primary agency belongs to God through the power of the Spirit, because "the church is present wherever 'the manifestation of the Spirit' (1 Cor. 12.7) takes place."

Michael Welker quotes Martin Luther, in his explanation of the third article in the Small Catechism, to explain the action of the Spirit,

I believe that by my own reason or strength I cannot believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to him. But the Holy Spirit has called me through the Gospel, enlightened me with his gifts, and sanctified and preserved me in true faith, just as he calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian church on earth and preserves it in union with Jesus Christ in the one true faith.
Exploring the relationship between Christ and Spirit, James Dunn describes it as "the one who had been inspired by the Spirit had now become dispenser of the Spirit."\(^{241}\)

One of the effects of understanding this relationship in the early church is seen in the outreach of the early church beyond Judaism. In reference to Acts 10-11, he argues that "it was because the Spirit was seen to have been poured out on Gentiles, freely and fully, and without any expectation of these Gentiles becoming proselytes, that the emergent Christian movement found that it could not be contained within even the diversity of Second Temple Judaism and set out on the road that resulted in Christianity becoming a predominantly Gentile religion."\(^{242}\)

Not being an evangelistic religion, and having expected the eschatological outpouring of the Spirit only for Israel, "whether willingly or not, they were forced by what they saw with their own eyes to conclude that Gentiles while still in their uncircumcised state had been granted a blessing hitherto assumed to be more or less the sole prerogative of Israel... and that conclusion was forced upon them by the action of the Spirit."\(^{243}\) This has profound implications for a missional pneumatology that argues for an ecclesiology of participation in the agency of the Spirit in the world. It illuminates the Spirits agency and transformation through the other, and how the church is not only dispensers but also recipients of the work of the Spirit. Ecclesial participation is defined


\(^{242}\) Ibid., 18.

\(^{243}\) Ibid., 20.
by these reciprocal flows of the movement of the Spirit, and transformation happens within this movement.
CHAPTER 4

POIESIS: ASSESSING THE MISSIONAL IMAGINATION

Silence.
Waiting.
Surely as spring
the world will turn again.
Though why or how
I do not know.
Or even when.
In the ripeness of time
(after death)
the play will begin again
and
Beginning again: the res-er-cion of the flesh.¹

This chapter addresses the research question of how to access, cultivate, and assess the LC’s socially-embodied theology as their missional imagination in civil society from the perspective of assessing the imagination. It represents the research journey’s attempt to accompany the LC’s discernment process of evaluating and learning from the process by looking back on their playful imagination of engaging their discernment question, and their critical reflectiveness during that engagement. The purpose of the LC’s assessment of their habits and practices of discernment is to continue the conversation about how to sustain and develop their culture of discernment for the sake of an ongoing attentiveness to, reflectiveness on, and receptiveness of the future that God is bringing forth among them.

¹ Keen, “Godsong.” 97.
The research journey of exploring the LC’s *assessment* of their socially-embodied imagination in civil society again invites into this journey a variety of voices from cultural anthropology, philosophy, the history of imagination, and theology. From within the LC’s assessment of their playful and hermeneutical imagination, this chapter presents the integration of these voices as a hermeneutic of *poiesis*. It is shaped by a critical evaluation of the contributions from developments in the history of imagination that brings to the fore a more so-called post-modern imagination that attempts to transcend the privileging of either object (representational imagination) or subject (productive imagination). What emerges in this critical evaluation is an understanding of *poiesis* that enables a *poetic imagination* based on a habit of conversational openness intrinsically linked to a theological *eschatology* and a philosophical view on the *gift*. This endeavor helps this dissertation to ultimately consider the possibilities of a *missional imagination* for the sake of the LC’s public moral companionship in civil society. It is a *missional imagination* shaped by God’s *abundance* in the world, and an *ethical* vocation of encountering the other as companions in civil society for the sake of cultural transformation in both the LC and its broader cultural contexts.

This hermeneutic of *poiesis* is argued from within the theo-cultural soils of the LC’s assessment of their process of discernment. This assessment is developed through mainly two events during the research process. One is the reaction of a broader membership base of the LC after receiving a presentation on the three threads that emerged from their playful and hermeneutical imagination. The other one is an evaluation session by the Governance Board during which they were looking back on the
process for the sake of continuing the conversation about what emerged as God’s future for the LC.

**God’s Gift: The Discernment Posture**

Developing the evaluation of the LC’s discernment process involved learning experiences of how to receive God’s gift in relational attentiveness, critical reflectiveness, and conversational openness. Their *assessment* of their socially-embodied imagination was shaped by a *posture of reception* through which they were prepared to evaluate their discernment culture based on the gifts they were receiving from others within the movement of God’s Spirit in their midst. The content of this evaluation emerged as a result of the process creating an environment of *focusing on gifts* and *conversational openness*.

**Evaluating the Process**

First, it is important to look at the shape of the LC’s assessments through the feedback from the Governance Board, and the larger body of LC membership. After considering this feedback, Peter Block will once more be invited into the conversation about the importance of creating and facilitating environments of *focusing on gifts*. The larger body of LC members assessed the discernment process through an opportunity to respond to the Governance Board’s presentation of the three threads by engaging in a posted notes exercise producing questions and comments for consideration as a next step in the ongoing conversation. The Governance Board took responsibility for facilitating this next step, and also arranged their own evaluation session on the process.
Developing the Evaluation

The LC’s annual meeting was mainly structured around the Governance Board’s presentation of how the discernment process evolved, and especially of the three threads that emerged as the impulses of the LC’s production of theology shaping their socially-embodied imagination. This presentation culminated in an opportunity to respond to the process as such, as well as the emerging threads. They were doing so via an exercise of posting on walls any comments or questions under the categories of the three threads.

The category on relationships produced the following evaluation:

First, some noticed that the broader church community (other churches, denominational bodies, etc.) was excluded from the process. This concern emerged through questions such as “How can we more fully engage with other churches in the community?,” and “How about offering our gifts of hospitality & relationship to others in the larger denominational body? How about relationships with A (name of a neighborhood church), (unintelligible), and B (another neighborhood church)?” Someone else asked, “Where do we fit in, see ourselves, in relationship to our denomination which is in such a state of flux? Are we, should we be an island and just be independent?”. Others recognized the institutional possibilities of the LC’s companionship with others around civil society issues. The project of involvement with other churches in the broader community to provide shelter for the homeless is one such an example: “Ecumenical project D helps us connect with neighborhood churches. How about the E and F communities – not far from C?”

Second, some responded with thankfulness for the LC’s intentional focus on relationships, and wonder how this could be further embraced in different areas of not
only the life of the church, but life in general. Influenced by the dwelling text of the Annual meeting, somebody just felt the need to repeat, “Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others” (Philippians 2 was the dwelling text). It includes comments and questions such as, “I am so thankful and blessed by the people here and the relationships I’ve made. How do I continue to do this in various stages of life?” Many feel encouraged that the gifts of the community are appreciated, and wondered how the LC can further cultivate this aspect. Someone asked, “How do we discover and encourage our individual gifts and talents among us?” And somebody else, “I resonated with the idea of niches. We all have different gifts. We’re not all intellectuals or singers or artists, etc (though we are blessed with many). What other gifts; contributions can we elicit from parishioners?” Another person asked, “How can we fully appreciate everyone’s unique gifts?”

Third, many embraced the inclusiveness of the process and the LC’s culture. Embracing this aspect created the opportunity for others to raise issues of concern that are related to inclusiveness, but in an entirely different way. One example is in relation to the use of inclusive language about God: “I am a bit disheartened each time during Eucharist that I have to change/imagine ‘he’ as ‘she’ or ‘God’ and ‘Father’ as ‘Mother’ or ‘God’, because the liturgy is so dependent on God as a male Father figure. God is that and so much more, or perhaps God is neither male nor female… Please let us look at this with open hearts?”

Fourth, embracing diversity raised further questions about how to more fully embody that in relationships. One person asked, “How can I value the member of the LC who is most different from me?” Many wondered, “What can be done to increase
diversity?” Some made suggestions of how to reflect this diversity in the LC’s worship services: “I would like to see some other ethnic/heritage based services developed. I have enjoyed the Irish, American Indian, etc.” Another participant said, “Bringing the church practices from around the world increases our awareness of God’s impact in the world.”

Fifth, the busyness of the LC raised concerns about clarity and focus, especially in relation to the demands of a variety of Social Justice Ministries. Somebody asked, “How do we decide which social justice ministries God is calling us to participate in and those we are not called to participate in? I think we need clarity and focus, and that less is more.”

Six, there is a real concern that engagement with others outside of the LC has not reached levels beyond them being recipients of the LC’s projects. Or, in somebody else’s words, “Can we bring these strands into our social justice ministries – service of those outside our church?” Someone else was blunt about it, “Can we move beyond conversation among ourselves, to deeper conversation with those ‘outsiders’ we ‘serve’?” Another participant asked, “What other/new diverse populations might we form relationships with? How might we live more deeply into diversity?” Somebody said, “More intentional welcoming of the stranger – the practice of Sunday hospitality – not just (unintelligible) outreach – learn this together.” Even though the LC has a strong culture of hospitality, some feel the LC can “always get better at welcoming new members.”

Seven, there are some who are concerned about talking about relationships without seeing its interrelatedness with spiritual practices. One participant said, “I think
relationship and spiritual practices are interrelated. It is important to continue to broaden relationship (not just those who have always interacted) so that our spiritual practices together reflect that openness.”

Eighth, there were some who wanted the focus to shift to the demands of *ordinary life* by involving the LC more in companionship with others in civil society. One example is in relationship to the economy, “What about creating or being associated with a job seekers network? For example, the E Network of F Church. They have a network of churches.”

Ninth, there were those who encouraged the *process* to be continued. Someone recommended continuing to “cultivate imaginative listening.” And another participant said, “Continue to involve arts and the senses to reach each person individually.” Another one was wondering, “How will we keep this imaginative discussion going in the future?” Somebody suggested, “To live more fully – keep some fun & imagination involved. Keep involving a variety of new people in small ways…” In the words of another participant, “Keep ’doors’ open – imagine, imagine, imagine…” There was also a skeptical voice who said, “We need to continue the discussion to include people who, like K, have been skeptical. I am one of those.”

The category on *Eucharist* produced the following evaluation:

First, many endorsed the importance of *spiritual practices*, and encouraged the LC to be a local Christian community that takes that serious. Somebody said, “I believe we have provided a wonderful ‘faith formation’ but should continue to develop more spiritual practices to reach out and relate to more people.” Another participant saw possibilities in connecting spiritual practices with the LC’s Taize worship service: “Does
Taize service need to evolve? Maybe a 'spiritual practices' service?” Somebody else suggested, “Develop and implement more prayer groups to help people be consistent in the spiritual practices.” There was also a specific request for “more emphasis and training in spiritual practices, including Bible study.”

Second, somebody raised the critical question about how spirituality is related to the LC’s specific denominational and liturgical tradition: “I heard a lot of talk of ‘spirituality’ – but where do we explore the depths & strengths of our historic J identity – especially liturgically? I feel we sometimes are losing the mystery by making faith a ‘personal experience’. We are in communion together in the mystery of God, and that is not always a warm, fuzzy place. I miss the Thy & Thou, and I miss being Bold to say the Lord’s Prayer.”

Third, somebody was simply asking for “into more silence.”

Fourth, there were others who were honest about the challenge for them on levels of spirituality. Somebody acknowledges, “The theme of ‘wonder’ of deeper spirituality challenges me… I have far to go in facing my doubts. I continue to have faith but sometimes it is very hard.” Another participant suggested, “Have some type of open forum or setting where parishioners can voice their deep spiritual and theological wonderings. This could strengthen relationships as well.” Somebody said, “I appreciate that the LC is a place where it is OK to wonder…. Questioning, doubting, re-imagining is central to my faith journey.”

Fifth, somebody else thought that cultivating the LC’s environment of an ongoing conversation gives an opportunity to especially focus on the spiritual, as an “opportunity
to learn from the various groups — opportunity to share what God is doing with each of us."

Sixth, the connection between mystery and healing was repeated at the Annual Meeting responses. Somebody said, “Mystery — become open to healing.”

The category on change produced the following evaluation:

First, there are those who expressed a desire to remain open to change. Someone asked, “How can we be more open to change and ‘accept’ change?” As somebody said, “If God had wanted nothing to change s/he would not have created tomorrow. Our job is to prayerfully and thoughtfully find our place in a world of change.” As someone else said, “We need to feel what is constant and holds us together, yet be continually open to new things and the changing world.”

Second, there are those who linked the focus on abundance with the LC’s relational culture. One participant asked, “How do we build relationships around the world that are infused with the mystery of the body of Christ, sharing our abundance?” Somebody else wondered about the relationship between God’s abundance and signs to the contra in the world: “Abundance in the world is threatened by human use of natural resources. How do God’s people respond?” Another participant asked, “Are there concrete ways to encourage each other to continue feelings of abundance?” Another person said, “I imagine (wonder) how we can share our collective abundance with the poor (the invisible) of our community.”

Third, the importance of both continuity and change was stressed by somebody in relation to the worship services: “The traditional liturgy provides continuity; embracing world liturgies offers change, openness. Continuing these both will help us stay on our
path.” Someone else said, “I love change – love new ways to worship. How can we worship in ways to meet everyone’s needs?”

Fourth, somebody else wondered about the implications for space, “How can our current space better enable us to live into our calling?” And another one asked, “When the new kitchen?”

The Annual Meeting was followed shortly after by a Governance Board meeting during which they reflected on their own learnings during the process. The following evaluation emerged from that reflection: (1) “It was surprising how much people opened up and how fast it happened (at the discernment sessions).”; (2) “People participated at a much deeper level than anticipated”; (3) “People really liked the use of creativity. Adults don’t do this as much, but play is a great way to access inner thoughts through imagination. It is very non-threatening.”; (4) “The process was very validating; messages were consistent among the groups, even though the methods were different in different groups.”; (5) “People got spiritual/theological very quickly”; (6) “People connected with the other members of their group.”; (7) “Stewarding the energy of the congregation is a unique way to lead. Taking their hopes and imagination and working with it instead of making a decision and telling the congregation what it is/what to do.”; (8) “One Governance Board member was not sure about/intimidated by being thought of as a spiritual Leader, but each person develops their own spirituality, and it can be more of a role of helping others develop their faith (an assisting role).”; (9) “We lead by example, so set a good example, or be a good follower.”; (10) “We do inclusiveness well.”; (11) “We didn’t anticipate how profound the insights would be in the transcripts.”; (12) “There seems to be a burning need to talk about deep spiritual needs, and we need to find
a place/forum for that.”; (13) “It (the process) gave people permission to do something that was important to them.”; (14) “It gave people a voice, a say, in how things are done. What is God telling us, How is God working through us?”; (15) “Think of church not as a building, but as the people that make it up.”; (16) “The Governance Board kept a curious and open mind about the process; it was fun to see how it works and where it will take us.”; (17) We need to keep questioning what people want. It is an ongoing process.” (18) “It is up to The vestry to keep things going with a high level of investment in the LC.”; (19) “We didn’t know that this was going to be such a big part of every meeting this year on the Governance Board, but going deeply into this process was rewarding.”; (20) “We like the idea of calling it an ‘Ongoing Imagining Process’. Discernment can have a bad connotation to many people. (It assumes that you are confused). Discernment is an ancient practice, but it can also be manipulated to get the results you want.”; (21) “The process is open ended, life-giving, ongoing.”; (22) “We will embrace wondering and imagining.”; (23) “God is calling us to imagine what God wants us to do.”

These assessments and evaluations by way of comments and questions draw a picture of appreciation for the gifts that the LC received from God and each other during the process, while at the same time continuing the habit of critical reflectiveness. The critical reflectiveness of their hermeneutical imagination during the process of interpreting their playful imagination (chapter 3) now became cultivated as a conversational openness in which they learn to receive the gifts from the O/other for the sake of a lifestyle of asking the question how to participate in God’s mission in the world. This chapter will explore this environment of conversational openness as the possibility
of the LC’s posture to receive the gift, and therefore receiving the future that God is bringing forth among them.

Receiving Gifts

Peter Block’s contribution in the chapter 3 of this dissertation already focused on the difference it makes when there is a focus on possibility rather than deficiency. In this chapter, Block’s emphasis on abundance rather than limitations is further explored. In his book on structuring belonging, he specifically mentions the importance of gift conversations. Block’s contribution on this importance illuminates the attempt in this chapter to focus on the LC’s ability to facilitate energy around giftedness rather than weaknesses or problems, and to assess the LC’s capacity for receiving the gift.

Block is convinced that “instead of problematizing people and work, the conversation that searches for the mystery of our gifts brings the greatest change and results.” In this regard, he specifically focuses on “the leadership task… to bring the gifts of those on the margin into the center.” Block does not see this focus as a denial of limitations, but rather an acknowledgement that we are not defined by our limitations, and instead, that there are capacities and gifts that transcend our limitations into an openness towards the future. For him that means “an alternative future when we capitalize on our gifts and capacities.”

Block sees the power of environments that focus on giftedness in the difference between, on the one hand, “telling people about what they need to improve… what didn’t

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2 Block, Community: The Structure of Belonging, 139.
3 Ibid.
4 Ibid., 140.
go well... how they should do it differently next time,” and on the other hand, “talk to others about the gifts you’ve received from them... the unique strength that you see in them... the capacities they have that bring something unique and needed in the world... what they did in the last ten minutes that made a difference.”\(^5\) The way in which Block frames the importance of gift conversations is not insignificant. Many gift conversations center around very individually oriented practices of discovering your own gifts. The emphasis is on the self’s discovery of giftedness in the self. The main question is different for Block. He says it is about creating a communal environment for people in conversation with one another to say “what gift have you received from another in the room?”\(^6\) The LC’s Governance Board certainly succeeded in facilitating such an environment during the Annual Meeting, and got an overwhelming response that gave them energy back for an ongoing process of receiving and embracing the gifts of God, each other, and the other in broader society.

Block shifts the emphasis from gift discovery in the self to gift disclosure in communion with others. The primary focus is on receiving gifts from others. In the context of the LC’s discernment process, the playful and hermeneutic imagination created an environment for receiving the gift from each other. Focus group participants received the gift of a question that stimulated their imagination. The Governance Board received the gift of imaginative variations from focus group participants. The Annual Meeting received the gift of a presentation on what emerged among them as their socially-embodied imagination. The Governance Board received back to them an economy of

\(^5\) Ibid.

\(^6\) Ibid., 141.
responsiveness on this entire process is assessed. It is in such an environment of learning how to receive the gift from another that the LC's culture change to an interest in the abundance that emerged in their midst rather than the deficiencies or limitations that draw them into a problem solving mentality.

One important feature emerging from the economy of responsiveness after the Annual Meeting is the extent to which the gifts of others in civil society are not sufficiently included yet in the gift conversation. This is a very significant recognition, and it lays the foundation for next steps to explore this more fully. It creates the opportunity not only to receive the gift from other gifted persons in the LC, but to discover the world as a place where the abundance of God is translated into the gifts of strangers to them as a local Christian community. Embarking further on this journey will even more than before shift the emphasis to the gifts of others rather than how do we get others involved in our own agenda. The latter is the default pattern of how energy is spent around community involvement through projects. Energy goes into mobilizing others to participate as volunteers in projects rather than encountering others to be in conversation about the gifts that emerge between us when we are together. Block reminds us that "it manifests the willingness to live in a collaborative way. This means that a future can be created without having to force it or sell it or barter for it. When we believe that barter or subtle coercion is necessary, we are operating out of a context of scarcity and self-interest, the core currencies of the economist."\(^7\)

Block helps this dissertation to understand what is at stake if the currencies of the economist are transformed in the LC to currencies of the missional church. A

\(^7\) Ibid., 117.
fundamental missional assumption is that God is already present and active in the world, and therefore, provides the abundance for the church to participate in despite the forces of sin and death. This assumption translates into a missional posture of trust based on God's promises, and a readiness to receive the gifts from God’s abundance. This chapter will now turn to an engagement of such a missional imagination that turns to the O/other for receiving those gifts.

The Missional Imagination: Engaging the Discernment Learnings

The LC’s assessment of their socially-embodied imagination takes place in the midst of a variety of different interests, agendas, and expectations of what it means to be a local Christian community. However, the three threads, and the way in which participants at the Annual Meeting responded to these threads (as indicated above), point at an importance attached to an environment in which there is not only an appreciation for giftedness, but also one in which gifts can be shared in relationship with each other. It is probably most obvious in the emphasis on relationships and diversity, and how there is a longing to receive the other as a gift, as well as an openness and freedom to express a diversity of gifts. It is also a strong impulse in the longing for being in connection with, touched by, and healed by God as the Holy Mystery. The many expressions of mystery and the Spirit, many times stimulated through metaphors of nature, is an illustration of a God experience in which God bestowed upon people God’s gifts of healing and abundance. The emphasis on abundance in the third thread makes it clear that there is a high level of trust that life is more than the scarcity narratives of society, and a willingness to redescribe the world in terms of God’s gifted abundance.
There are enough indications that the description above is more of a detection (out of the corner of the eye) of impulses emerging than a romanticized version of the LC that denies the variety of interests, agendas, experiences, and expectations. A prominent example is the LC’s emphasis on giving to the other that depends on their support. Even though there is not much of an indication of reciprocal relationships between the LC and others in civil society, many articulated exactly this challenge as the next step of living more fully into what is already embraced within the LC as high values of relationships, diversity, giftedness, abundance, etc. The impulses emerging from the economy of responsiveness on their own playful and hermeneutic imagination suggest an assessment of their socially-embodied imagination that is born out of their own social imaginaire, and makes it possible for them to recognize the challenges of how to live more fully into what they embrace as their socially-embodied theology.

These impulses need to be explored more fully for the sake of a full assessment of what is at stake in their ongoing conversation about the theo-cultural contours of God’s future that they want to live into more fully. This dissertation will explore this through the challenge of building new community with others, and then invite other partners to the conversation. These conversation partners will come from the history of imagination, and a hermeneutics of poiesis defined by a reception of the gift.

Building New Community

The LC’s socially-embodied imagination, accessed as their playful imagination from within relational attentiveness, and cultivated as their hermeneutical imagination from within a critical reflectiveness, is assessed as an environment of ongoing conversation. During this dissertation’s research journey, they have discovered some of
the conversation partners on their journey of discernment. They discovered each other as a community that fosters an economy of responsiveness among them, and they discovered God as a companion on their journey. They began to identify the importance of reaching out to the other in civil society, not only with projects of benevolence, but above all to engage them as conversation partners on their discernment journey of how to participate in God's mission in the world. Building new community with others in civil society (including the Other) is their missional challenge as a local Christian community that embraces relationships, diversity, hospitality, and a sense of the mysterious presence and movement of God among them.

Cultivating such an environment of ongoing conversation with partners that they discover on their journey requires an honest assessment of how these others are allowed to participate in these conversations. Merold Westphal points to four features in Gadamer's notion of interpretation as conversation. First, an openness and vulnerability to the other in which I am prepared to engage with genuine listening. As Gadamer says, "Openness to the other, then, involves recognizing that I myself must accept some things that are against me, even though no one else forces me to do so." Second, what Gadamer has in mind with conversation is really an environment of reciprocal questioning. Westphal says, "We might think that the appropriate response to a question is an answer. But Gadamer suggests that the appropriate response is to ask one's own questions." Third, what happens in such a conversation is that it takes on a life of its own that also

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10 Westphal, *Whose Community? Which Interpretation?*, 116. This aspect bring this dissertation right back to where it started in chapter 1 with Peter Block's insistence on the power of the question.
transcends the subjectivity and intersubjectivity involved in the conversation. Gadamer says, the conversation partners "are far less the leaders of it than the led... All this shows that a conversation has a spirit of its own." 11 Fourth, the goal of conversation is mutual interpretation rather than to win an argument. Gadamer says, "To reach an understanding in a dialogue is not merely a matter of putting oneself forward and successfully asserting one's own point of view, but being transformed into a communion in which we do not remain what we were." 12

Westphal also reminds us that this task of an ongoing conversation is "doubly conversational," namely it is a conversation between readers and texts, as well as among readers. 13 From a Christian perspective, that means a deliberate attempt to include the sacred texts in the conversations. Every focus group event, Governance Board session, and the Annual Meeting started with dwelling in Scripture, and encouraging participants to include what emerges from the dwelling as a conversation partner for the rest of the event, session, or meeting. One of the focus group events (the Worship Team event) was deliberately designed as a dwelling in all the other important liturgical texts of the LC. One can go back to these focus group events and identify moments in the playful imagination where the imagination was clearly shaped by the impulses from dwelling in the Word.

This aspect gives this dissertation a brief opportunity to reflect on how the Bible functioned in the LC's discernment process as ongoing conversation. The dwelling in the

12 Ibid., 371.
word exercise invites the text into the conversation of participants as a way to open up the world "in-front-of-the-text." This is not to suggest that the meaning in-front-of-the-text is shaped without dynamics involved from behind-the-text or in-the-text, but simply to indicate the intent of the dwelling in the Word exercise to allow the Bible to be a conversation partner that can redescribe the world as it emerges in the relevant conversation. It invites participants to engage the Bible in imaginative ways that allow for horizons to fuse, while remaining open for discussion about the worlds behind and in the text.

Patrick Keifert describes dwelling in the word as an attempt to stimulate biblical imagination. Reflecting on his experience of how the Bible usually functions in congregations, he says, "Of course they use the Bible. They may use the Bible like some tool with which they demonstrate the capacity to imagine their everyday lives within the narrative of the Scripture. Indeed, their focus on the Bible is strangely unrelated to this living within and out of the world in front of the biblical text."

Many times there is the tendency when dwelling in the Word takes place during LC gatherings to have a first posture of critique. This posture will usually emerge either in the form of a disagreement with at least certain parts of the text based on the modern experience, or an intellectual curiosity based on a questioning of author's intent detached from the good news of the particular passage for the current conversation. However, a

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14 Joel Green provides a short summary of what is at stake in "behind-the-text approaches" that "address the text as a window through which to access and examine the deposit of 'meaning'"; "in-the-text methods" that "recalibrate their gaze so as to bring into focus the qualities of the text itself, its architecture, consistency, and texture"; and, "in-front-of-the-text approaches" that "orient themselves around the perspectives of various readers of the text, on readerly communities, and/or the effects that texts (might) have on their readers." Joel B. Green, Seized by Truth: Reading the Bible as Scripture (Nashville: Abingdon, 2007), 105.

15 Keifert, We Are Here Now, 69.
significant change in culture took place in this regard over the two years of the researcher’s involvement in the LC. The current pastor’s persistence in not allowing the Bible to function as a mere ritual to begin conversations with, and to repeat the same habit of dwelling in the Word at every possible occasion (and certainly all meetings, including the Sunday morning faith formation hour) bear fruit. The change in culture is evident through a lot more playful and imaginative engagement with Scripture during dwelling occasions, and consequently a fusion of characters and plots from these biblical narratives with the worlds in front of the text.

Against this background, the challenge is to keep changing an environment in which the Bible is *used* as a tool for one’s own interest to one in which the Bible is *using* the readers by redescribing their world. What this opening of the imagination, and redescribing does, is that “Leaders and those who follow them begin to speak freely of their sense of God’s engagement in their lives and a sense of their partnership within the mission of God. Within this strengthened Christian imagination, they begin to see and experience the world, especially their immediate community, service area, and those with whom they live their daily lives, in new terms, no longer only as humans would see them but also as God does.”\(^{16}\)

**The Civil Society Imagination**

The brief reflection above on how the Bible functioned in the LC’s playful imagination is not irrelevant to the question of how this process is opening up the LC’s civil society imagination. Regardless of the specific text or content involved in particular dwelling circumstances, the *posture* of engaging Scripture is a *listening* one that

\(^{16}\) Ibid., 70-71.
emphasizes on this level exactly the point made by Westphal in reference to Gadamer (see above). Engaging Scripture in this way cultivates the same habit of relational attentiveness, critical reflectiveness, and conversational openness in the presence of O/others. It is learning how to be comfortable in the gaze of the O/other (which this chapter will attend to later), and how to be vulnerable in the presence of the O/other for the sake of the transformation implicit in the new that emerges from within the conversation.

This dissertation argues that a civil society imagination is born out of the cultivation of this posture. It cultivates an environment where people learn together how not to treat the O/other with the paternalism of benevolence, and also how not to objectify the other for self-interest, but to participate in a communicative environment of mutual and reciprocal relationships that transforms the self and the corporate from within the in-between space of the future's inbreaking through the power of the O/other. What is modeled in these LC gatherings is precisely what is fundamental to a missional imagination in civil society during a post-christendom era.

This particular missional posture stimulates a civil society imagination that is absolutely relevant for the LC's relationships with others in civil society. At this point a brief reference back to chapter 1 is necessary for emphasizing what is at stake in this posture, namely the three different modes of civil society referenced by Gary Simpson. The habit of conversational openness, as an environment of relational attentiveness and critical reflectiveness, from within postures of listening and an authentic turn to the other cultivates a communicative mode of civil society which is socially-embodied and mutually engaging according to communicative procedures and practices. On a deep
cultural level of the LC's habits and practices of discerning God's mission in the world it deconstructs the agonistic and liberal ethos as alternatives to the communicative mode. If the future will bring an increase of engagement with others in civil society in this way, the transformation to be missional in civil society emerged from within their socially-embodied imagination of how to be in an ongoing conversation with each other.

An assessment of this capacity for a missional civil society imagination can be further illuminated by inviting conversations partners from the history and philosophy of imagination.

**A Gifted Poiesis**

This dissertation approaches this illumination with a hermeneutic of *poiesis* that originates from a critical engagement with what Kearney calls a postmodern imagination, and then explore the alternative of an ethical and eschatological definition of *poiesis*.

**The Parodic and Postmodern Imagination**

Richard Kearney mentioned that one would have expected the so-called post-modern era, as an era of the image in so many ways, to be much more sympathetic to the imagination than the pre-modern onto-theology and the modern privileging of reason. However, that is not the case. He writes, "Where it is spoken of at all, it is subjected to suspicion or denigrated as an outdated humanist illusion spawned by the modern movements of romantic idealism and existentialism. The philosophical category of imagination, like that of 'man' himself, appears to be dissolving into an anonymous play of language... it has become little more than the surface signifier of a linguistic
Kearney includes in this analysis the *imaginaire* as “an impersonal entity… over which the individual creative subject has no control… which comes from elsewhere and which we no longer master.”

Kearney sees such an impersonal imagination as the result of a depersonalized electronic age in which representations came to overshadow reality itself. For Kearney, post-modern philosophy reflects this rejection of a humanist imagination as an original creation of meaning. He describes the post-modern alternative as a deconstruction of meaning “into an endless play of linguistic signs, each one of which relates to the other in a parodic circle.” The parodic imagination does not originate from either *outside* (Platonic model) or *inside* human beings (Idealistic model) but from the “achronic patterns of repetition and recurrence.” Kearney’s metaphor for the parodic imagination is a *looking glass*. He says, “While the premodern paradigm was expressed by the metaphor of the *mirror* (which reflected the light of a transcendental origin beyond itself), and the modern by the metaphor of the *lamp* (which projected an original light from within itself), the postmodern paradigm is typified by the metaphor of the *looking glass* – or to be more precise, of an interplay between multiple looking glasses which reflect each other interminably… a labyrinth of mirrors which extend infinitely in all directions – a labyrinth where the image of the self (as a presence to itself) dissolves into self-parody.”

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18 Ibid.
19 Ibid., 252.
20 Ibid., 253.
21 Ibid.
Kearney also shows how this development is funded by the textual revolution in which "the autonomous subject disappears into the anonymous operations of language."\textsuperscript{22} The rest of this chapter will explore the necessity of this revolution (as indicated in chapter 3) without the parodic consequences that Kearney accepts as a so-called post-modern outcome of developments. This dissertation finds Kearney's critique on the post-modern imagination helpful, especially if this is indeed associated with a return to the mimetic model that was critiqued in chapter 2 of this dissertation. It is a different kind of mimesis that Kearney calls "an inversion, a self-parody" in which "we are concerned not with the imitation of some pre-existing truth, but with an imitation of an imitation which avows that there exists no original beyond itself."\textsuperscript{23} But it will be argued in the rest of this chapter that there is a different way to understand the influence of the textual revolution, and consequently a different way to think about the imagination beyond Platonism or idealism.

Kearney gives five examples of the kind of post-modernism that can be associated with a parodic understanding of the imagination, namely Lacan, Althusser, Foucault, Barthes, and Derrida.

Lacan

Lacan challenged the humanist interpretation of Freud that argues for the triumph of the Ego over the Id. Lacan understands Freud to mean that consciousness must open itself to the unconscious. For Lacan, "the unconscious is structured like a language," and he argues for "an analogous subordination of individual consciousness to the hidden

\textsuperscript{22} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{23} Ibid., 255.
structures of the unconscious.”

Therefore, the humanist ideal of self-identity is an imaginary contrivance, and “the imaginary level of illusion must, he believed, be unraveled in order that the symbolic language of unconscious desire be heard.”

This is necessary in order to “enter the self-differentiating language of unconscious desire,” or, “in short, the imaginary self must die in order for the symbolic other to live.”

Lacan has a negative definition of the imagination “as an idealized ego formation” that serves as the “origin from which the self produces or reproduces its ideals.”

It therefore serves as “a repository of the falsehoods of the ‘self’ at both a psychological and social level.” In this sense, “the human subject remains a prisoner to the imaginary order to the extent that it conceals from itself its unconscious relation to the other.”

This also means that Lacan views the imaginary as the root of narcissism, which he at the same time sees as the root of humanism.

Kearney is right to ask why this would necessarily lead to equating the imagination with the illusion of self-autonomy, and why the imagination cannot be positively identified with an expression of the unconscious (almost the way in which Kant calls it the unknown root or Schelling’s identification of the imagination with an unconscious drive in human beings).

24 Ibid., 256-57.
25 Ibid., 257.
26 Ibid.
27 Ibid., 259.
28 Ibid.
29 Ibid., 260.
30 Ibid., 258.
Althusser

If Lacan represents a rejection of the imagination through a critique of humanist psychology, then Althusser rejects the imagination as a critique on humanist ideology. For Althusser, the imaginary is associated with the false consciousness of the bourgeoisie. His definition of ideology is the "representation of the subject's imaginary relationship to his or her real conditions of existence."31 His roots in the structuralist movement of the sixties influenced his repudiation of the possibility of creative subjectivity, and he connects it with "the Marxist discovery of the hidden laws of 'social formation'."32

Althusser is particularly opposed to Hegel and Sartre as "typical exponents of the humanist myth of subjectivity."33 Hegel and Sartre are examples of how the illusion of human subjectivity leads to an ideological strategy of subjection to the status quo. Kearney says, for Althusser, "the very purpose of ideology is to represent each individual as an imaginary subject of freedom in order that he remain subject to the prevailing socio-political system."34 Therefore, Marxism presents an alternative of the science of structural relations to the humanist ideology of imaginary representations.

Foucault

Foucault adds an epistemological dimension to Lacan's psychological and Althusser's Marxist critique of the imagination. For him, there is an "epistemological unconscious" that "eludes the consciousness of the scientists themselves, even though it

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31 As quoted in Ibid., 261.

32 Ibid.

33 Ibid., 262.

34 Ibid.
structures their discourse from beginning to end."\textsuperscript{35} Human beings are pre-conditioned by "perceptive or imaginative capacities by underlying codes over which they have not say."\textsuperscript{36} It is important for how the rest of this chapter develops into an alternative phenomenological attitude to the gift that it should be pointed out how this also led Foucault to reject the "phenomenological approach which gives absolute priority to the observing subject, which attributes a constituent role to an act, which places its own point of view at the origin of all historicity – which, in short, leads to a transcendental consciousness".\textsuperscript{37} This chapter suggests that there is a turn in the development of phenomenology that makes a different understanding possible.

Against the background of the emergence of the transcendental consciousness, Foucault points to a new post-modern era "where the figure of man will once again disappear."\textsuperscript{38} Man will be replaced by a new form of unconscious knowledge, "indeed by the whole structuralist critique of the human subject."\textsuperscript{39} He argues that we cannot actually know the exact shape of this in advance, but we can sense its possibility. In this context, he contrasts the heterotopias of post-modern art with the utopias of the humanist imagination. He says, these heterotopias "dessicate speech, stop words in their tracks, contest the very possibility of grammar at its source, dissolve our myths and sterilize the lyricism of our sentences."\textsuperscript{40} These heterotopias will lead us into an “apocalyptic age of

\textsuperscript{35} Ibid., 265.
\textsuperscript{36} Ibid., 266.
\textsuperscript{37} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{38} Ibid., 267.
\textsuperscript{39} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{40} As quoted in Ibid., 268-69.
Barthes draws from the combined sources of the above mentioned structuralist contemporaries, but focus on an entirely different dimension, namely “exposing the hidden codes at work in the popular mythologies of our mass-media society.” Kearney describes Barthes’ project as “developing the structuralist suggestion that images are no more than surface signs of an unconscious language, Barthes sets out to demystify the representations of the collective imaginary which ‘transform petit-bourgeois culture into a universal nature’.” Therefore, the imaginary is a mere myth. Barthes exposes the urge of constructing an autonomous cogito as the denial of the fact that human beings are no more than symptoms of their historical processes. Kearney says that he appears “to be in agreement with Levi-Strauss’s reading of myths as collective strategies for resolving the contradictions of everyday social life at an ‘imaginary level’.”

After the demythologizing attitude, which can only be taken on with a posture of sarcasm with regard to the recognition that even the demythologizer has to be demythologized, what is left is only “to enter the dark night of history – an empty space of disorientation.” It is an apocalyptic sphere where no return to either the imagination

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41 Ibid., 271.
42 Ibid.
43 Ibid., 272.
44 Ibid.
or a positive real world is possible. Ultimately, this implies that the modern imagination of the subject is an *authorial imagination*. The modern notion of a *book*, which is the project of an author, has to be replaced by the postmodern notion of the *text* as an impersonalized process of writing where the author is absent. Kearney sums it up, "We can consequently dispense with the model of a patriarchal consciousness which was thought to exist prior to the text and to procreate itself by means of the text. Language comes to substitute itself for the productive subject who previously had been considered its owner and master." ⁴⁶

**Assessing a Gifted Poiesis**

This section on an understanding of a gifted *poiesis* finds the warrants for its particular interpretation of *poiesis* from a number of different sources.

Originally, in Aristotle's classification, *poiesis* is distinguished from *theoria* and *praxis*. ⁴⁷ However, since the 14ᵗʰ century the distinction between *praxis* and *poiesis* has been blurred, and it is well illustrated in Duns Scotus' *praxis* that covers both *actio* and *factio*. ⁴⁸ The distinction that disappeared in developments since the 14ᵗʰ century is Aristotle's insistence that *poiesis* is production that aims at an end other than itself, while *praxis* refers to doing whatever is being done for the sake of doing it well. ⁴⁹ Continuing the original Aristotelian distinction, Vitor Westhelle defines *poiesis* as

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⁴⁶ Ibid., 275.

⁴⁷ Aristotle's *Metaphysics* V.1.


⁴⁹ Aristotle's *Nichomachean Ethics*. 
“the human (social) production for the satisfaction of some need through a determinate result (product) envisaged ideally (telos), conditioned by the material reality at hand and by the technological means available.”\textsuperscript{50} He further describes it by saying, “in poiesis the determinant phenomenological feature is the interaction or interpenetration of subject and object in which the subject objectifies itself through the creation of positive satisfaction, and the object is subjectively grasped and incorporated. This process of mutual transformation in the subject-object relationship can be called metabolism.”\textsuperscript{51}

In this sense, praxis is an independent action in accordance with the moral habits of a community, while poiesis refers to the bringing into presence of an autonomous object as the product of the community’s activity. Praxis has to be guided by independent ethical principles for it to be meaningful action, while the aim of poiesis is to create an in-between environment where the new emerges beyond subject and object. The LC’s socially-embodied imagination will only survive the seduction of ideology (both in an agonistic and liberal sense) if it is a poiesis that takes them into the future of living into new and in-between spaces of meaning with others. Poiesis brings together the LC’s playful imagination and hermeneutic imagination as the assessment of an ability to create new spaces of living into relationship with others rather than the action onto others.

Mark Gedney suggests this understanding of poiesis makes it difficult for both philosophers and theologians, because of the urge to make poiesis a noesis. He says this is the case because of the desire “to move from ‘seeing through a glass darkly’ to ‘seeing

\textsuperscript{50} Westhelle, “Labor: A Suggestion for Rethinking the Way of the Christian,” 197.

\textsuperscript{51} Ibid.
Gedney is referring to the work of Richard Kearney as an attempt to recover faith in the transfiguring power of the imagination in the light of the deconstruction of both onto-theology and idealism. It also surfaces as a critique on the post-modern critique that ends up being a limitless self-parody where images ground themselves only in other images. Kearney is indeed skeptical about these developments, and asked, "if postmodernism subverts the very opposition between the imaginary and the real, to the point where each dissolves into an empty intuition of the other, can we still speak of imagination at all?"53

It is only through poiesis that an alternative is possible as "the power of the imagination to reconfigure our current reality in order both to recognize new possibilities inherent in our self-conceptions and to make possible new relations to others whose voices had heretofore remained unheard."54 One can also discover this understanding of poiesis via Heidegger's discussion of modern technology. Heidegger uses the term Bestand to describe the revealing of modern technology as a kind of "standing-reserve": "Everywhere everything is ordered to stand by, to be immediately at hand, indeed to stand there just so that it may be on call for a further ordering. Whatever is ordered about in this way has its own standing. We call it the standing-reserve."55 Technology is revealed as standing at attention ready to be activated by the human will whenever so desired.


53 Kearney, The Wake of Imagination, 358.


Heidegger contrasts this way of revealing as Bestand to poiesis. The latter refers to “the ancient way of revealing that the Greeks called... a ‘bringing-forth into presencing’... beyond the simple sense of ‘making,’ for poiesis was not just something that humans did, but something that the rest of nature did also.” Poiesis differs from a technological approach that it points beyond itself to the context in which it participates. It is an eschatological bringing-forth into presence when different others are participating in communal relationships of reciprocity. McCullough suggests that “a strong parallel emerges between Augustine’s two ways of knowing and those of Heidegger.” In this, Augustine’s covetousness is similar to Heidegger’s challenging-forth of technological knowledge, while the bringing-forth into presence of poiesis is similar to Augustine’s charity. McCullough sums it up in a significant way for the purposes of this dissertation’s argument about poiesis: “When the mind loves its object with the unrequited love of covetousness, the mind lusts after the object, desiring to exert its willful mastery over the object and thus consummate its desire. The will ‘challenges forth’ the object to serve its whims. In poiesis, however, the object reveals itself as a ‘bringing-forth into presencing’ and confronts us as pouring out a gift of revealing to us.”

The challenge is not to enter the future with a desire of producing self-standing devices as the technological attempt to control the future, but to live into the future as the recipients of the charity of the other as the conditions of possibility for the new to emerge. As McCullough concludes, “The mind fixed on God exists in a charitable love

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56 Ibid.
57 Ibid.: 36.
58 Ibid.: 38.
and a renewed knowing that enables it to see the *poiesis* of nature as God's gift, in its 'bringing-forth into presencing' of the creator." 59

Gaston Bachelard took on the central questions of "Where do we locate the poetic art of creation? In the human initiative of making? In the matter and form of the thing made? Or in the minds of the recipients themselves – for example, the reading community?" 60 In answering these questions, Bachelard returns to the human subject, but in a completely different way than Cartesian idealism. Kearney says, "his was a 'subversive humanism' which conceived of the human being as a de-centered subject nourished by a poetic power which transcended its control." 61 Bachelard's *poiesis* is a humanism beyond idealism, and beyond the conventional object-subject splits.

In his *The Poetics of Space* (1957), Bachelard's main argument is built on what he calls the "ecstacy of the novelty of the image." 62 This novelty is not attributed to the transcendental subject anymore, but refers "to be conscious of something other than itself which motivates, induces, and transform it." 63 This *something other* is "the world of possibility, at once invented and discovered by imagining..." 64 In Bachelard the intentional consciousness is shaped in the dialogue with the world rather than, for example, in a circle of self-involvement (Sartre). Being flares up in the imagination rather than the imagination creating reality. Bachelard provides a *dialogical* interpretation of the

59 Ibid.

60 Kearney, *Poetics of Imagining: Modern to Post-Modern*, 96.

61 Ibid., 96-97.

62 As quoted in Ibid., 97.

63 Ibid.

64 Ibid.
image. Later in this chapter, this notion will be translated into a phenomenological reverse intentionality through engagement with the world and the other.

In this regard, Bachelard talks about trans-subjectivity in which images are created through play. The image becomes a genesis rather than an effect, and "this is possible only in a poetics where the suspension of causal preconceptions allows for an assessment of the unprecedented nature of its being."\(^{65}\) In this sense, the image is a disclosure of our way of being-in-the-world, intentionally directed to the other rather than the self. Such an imagination is reverie as "the guardian of the emergence of reality."\(^{66}\) This presents poiesis as two-dimensional, namely "at once a giving and a taking, a projection and a discovery, a centrifugal exodus toward things and a centripetal return to the self."\(^{67}\)

Engaging the LC’s evaluation of their discernment process is entering an environment where they cultivate the habit of conversational openness. It is a habit influenced by a profoundly ethical turn in how the socially-embodied imagination is shaped, and it provides this dissertation’s research journey with a final level of phenomenological engagement.

**The Poetic Imagination: The Habit of Conversational Openness**

This section explores the LC’s habit of conversational openness once more from a specifically ethical perspective. Richard Kearney insists that the only way to avoid the post-modern parodic imagination is through the ethical. Inviting Kearney in as a

\(^{65}\) Ibid., 99.

\(^{66}\) Ibid., 101.

\(^{67}\) Ibid., 103.
conversation partner in this regard lays the foundation for a brief discussion about the relevance of cultivating such an ethically oriented conversational openness. It is a conversation that illuminates the possibilities of the LC taking their ongoing conversation to next levels of engagement with others in civil society.

A Turn to the Ethical

Kearney suggests that “if the deconstruction of imagination admits of no epistemological limits (in so far as it undermines every attempt to establish a decidable relationship between image and reality), it must recognize ethical limits.” For Kearney, it is a necessary “outfacing” of the postmodern imagination’s looking glass reflections, because “the face of the other resists assimilation to the dehumanising processes of commodity fetishism.” The otherness of the other refused to be reduced to sameness. The epistemological status of the face is unknown. In an ongoing conversation with others, there is always a dynamic of being addressed right here and now by another. Kearney says, “An other in need makes the ethical demand upon me – ‘where are you?’ before I ask of the other the epistemological question – ‘who are you?’” This is decisive enough for Kearney to give ethics the primacy over epistemology and ontology.

Kearney turns to contemporary retrievals of Aristotle and Kant by Ricoeur, Nussbaum, and Arendt to emphasize the importance of dialogue between poiesis and

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68 Kearney, The Wake of Imagination, 361.

69 Ibid.

70 However, it is important to note that this does not mean for Kearney that it is always under any circumstances an ethical imperative to respond to the face of any other. He uses the example of “it is one thing to respond to the face of the dictator (e.g. Hitler) and another to respond to the face of a slave (e.g. a holocaust victim).” Ibid., 362.

71 Ibid.
ethics. In doing so, he argues for a narrative imagination that is poetic and ethical. In referencing Walter Benjamin, he says, “the threat to storytelling, ushered in by a technological era of impersonal information” is “eroding the transmission of commonly shared experience” that brings an end to both the notion of community (civitas) and historical memory. It is the ethical characteristics of narrative imagination that Kearney thinks is denied by the post-modern diagnostics. For this dissertation’s purposes, it is important to briefly mention Kearney’s reference to Ricoeur and Arendt.

Kearney finds Ricoeur’s parallel between narrative imagining and “the practical wisdom of moral judgment” appealing. In his Life in Quest for Narrative (1989), Ricoeur defines narrative as “the synthesis of the heterogeneous” or “the capacity to redescribe reality by combining elements dispersed in time and space into some kind of coherent pattern.” Ricoeur goes back to Aristotle’s notions of muthos (emplotment) and mimesis (representation as imitation of action) in the Poetics. Kearney sums up Ricoeur’s understanding of the relation between poiesis and ethics, “While ethics, from the Greeks to the present day, speaks of the relation between virtue and the pursuit of happiness in largely universal terms, it is the task of narrative, in its ‘poetic’ forms, to provide us with specific ways of imagining how the moral aspects of human behaviour may be linked with happiness or unhappiness.” For example, Greeks would tell the story of Achilles if they want to learn about courage, or the story of Penelope if they want to learn about

72 Kearney, Poetics of Imagining: Modern to Post-Modern, 241-55.
73 Ibid., 241.
74 Ibid., 242.
75 Ibid.
76 Ibid.
fidelity. "Such 'exemplary' narrative plots," says Kearney, "reveal how twists or reversals of imitated-action relate forms of excellence with forms of fortune or misfortune."77

A habit of ongoing conversation creates the possibilities for these stories to be told on a continuous basis from one generation to another. In such a narrative paradigm, *mimesis* does not function as the imitation of a detached blueprint from somewhere else, but as the imagination shaped by the memory of a socially-embodied example from within the lived experiences of the local Christian community. The LC has such a narrative that feature very prominent in the life of the LC, and it is a narrative that cultivates the LC’s civil society imagination. It is about a member of the LC who died a number of years ago, but whose legacy is still shaping the LC’s culture of civil society companionship. This member originally came from an African country, and apart from a general influence on so many aspects of the life of the LC, she is best known for her initiative to begin an orphanage in her country of origin. This project took on a life of its own, and still is one of the largest (if not the largest) project associated with the LC. When the stories are told about the LC’s civil society engagements, her name comes up as the first example to be used in this regard. The LC needed an other (from a different country) to become a part of the LC community for the future of God’s movement in civil society to be disclosed in relationship with her over the years. This narrative continues to inspire others for a civil society imagination of what it means to participate in what God is up to in the world.

77 Ibid.
Ricoeur also calls this the *phronetic* character of narrative that entails the correlative functions of *catharsis* and *poiesis*. Kearney explains, "As catharsis, narrative fosters wisdom by encouraging us to sympathize with the characters of imitated and plotted action while simultaneously provoking a critical attitude of withdrawal (the main role of the chorus in Greek tragedy)... but this... is only possible to the extent that narrative operates as a form of *poiesis* – a disclosure of the hidden causes of our actions which is also a creative transfiguration." Poiesis functions as both *revelation and transformation*, because on the one hand it reveals that which would have otherwise remained unrecognized, and on the other hand it transforms or elevating life to another level. Such a hermeneutic of *poiesis* becomes the LC’s critical assessment of how their civil society imagination will be shaped from within what has been recognized, but to the extent that it elevates them to new levels of engagement with the other through practicing conversational openness.

Kearney calls this narrative’s “agency of moral empathy.” It is narrative’s ability to address readers as human beings rather than faceless members of some category. Kearney says, “Narrative imagination, in brief, enables each one of us to relate to the other as another self and to oneself as another.” In this regard, he also refers to Hannah Arendt who “construes narrative as amplifying the circle of selfhood into an ‘enlarged mentality’ capable of imagining oneself in the place of the other.”

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78 Ibid., 243.
79 Ibid., 245.
80 Ibid.
81 Ibid., 246.
connects the sensus communis associated with Kant’s aesthetic judgment with ethical judgment. Kearney quotes Arendt,

> The power of judgment rests on a potential agreement with others, and the thinking process of pure reasoning, a dialogue between me and myself, but finds itself always and primarily, even if I am quite alone in making up my mind, in an anticipated communication with others with whom I know I must finally come to some agreement. From this potential agreement judgment derives its specific validity… It needs the special presence of others ‘in whose place’ it must think, whose perspectives it must take into consideration, and without whom it never has the opportunity to operate at all.⁸²

Arendt presents this dissertation’s argument for the cultivation of the LC’s civil society imagination with a narrative mode of representative thinking. It assumes the potential for transformation from within the revelation. It points to the condition of possibility for the LC’s next steps of building new community with others in civil society. It is a condition of possibility for the LC’s emancipation from any possible narcissistic enclosure of the local Christian community’s self, and to open them up even further for the foreign and unfamiliar worlds of others. In this sense, it points at the possibilities of missional imagination for public moral companionship. The ability to receive the gifts of others, as the true function of poiesis, will determine the extent to which the socially-embodied imagination is intrinsically linked with ethical responsibility.

Kearney sums it up by saying, “The ethical potential of narrative imagination may be summarized under three main headings: (1) the testimonial capacity to bear witness to a forgotten past; (2) the empathic capacity to identify with those different to us (victims and exemplars alike); and (3) the critical-utopian capacity to challenge official stories

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⁸² Ibid.
with unofficial or dissenting ones which opens up alternative ways of being." Poiesis refers to this power of disclosing dimensions of otherness, and to imagine oneself as another.

The Eschatological Imagination: Receiving Abundance

The LC’s eschatological imagination is described on the basis of their focus on the gifts of abundance present in their midst. The way in which they embrace abundance in the midst of continuity and change lays the foundation for a theological abundance rooted in the eschatological future that God is bringing forth in, among, and through them in civil society. It represents their articulation of how they receive the gift of God, and in doing so, living into the future of God’s kingdom. This section will invite into the conversation contributions from Graham Ward and Wolfhart Pannenberg to explore what is at stake in the LC’s eschatological imagination from both a theological, anthropological, and cultural perspective.

Embracing Continuity, Change, and Abundance

The third overarching description was identified around the core themes of continuity, change, and abundance. It refers to a congregational culture that embraces both the continuity with the past and the risk taking of change for the sake of the future. It chooses to work with an economy of abundance rather than a mentality of scarcity. As such, it is a culture built on trust rather than fear.

The Godly Play teachers appreciate children for their “capacity to just give yourself over to a new experience without necessarily fear.” They were struck by the

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83 Ibid., 255.
verb receive the Kingdom of God in Luke 18:15-17, “because do you receive the Kingdom of God, is the Kingdom of God a place, traditionally you think about it as a place, but it’s obviously not a place, we know that, but receiving it – does that mean receiving baptism and the promise of salvation.”

One of the Staff members said, “The other thing that didn’t really show up, is when you go into the big garden, you’re very conscious of what season of the year it is, what’s dying, what’s bearing fruit, the geese are out there in the fields and the older I get, the more I love the change of season, the less I fear it. And I see that happening in our church too, I like seeing things change year after year, I don’t worry so much about what that change would be, but I do see most of it as change that’s driven by people who want to change things. We weren’t doing the project of providing shelter for the homeless when I first came to this church and uh... little things, big things, people change, but I like that. I like that changing season on occasion too...” Another staff member is overwhelmed by the reality of God’s grace on the entire community as a sign that we can trust God.

An awareness of abundance was a theme that emerged frequently during focus group meetings. A staff member tells the following story: “We were driving... and all of a sudden we went over this hill and there is this huge field – I didn’t capture it very well, but it went on forever! This huge field of sunflowers. And so we’re whizzing by in the car and I said, ‘Stop! I have to take a picture, because that’s where God is.’ We got out on the dusty road. So here I am in the blowing dust – that wasn’t as beautiful than to take the actual picture, but I just felt that it was abundance. I just had this feeling of wow and praise and abundance... We went to the farmers market one weekend, I was
overwhelmed again by that feeling of how much grace is in our lives – how much we
have... the harvest season is God’s love overflowing really.”

In reflecting on the Scripture passage of the 5 loaves and 2 fishes, a member of
the Hospitality Ministry group said, “part of the message is that if you have faith –
somehow – the power of Jesus – there will be no shortage.” The group was struck by how
the word “satisfied” came up in the passage. Later on in the conversation it was explicitly
linked to prayer: “…whenever I hear a prayer here, I always hear the thanks for the
abundance, and the thanks for the food. And, you know, I think we do recognize that
bounty that we are experiencing.” They stresses the importance of “wake your senses” to
this abundance (associated on their menu with lemon cake with glaze and fruit sauces that
waken the senses). Several times in their imagination abundance was associated with
things such as fruit, grapes, wine, pomegranate, fresh lettuce and spinach with mangos
and apples, or spinach soup with Italian seasonings in the summer. All expressions of
“how blessed we are.”

One of the participants in the Family Faith focus group described trust as an
important part of her child’s formation: “...you go a playground where there are some
bigger kids and maybe not playing so nicely and you know, you have that protect and not
make them vulnerable and they just go marching right in and be themselves and most of
the time it works out just fine. It’s like it’s that simplicity, that trust is almost like an
armor for him.” In explaining what the children book, “Thanksgiving is for Giving
Thanks” is all about, somebody else said, “…it’s a conversation from a child to God, you
know and it’s about the way they can be thankful for things that they could be happy
about things and be comforted about things... So I think it’s just the theme of
thankfulness and not just for grand things and not just for thanksgiving, but for small things in the day like thankful for my room and playing by myself and little things of life... thinking about being blessed.” When the children story book, “Kiki’s Hats” was explained, a reference was made to “the sense of abundance where we can enter into an economy of sharing which is God’s economy rather than just competition and a sense of ‘for the neighbor’ you know…”

A participant in the Family Faith focus group referred to the importance of keeping continuity and change together: “There is so many right things going on here right now, I mean I understand not wanting to be stagnant, but by the same token I just want to make sure that were not looking for something new just because it feels like we should be looking for something new.” The entire Former Governance Board Leaders focus group exercise was designed around the importance of memory to shape the future. They interpret the arrivals of different pastors as times of “renewal.”

The Biblical Kingdom of God

Since the LC’s eschatological imagination is profoundly shaped by a theology of abundance, this dissertation finds Graham Ward’s discussion of a preference for a particular interpretation of the eschatological remainder relevant to the LC’s ongoing conversation. Ward’s emphasis on the continuity between the kingdom to come and the kingdom already present through the reality of God’s salvation in Christ provides the connection with how Pannenberg analyzes the functioning of the theme of God’s kingdom in the history of eschatology, and especially how he relates that history of development with the biblical promise. Finally, this chapter relates the ethical turn in imagination as a hermeneutic of poiesis with the eschatological notion of remainder and
promise by assessing the LC’s missional future as the possibility of their conversational openness within the reverse intentionality of responding to the call of God.

From Building the Kingdom to Receiving the Gift

Graham Ward defines his eschatology in terms of “the remainder.”84 He distinguishes his understanding of the eschatological remainder from Metz’s eschatological reserve or provisio, as well as Agamben’s remnants/remains. Indebted to Metz’s attempt to christianize secularism as eschatology’s fulfillment in God’s absolute acceptance of the world, Ward also wants to relate theology to the world as “reading what I see around me as not necessarily working against divine providence but rather as given to us in that providence.”85 He adopts Metz’s position “that although human beings may distort, devise elaborate parodies, and use for their own ends the histories and the cultures that are given to them, nevertheless ‘the Incarnation is not a “principle” that is applied subsequently within history (to particular phenomena), but the inner principle of history itself.’”86

Ward has problems though with Metz’s negative eschatology reflected in the skepticism of his reserve that puts grace over nature, and that gives eschatology a role of judgment over anything that can possibly emerge from the future. Ward wants to make sure that eschatology is defined in a more positive posture of emphasizing “a certain continuity between the kingdom that is already among us and the kingdom that is to


85 Ibid., 169.

86 Ibid.
come.” Continuity here means that we are already living in God’s future that is more than what can be identified by the institutional church as the contours of God’s kingdom. This brings Ward to the point of his difference with Metz, namely “Such continuity views eschatology not as what is lacking in all the secular ideologies of the future but what is excessive and superabundant to them” (my italics).

Ward also makes a second distinction between his remainder and Metz’s reserve. Ward wants to emphasize “the supernatural mystery of Christ-with-us in that his body is both present and incomplete… The presence of Christ with us now is discerned in the Eucharist, within every act of faith, among the congregation of the faithful, and analogically in every identification of justice, peace, love, joy, and community.” This “operative messianism” is “an index of the mysterious – that is, the sacramental excess that invests the everyday realities of things.” It differs from Metz’s lack of analogical relation between what was, what is, and what is to come, and his consequent dialectics that enforces a disenchantment in the secular world while at the same time resorting to countering secular ideologies of the future only with a Christian agnosticism.

This position also allows Ward to distinguish between the apocalyptic and the eschaton. For Ward, even though “the kingdom is not yet and therefore remains incomplete, nevertheless it persists, perdures.” This is an important contribution for this dissertation’s position that through the presence and activity of the Spirit in, among, and through the LC, the politics to come is already present and practiced beyond the presence

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87 Ibid., 170.
88 Ibid.
89 Ibid.
90 Ibid., 171.
and influences of earthly powers and dominions. Ward says, “Acts of charity persist. There remains an operation of God that shapes ends beyond ourselves and the circulating processes of living in the world.”\textsuperscript{91} The LC’s socially-embodied imagination shaped from within the ongoing conversation between all kinds of conversation partners is not diametrically opposed to the prophetic mission of the church, but it provides the very impulses of a missional church in, among, and through which the Spirit creates God’s future in civil society.

Ward’s eschatological contribution confirms the position in this dissertation (already referred to in the first chapter) that the interwovenness of theological and cultural contours makes a purely countercultural position impossible. It is impossible not only because the church is embodied in secular construals about thinking in terms of the kingdom, but also because secular ideologies are influenced by biblical heritage and traditions. Transformation happens from within this integrated theo-cultural landscape where God is present and active through the Spirit, and in which God is bringing forth God’s future.

Agamben uses terminology similar to Ward’s preference for emphasizing the excess. His \textit{remnant} and \textit{remains} sound similar to Ward’s \textit{remainder}. Agamden also stress the fact that the “messianic world is not another world, but the secular world itself, with a slight adjustment, a meager difference.”\textsuperscript{92} Even though Ward subscribes to Agamden’s effort to make sure that the remainder is not divorced from the historical and material, he still finds the remains in Agamben as a highly abstract, metaphysical notion.

\textsuperscript{91} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{92} Ibid., 174.
Agamden’s remains refer to something too “secret, mysterious (he [Agamden] even at one point writes of ‘transcendence’) aspects of temporality.”

It is through Agamden’s influence though that Ward comes to define his understanding of poiesis. After also referring to Aristotle’s distinction between praxis as doing or acting and poiesis as making or creating (referred to elsewhere in this chapter), Ward says that even though poiesis “has a practical aspect to it, since it is related to techne… it cannot be reduced to this aspect, for, as Agamden (reading Aristotle through Heidegger…) has recently put it, poiesis ‘does not bring itself into presence in the work, as acting (praxis) brings itself into presence in the act (practon).’ Poiesis “bears a transcendent charge, an ontological weight of bringing something into being, of genesis.” In this sense, poiesis refers to the something new that emerges, and in the emergence of the new, also the knowledge of the something new. For Ward, this means that “After Aristotle, then, we might characterize Christian acting as a praxis that participates in a divine poiesis that has soteriological and eschatological import.”

Poiesis is the creative doing what is good (in the sense that Paul uses poiesis in Romans 7:15-19), but through participation in the future God is creating - from within the socially-embodied imagination where the theo-cultural flows intersect. In this dissertation, poiesis refer to a posture of receiving the gift of what God is bringing forth when the new emerges from within the ongoing conversation between others as shaped through

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93 Ibid., 175.
94 Ibid., 201.
95 Ibid.
96 Ibid.
relational attentiveness and critical reflectiveness. *Poiesis* requires an openness and listening posture to receive the gift of God’s future.

**Eschatology in Christian Theology**

Pannenberg finds it surprising that the theme of the kingdom of God has not played a more prominent role in Christian eschatology. As far as the early church is concerned, he attributes this lack of interest to the bigger urgency of defending the belief in creation against Gnosticism. He says, “It is no longer surprising then, that at the end of the comprehensive exposition of the orthodox faith by John of Damascus the future hope of Christians should be handled from the standpoint of the resurrection of the dead and the last judgment with no reference at all to the kingdom of God.” 97 This continued to be the case through the era of Scholasticism and the older Protestant dogmatics, namely that eschatology focused on individual hope in the resurrection, and therefore, the last judgment at the end of the world.

It was not until Johannes Cocceius that the kingdom of God returned as a dominant theme of eschatology. However, the kingdom of God got the attention of eschatology more within a context of moral philosophy, especially how it featured via Pietism and the German Enlightenment as a goal for moral action. Pannenberg says, “...it was left for J. Weiss to remind theology in 1892 that in the proclamation of Jesus the kingdom comes from God alone with no cooperation on our part.” 98 For Pannenberg, this was the beginning of the right direction of giving eschatology its rightful place not as the single chapter in dogmatics but as a dominant thread throughout all of Christian doctrine.


98 Ibid., 3:530.
The reason is that "The truth of the revelation of God in Jesus Christ is dependent... on the actual inbreaking of the future of God’s kingdom, and we maintain and declare it today on the premise of that coming." Pannenberg continues to develop the centrality of the kingdom of God in Christian eschatology not only because the kingdom of God is the basic message of Jesus, but also because the future of God’s kingdom is already present through Jesus among those who believe in Him. This does not mean there is not an anticipation of a “not yet” in Pannenberg’s eschatology, but this “not yet” is something manifested already in the event of Jesus’ resurrection. He says, “but whether we are correctly describing what happened then depends still on something that has yet to take place: the coming of the reign of God in all its power and glory.”

It had to wait for the 20th century before eschatology returned with real significance to Christian theology. Barth gets a lot of that credit, as indicated by his famous insistence that a “Christianity that is not wholly and utterly eschatology has nothing whatever to do with Christ.” Against this background, Pannenberg then asks the question of how to “establish eschatological statements” in a way that eschatology is constitutive of all theology without necessarily being the beginning of Christian teaching. It is this section that particularly interest this dissertation’s attempt to connect eschatology to the LC’s assessment of their poiesis as a missional civil society imagination for receiving the gifts of God and others through a conversational openness.

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99 Ibid., 3:531.

100 Ibid.

101 As quoted from Barth’s Epistle to the Romans Ibid., 3:532.

102 Ibid., 3:532-45.
Pannenberg starts his argument in this regard again from the point where "the dissolution of eschatology reached its culmination... in the school of Hegel in which the Hegelian monism of the absolute Spirit could accept the independent existence of finite beings, even finite subjects, only as transitional points in the development of the Spirit."\textsuperscript{103} This development relegated eschatology to the immortality of the soul, and the kingdom of God got an ethical interpretation as a matter of moral practice. For Pannenberg, the influence since the time of Schleiermacher to base Christian hope more on fellowship with Christ moves in the right direction, but still neglects a very important implied supposition, namely "God's power to overcome death and, above all, conviction regarding the resurrection of Jesus and the associated possibility of a resurrection from the dead."\textsuperscript{104}

Therefore, an apocalyptically oriented expectation of God's future is not enough, and in fact, gives "at first an impression of the strangeness of the message of Jesus and its impossible remoteness from the modern mind."\textsuperscript{105} Concepts such as an eschatological location of heaven and hell, as well the notion of an imminent end of the world increasingly became less appealing to the modern mind. Again Pannenberg credits Barth for making eschatology relevant to how the lordship of God is a contemporary issue as "the relation of God's own reality to us and to the world."\textsuperscript{106} However, given the historical circumstances from within which Barth wrote during the early 20\textsuperscript{th} century, the temporal futurity of the biblical message was downplayed for a focus on the

\textsuperscript{103} Ibid., 3:532-33.
\textsuperscript{104} Ibid., 3:535.
\textsuperscript{105} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{106} Ibid., 3:536.
eschatological judgment of God as an expression of the confrontation between the world in those circumstances and the eternity of God. Pannenberg says, "In Barth, and then Bultmann, concentrating on the constitutive reality of God in relation to the present replaced the biblical eschatology of the future."\(^{107}\)

In the light of this, "Reflection on the future nature of God's kingdom and on its relevance for the understanding of God, for our own present, and for the presence of God with us, would be a task for the age that followed."\(^{108}\) He specifically mentions Walter Kreck, Jurgen Moltmann, and Gerhard Sauter. All three of them brought time back into eschatological thinking, especially with relation to the future sense of eschatology. The important development in this regard is the prominence of the biblical concept of promise. Kreck uses it in tension with fulfillment, and Moltmann interprets the actual salvation in Christ as promise. However, Pannenberg is of the opinion that Moltmann still "viewed the promise essentially as a contradiction of the reality of the world as we know it."\(^{109}\)

This development is relevant to the LC's emphasis on trust right from the beginning when the Governance Board formulated the discernment question with its implied trust in the agency of God as determinative for bringing forth the future among them. The entire process of playful imagination was to give imaginative expression to the future that God is bringing forth among them, and with that, the implicit assumption that God is able to do that. If that was the operative assumption, then Pannenberg's reference

\(^{107}\) Ibid., 3:537.

\(^{108}\) Ibid.

\(^{109}\) Ibid., 538.
to Althaus’ axiological understanding of eschatology is relevant when he quotes, “The
hiddenness, or, better, the hidden presence, of divine revelation and salvation in Jesus
Christ involves the promise of coming disclosure.”110 The emphasis is on the presence of
salvation in Christ, and the ability of God to manifest God’s future based on that
salvation in the present. It represents a recognition that revelation is not dialectically
opposed to the particularity of present conditions, but in fact relevant to particularity
because of its rootedness in the historical reality of Jesus Christ.

For Althaus, the salvation in Christ is the ground for hope rather than a direct
grounding on the word of promise.111 Pannenberg thinks this is an important impulse
from Althaus rather than, for example, Moltmann’s correction that goes the other way of
defining this reality solely in terms of promise. Pannenberg says about Moltmann, “… by
integrating the history of Jesus Christ into a perspective that is defined solely by the
concept of promise he (Moltmann) failed to do justice to the Christian belief in the
incarnation.”112 Pannenberg’s own assessment is that “grounding eschatology in the
concept of promise is correct inasmuch as eschatological hope can rest only on God
himself.”113 Pannenberg needs to be quoted more fully on his nuanced interpretation in
this regard,

...inasmuch as this presence of God is itself future, and we have to understand its
proleptic coming in the history of Jesus Christ in terms of its future, its salvation
is still an object of promise. The promise in turn can be the basis of confident
eschatological hope only as the promise of God. Here lies the difficulty in

110 Ibid., 3:538.

111 The latter position is Hoffmann’s critique which Pannenberg thinks has in effect been granted
by Althaus, and therefore admits that there is more to just a grounding in Christ’s salvation.

112 Pannenberg, Systematic Theology, 3:539.

113 Ibid.
grounding eschatology in the concept of promise. For it is not enough merely to appeal to the fact of promises that we can claim are the promise of God. Even if traditional promises may be pronounced in the name of a deity, we can regard them as promises of the true God only on the condition that we can first on other grounds support our conviction concerning the reality of God... We reach the same result when we reflect on the implications of the concept of promise. Insofar as the contents of eschatology are objects of promise, they have to stand in a positive relation to the nature and the deepest yearnings of human beings and the world to which they refer. Otherwise we cannot see why we should understand what is said about the future as a promise and not a threat... A prerequisite of the divine nature of the promise, then, is that the contents of the eschatological promise may be shown to be consistent with the nature and destiny of creatures and that the God of the eschatological promise is the Creator, not an 'alien' god of redemption... As such, then, the concept of promise presupposes at least a positive relation of its content to the lives of its recipients.  

The quote above also explains why Pannenberg thinks eschatology calls for an anthropological demonstration despite the fact that the eschatological hope depends on God’s reality and power. However, an anthropological demonstration is “essential if we are to be able to hear that which is maintained and proclaimed as promise as truly a matter of promise, and if it is to be credible as the promise of God.” Referring to Rahner in this regard, Pannenberg emphasizes that “If the future means the future of salvation as the fulfillment of the whole person, then knowledge of the future, regardless of its hiddenness, is constitutive for human life as it now is. For we can understand our present precisely as a fragmentary reality only in the light of our knowledge of its ultimate wholeness.” This makes eschatology an intrinsic element of our self-understanding.

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114 Ibid., 3:540-41.
115 Ibid., 3:541.
116 Ibid., 3:543.
This argument of Pannenberg seems to describe the eschatological condition of the LC’s playful and hermeneutical imagination. It is only on such a basis that their imaginative engagement with the future can be understood as true participation in the presence and activity of God through the theo-cultural contours of their socially-embodied existence in civil society. It is a condition based on the promise of God, and the reception of that promise with trust that God is indeed bringing forth the future in, among, and through them. The promise/trust relationship within this playful and hermeneutical imagination creates an environment of God’s call, and the LC’s response as the emergence of God’s preferred and promised future.

God’s Call

In a significant article for the purposes of this dissertation, Merold Westphal indicates that a phenomenology that wants to be useful to theology should be a hermeneutical phenomenology that not only goes beyond the Cartesian and Husserlian ideal of presuppositionless intuition, but also one that emphasizes what he calls reverse intentionality. Reverse intentionality is “one in which the constituting subject is constituted by the look and the voice of another.” It is significant for this dissertation’s attempt to point at the impulses of missional transformation from within the LC’s socially-embodied imagination in civil society, because it reinforces the argument that it is through relational attentiveness to the other, and critical reflectiveness with the other, that discernment of God’s future is constituted. It also connects with the philosophical

118 Ibid.: 117.
conversation partners in this dissertation who created the possibilities of an in-betweenness where the subject is decentered into relationality with the other as the space where the imagination is shaped in a playful manner.

Westphal argues this reverse intentionality by defending Jean-Luc Marion against three different critics. At the heart of his defense of Marion is the latter’s “clear distinction between phenomenology as a description of possible experience, and theology as the claim that a certain kind of experience, namely revelation or epiphany, is not merely actual but veridical.” In this defense of Marion, Westphal insists that “Marion’s account of the subject falls under the heading of inverse intentionality, and there are hints that vision is aufgehoben in the voice. The seer is first of all the one seen, but above all the one addressed, called forth into response-able being.”

As argued in chapter 3 of this dissertation, hermeneutical phenomenology replaces intuition with interpretation. The imagination is shaped not simply by seeing, but seeing-as. And that the imagination is constituted not by a transparent consciousness, but a socially-embodied wirkungsgeschichtliches Bewusstsein. Quoting Ricoeur, Westphal reminds us again that hermeneutical phenomenology “includes the interpretation of texts and that this not only involves a detour (through the text) but also that its not a temporary path to intuition but a permanent journey through the conflict of interpretations.” To paraphrase Ricoeur, the symbol gives the gift of meaning as the rise of thought. At the same time, as indicated by the hermeneutics of suspicion, it also involves a suspicion of

199 Ibid.
120 Ibid.
121 Ibid.: 120.
the subject, and moreover, that "to the detour of the text is added the detour of the subtext." ¹²²

For Westphal, the decentering of the subject in this conflict of interpretations involves a reverse intentionality which he thinks already made its appearance in Sartre’s analysis of the Look. Westphal summarizes this reverse intentionality by saying,

Intersubjectivity does not have the noesis-noema structure; it arises not when a consciousness encounters an object which it somehow construes to be another subjectivity, but in the experience of being looked at. The intentional arrows do not go out from the subject in an act of Sinngebung or constitution; rather they are experienced as coming from another subject and conferring meaning on the first subject from without. ¹²³

Ricoeur relates this aspect to the call-response structure of religion, and therefore puts transcendence in direct relationship with responsibility (ethics). Westphal thinks the implications of the hermeneutical turn in phenomenology “is a nice fit” with a theology that “reminds us we are not God and cannot view the world from an absolute and unmediated (that is, divine) point of view.” ¹²⁴

Westphal argues the potential usefulness of hermeneutical phenomenology for theology as relating to a theme of transcendence, and he uses the biblical story of Moses and the burning bush as an example. He describes this story as “a dialectic of the visible and the voice.” ¹²⁵ If the burning bush is only seen, then it is an anomaly, and not an epiphany. It can only evoke curiosity, but not worship. But since God got Moses’ attention by speaking to him from the bush, everything changes. Westphal says, “Moses

¹²² Ibid.: 121.
¹²³ Ibid.
¹²⁴ Ibid.: 122.
¹²⁵ Ibid.: 131.
is able to recognize the presence of the *mysterium tremendum* only when the visible becomes voice, not as sound, to be sure, but as speech act." This interpretation becomes Westphal’s hermeneutical key for reading Marion’s phenomenology, especially with regard to how Marion’s idol/icon distinction and his saturated phenomenon are governed by the dialectic between visibility and invisibility.

Philosophically this relates to Marion’s *seeing* metaphor (beyond its literal, sensible meaning) of describing what the intellect does with its concepts. Theologically it relates to Marion’s insistence on the incomprehensibility of God. Marion says in this regard, “For the one we comprehend would always remain less than and below the one we do not comprehend. *Incomprehensibility therefore belongs to the formal definition of God*, since comprehending him would put him on the same level as a finite mind–ours–. . . As soon as one tries to catch sight of God, the relation must be inverted– knowledge holds only if comprehension ceases.” Both Marion’s theological icon and his philosophical saturated phenomenon refer to how that what is present is always pointing beyond itself to what cannot be grasped or encompassed.

Westphal relates the phenomenologies of vision and voice (via the example of Moses and the burning bush), and says, “On the scene of vision, this reversal echoes the Sartrean Look and the Derridean gaze that “sees without being seen,” while within range of the voice, the reversal means being claimed, commanded, put in question,

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126 Ibid.: 132.

127 As quoted in Ibid.
even accused as suspect." The voice and its claim is a necessary precondition for the phenomenon and its visibility (as well as invisibility if it is an icon or saturated phenomenon). Westphal suggests there is even some of Levinas in this insistence that the claim of the other is the horizon for consciousness. In encountering the other, the voice of the other makes an appeal that requires a response. Receiving the gift is intrinsically related to ethics. Westphal sums it up by saying, "How totally everything is changed if epistemic transcendence is teleologically suspended in ethical transcendence. God's incomprehensibility is now seen as the necessary condition for God's being the one who calls us to responsibility. In turn the address that claims us is the necessary condition for the peculiar dialectic of visibility and invisibility we find in the icon and saturated phenomenon."
CHAPTER 5
SUMMARY

The Research Interest

The research interest of this dissertation is the return of the local congregation in theological education as productive center of theology for the sake of public moral companionship in civil society. Against this background, the research question is formulated as how to access, cultivate, and assess a particular local congregation’s socially-embodied theology as their missional imagination in civil society?

The interest in accessing, cultivating, and assessing the local congregation’s socially-embodied imagination for the sake of their public moral companionship in civil society is embedded in a conviction that the church, particularly a Northern American context, finds itself in a post-christendom era with very specific ecclesiological and cultural challenges. In this sense, the research interest position itself in a particular theological conversation regarding these challenges that is sometimes called the missional church conversation. This dissertation explores the possibility of accessing, cultivating, and assessing a particular local congregation’s socially-embodied theology as such a missional imagination of public moral companionship in civil society for the sake of participating in God’s mission in the world. The first chapter explored the lay of the land for a conversation about the LC’s socially-embodied theology in the larger contexts of studies related to congregations, civil society, and the missional church in a post-christendom era.
This dissertation describes this socially-embodied theology of a particular local Christian community, called the LC, as their social imaginaire. It is a social imaginaire shaped by the convergence of theological and cultural impulses from within the lived experience of the LC. The social imaginaire is what is accessed by the research journey, and it contains the possibilities for cultivating the LC’s transformation as public moral companions in civil society. The research journey in conjunction with the LC’s discernment journey discovered how to access and cultivate (chapter 3) the LC’s social imaginaire. Chapter 2 describes how the LC’s social imaginaire is accessed through the playful imagination of relational attentiveness, and chapter 3 describes the LC’s social imaginaire is cultivated through the hermeneutical imagination of critical reflectiveness. Chapter 5 looks back at this research journey embedded in the LC’s journey of discernment to assess an appropriate posture of discernment for the LC’s ongoing conversation of how to be public moral companions participating in God’s mission in civil society, and describes such an assessment as a missional imagination of conversational openness.

This dissertation invites into the research journey’s effort to access, cultivate, and assess the LC’s socially-embodied theology a number of different conversation partners that make relevant contributions to what the research journey discovered in conjunction with the LC’s discernment journey. These conversation partners come from various disciplines such as theology (especially related to trinitarian theology, pneumatology, and eschatology), philosophy (especially phenomenology and continental philosophy in general), cultural anthropology (especially social anthropology), the history of imagination (especially through its pre-modern, modern, and post-modern lenses), as well
as insights from the business consulting world (specifically Peter Block). These conversation partners were presented as a hermeneutic of *mimesis* in chapter 2, a hermeneutic of *Bildung* in chapter 3, and a hermeneutic of *poiesis* in chapter 4. Each of these hermeneutical lenses involved a deconstruction of particular conventional understandings of either *mimesis*, *Bildung*, or *poiesis*, as well as a reclaiming or rehabilitation of each of these three understandings for the sake of a particular focus in each of them that illuminates a specific aspect of the LC’s attempt to either access, cultivate, or assess their socially-embodied imagination.

In chapter 2, the LC’s playful imagination as their process of accessing their own socially-embodied theology in civil society is connected to a hermeneutic of *mimesis*. In this hermeneutic the work of the imagination as *mimesis* is developed via the metaphor of *play* rather than the metaphor of the *mirror*. The pre-modern understanding of the imagination as an *imitating* function is replaced by Hans-Georg Gadamer’s redefining of *mimesis* as *play*. The connection with the LC’s efforts of accessing their socially-embodied theology in civil society suggests that such socially-embodied imagination is constituted from within the relational attentiveness where people are communally engaging together in play. The socially-embodied imagination constituted in the process is not the imitation of a pre-existing or metaphysical blueprint of what the future should look like, but an emerging vision of the future that is particular (shaped from within the convergence of theological and cultural contours that make up the social fabric of this particular community) and that is transcending the subjectivity and intersubjectivity of this community. Through a playful imagination, the new of what God is bringing forth
from the future emerges in the in-between spaces where people are paying attention to the Other and the other in their relationships together.

In chapter 3, the LC’s hermeneutical imagination as their process of cultivating their own socially-embodied theology in civil society is connected to a hermeneutic of Bildung. In this hermeneutic the work of the imagination is developed via the humanist tradition of Bildung rather than the Kantian tradition of Einbildungskraft. The modern understanding of the imagination that privileges the self as constitutive of truth is replaced by a textual mediation of truth. The connection with the LC’s efforts of cultivating their socially-embodied theology in civil society suggests that such socially-embodied imagination is constituted from within the critical reflectiveness where people are communally engaging together in their interpretation of important issues. The socially-embodied imagination constituted in the process is not the idealism of the subject, but the social imaginaire shaped by the embodied theological and cultural contours of this particular community. Through a hermeneutical imagination, the new of what God is bringing forth from the future emerges in the in-between spaces where people are critically reflecting on their relationship with each other and the Other. This critical reflection provides its own soils for the transformation of both the LC and the culture of its embeddedness.

In chapter 4, the LC’s missional imagination as their process of assessing their own socially-embodied theology in civil society is connected to a hermeneutic of poiesis. In this hermeneutic the work of the imagination is developed via the metaphor of receiving the gift rather than the post-modern metaphor of the looking glass (or self-reflecting mirrors). The post-modern understanding of the imagination that rightfully
critiques the self’s ability to be constitutive of truth is replaced by a necessary *ethical* understanding of how the truth is constituted in response to the call of the O/other. The connection with the LC’s efforts of assessing their socially-embodied theology in civil society suggests that such socially-embodied imagination is constituted from within the conversational openness where people are building new community. The socially-embodied imagination constituted in the process is not the projection of the subject, but the *ethical* engagements in the face of the O/other. Through a missional imagination, the new of what God is bringing forth from the future emerges in the in-between spaces where people are in relationship with each other and the Other that transcends an objectification of the other through benevolence.

**The Production of Theology**

The research journey of accessing, cultivating, and assessing the LC’s socially-embodied theology in civil society gave this dissertation an opportunity to dwell in the LC’s production of theology during their discernment process. The theological impulses that emerged from within the cultural flows of both their communal engagement with each other and their reflection on the LC’s relationship with their broader contexts, also provided this dissertation with the clues for inviting into the conversation contributions from specific theological fields.

The theological impulses that emerged by accessing the LC’s playful imagination (chapter 2) provided the opportunity for exploring a trinitarian theology rooted in a relational ontology as the LC’s *imaginatio Trinitatis* based on a social interpretation of the biblical *imago Dei*. The theological impulses that emerged by cultivating the LC’s hermeneutical imagination (chapter 3) provided the opportunity for exploring a
pneumatology rooted in an understanding of God's agency through the Spirit that is not only profoundly different from Hegel's spirit, but also shapes the conditions of possibility for the LC's cultivation of a missional transformation in relationship with others in civil society. The theological impulses that emerged by assessing the LC's missional imagination (chapter 4) provided the opportunity for exploring an eschatology rooted in a theology of abundance based on the reality of the eschatological remainder.

Chapter 1 already gave an indication of the theological contours that would lay the land for the trinitarian theology, pneumatology, and eschatology to follow in the next three chapters. These contours were shaped in the Governance Board's theological reflection on their question of discernment. The formulated discernment question opened the possibility for communal discernment (when we bring together our greatest desires and biggest gifts, how do we imagine...), and worked with the assumption that the new can emerge from within such relational attentiveness. This clearly connects with a trinitarian imagination rooted in the biblical imago Dei. The question also assumed the agency of God (...how do we imagine the future that God is bringing forth), and so laid the foundation for a robust pneumatology of God's agency. It also framed the entire process as an opening up of the future that God is bringing forth, and therefore opened up a consideration of an eschatology of abundance in the midst of the LC.

The hermeneutic of mimesis in chapter 2 corresponds with a trinitarian theology rooted in a relational ontology that is in conversation with the LC's thread of embracing relationality, diversity, and openness. The hermeneutic of Bildung in chapter 3 corresponds with a pneumatology of God's transformative agency in critical reflectiveness that is in conversation with the LC's thread of embracing mystery,
Eucharist, and spiritual practices. The hermeneutic of poiesis in chapter 4 corresponds with an eschatology of receiving the gift of God’s abundant future in conversational openness that is in conversation with the LC’s thread of embracing continuity, change, and abundance.

These three threads with its corresponding theological impulses converge in an understanding of the LC’s missional imagination as their relational attentiveness to and critical reflectiveness with others in civil society for the sake of participating in the future that God is bringing forth in, among, and through the LC when they are in such conversational openness with others in civil society. The LC’s process of discernment cultivated an environment of an ongoing conversation among them in which a next step of including others in civil society already emerged as an important condition of possibility for them to fulfill their missional vocation as public moral companions that participate in God’s mission in civil society.

The Methodological Impulses

This dissertation’s research journey entered the LC’s journey of discernment with a phenomenological approach to research. Chapter 1 described this approach as non-foundationalist as an attempt to avoid both Platonic and positivist research assumptions. It was also an attempt to deliberately avoid a deductive or inductive relationship between the findings of the research journey and the theoretical frameworks brought into conversation with the LC’s lived experience. Chapter 1 also describes the commonalities and differences between such a phenomenological approach and other closely related approaches, especially action research and grounded theory.
The phenomenological research approach was embedded in the LC’s journey of discernment. The way in which the discernment process was structured during the period of research coincides with the basic conventional stages of a phenomenological research project, namely to follow up a first level of raw data gathering (the LC’s phase of focus group events gathered in engagement with a formulated discernment question) with multiple levels of interpretation by the research subjects (the LC’s phases of identifying and engaging emerging themes and threads through an ongoing process of interpretation).

However, this dissertation’s research journey approaches these conventional stages of a typical phenomenological research project with different assumptions than the more usual psychological interests of many such projects in other disciplines of research. First, it approached the LC’s lived experience not with a psychological interest of how phenomena appear to consciousness of a collection of individuals, but with a hermeneutical interest in how communal practices of interpretation are shaped by and shaping such a community’s social imaginaire. In this sense, the research journey reflects the hermeneutical turn beyond a Husserlian idealism (as especially described in chapter 3), and should rather be called a hermeneutic-phenomenological research approach. Second, the research journey also reflects the theological turn in more recent phenomenology conversations. It specifically follows Marion’s focus on the gift (as especially described in chapter 4), and also rejects more conventional phenomenological assumptions that any notions of God should be bracketed out of a phenomenological interest.

Given this basic framework of a phenomenological approach to the LC’s research journey, the journey in itself had a methodological interest of how to access, cultivate,
and assess the LC’s socially-embodied theology. The assumption has not been that the basic phenomenological approach provides a sure methodological guarantee for truth, but rather to direct a process of discerning the truth. This process in itself provided the LC, and therefore also this dissertation’s methodological research interest, with methodological impulses of how the LC produces their own theology and discerning God’s presence and activity in, among, and through them in civil society. These impulses are not translating into a universal theory of method, but provide the LC with directions for their ongoing discernment journey.

First, the LC’s discovery of how they embrace relationality confirmed their sense that the future that God is bringing forth among them is not through more projects or primarily through programs, but when they engage in relational and communal practices of playful imagination. This discovery implies that there is no historical or idealist blueprint of the future waiting to be imitated or applied, but that the future itself emerges through a *poiesis* shaped by receiving the gift in the midst of encounters with the O/other. Their socially-embodied imagination for being public moral companions in civil society is shaped from within these encounters. This methodological impulse coincides with a phenomenological habit of relational attentiveness.

Second, the LC’s discovery of how they embrace an ongoing conversation confirmed their sense that the future that God is bringing forth among them is not through the implementation of a strategic plan, but when they engage in a hermeneutical imagination of critical reflectiveness. This discovery implies that discernment is not an ad-hoc intervention, but a lifestyle of an ongoing conversation in which transformative dynamics are ever evolving from within the critical reflectiveness where the encounter
with the O/other happens. God's future emerges through a cultivation (Bildung) of critical engagement with the O/other. Living into the mystery of God's future is a matter of engaging God through Word, sacrament, and the other with a habit of critical reflectiveness that opens up possibilities of transformation in, among, and through them as local Christian community.

Third, the LC's discovery (through their process of critical reflectiveness) of how they need to include others from outside the LC in their ongoing conversations as a condition of possibility to live into the future that God is bringing forth in, among, and through them confirmed their sense that the future that God is bringing forth among them is intrinsically related to their public moral companionship with others in civil society rather than viewing the other as objects of benevolence. This impulse opens up the possibility of a missional imagination of how they participate in God's mission in civil society.
APPENDIX A

2007 APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY TEAM REPORT

Introduction

How has God been at work in our midst? How have we been uniquely gifted by God to participate in God’s mission in the world? What might God’s preferred and promised future look like for our church? As part of our congregation’s ongoing spiritual discernment about these questions, a small team was formed this spring to engage the LC’s members in conversations and storytelling. This report represents the fruit of those conversations.

This process drew upon Appreciative Inquiry, a method of discovery, discernment and visioning that seeks to identify what is most vital, life-giving and hopeful within an organization’s life in order to build a better future. Appreciative Inquiry is focused on garnering grass-roots voices, identifying common themes and reflecting on an organization’s strengths and dreams.

During the spring of 2007, approximately 45 members of the LC, representing attendees of both services, long-term and newer members, and a variety of ages and perspectives, gathered for a series of conversations. They were asked the following questions: (1) *When did you feel most alive, motivated and excited about your involvement at the LC?* (2) *What has contributed most to your spiritual life?* (3) *What characterizes the LC’s at its best, concerning our fellowship and relationships with one another?* (4) *How do we express God’s mercy and justice to the world?* (5) *What’s the*
most important life-giving characteristic of the LC? (6) Make three wishes for the future of our church.

The people of the LC are an expressive bunch! When given the opportunity to talk, they were generally eager to reflect, imagine, tell stories and share hopes for the future. On the following pages you will see the team’s summary of the themes, stories and dreams that emerged. This report is being presented to the Governance Board in the early fall and then made publicly available to the whole congregation. Feel free to share and discuss it with friends.

**Major Themes of Our Common Life and Ministry**

**Food**

Food was repeatedly named as a central element of the LC’s—food to share after worship, food for the hungry and poor, food to alleviate tragedy, food in our homes, and food in the sacred moment of the Eucharist. Food has many dimensions in our common life. It is a key feature of our times of fellowship, whether in the liturgy, the parish hall, in homes during dinner groups, or for special celebrations that take place during the year. It also is one way in which we serve others, particularly through T (a project of proving food at a shelter). It is shared when one of our members faces a time of crisis and the church pitches in to make meals. Eating together helps us understand and experience the Creator God who nourishes and sustains us, the Lord who shared table fellowship with all sorts and types of people, and the Spirit who creates communion in our midst.
Hospitality

Underlying this pattern of sharing food is a deeper commitment to hospitality and service, which in many ways imitates the self-emptying posture of the Crucified God we serve. Hospitality is seen as extending from the heart of our worship life in the Eucharist out to our neighborhood, city, nation and the world. The LC’s members value a sense of welcome, inclusiveness and acceptance. Several said that the invitation to communion given by the celebrant in the liturgy encapsulates this sense of openness and hospitality. Moreover, hospitality to others is a vital part of our outreach life, expressed principally through a project providing shelter to the homeless and our support of the L, a home for AIDS orphans in an African country, as well as the homes repaired by youth on mission trips. Many members recognized the pivotal leadership role played by M in developing the L and the tutoring program. Some cited our openness to children in worship—even noisy ones!—as particularly important.

Variety in Worship and Spiritual Practices

When asked about the spiritual life, more than anything the people of the LC value variety. The range of opportunities to connect with God and others is broad and diverse, from Taizé to tutoring, from Dwelling in the Word to dwelling in art, from Bible study to musical expression, from special worship services to regular ones. This affirmation of a diversity of expressions and paths of discipleship reflects an understanding of the kingdom of God that has room for the varying visions, journeys and talents of different people. This body is not made up of many who are the same, but many who are unique, united in Christ. The LC maintains a vibrant spiritual life with God through a wide array of spiritual practices and formation opportunities, and pursues them
with energy and candor. One question to consider is how we can dovetail the multiplying
spiritual practices—some with an individual bent and others communally oriented—and
channel them to strengthen our common life together and the ministries to which we are
called.

The Arts

Closely linked with the themes of creativity, worship and hospitality is the LC's
emphasis on the arts. The arts take many forms—from the undercroft art gallery shows to
the music used in worship. People talked about the LC’s engaging all the senses in
worship, fellowship and prayer. The arts are seen as a vital dimension of our outreach
into the community, both in welcoming people in for shows in the gallery, as well as the
role the arts play in worship. The Lenten Taizé services were cited as one example of
this, as was the Good Friday liturgy this past spring, with the accompanying Stations of
the Cross (created by members of our congregation).

Service and Community Connections

While service and outreach have been mentioned in various ways above, it is clear
that they are recognized as central to the DNA of the LC. The church’s slogan, “A
Neighborhood Church with a Worldwide Community” is expressed through the L, the
project of providing shelter for the homeless, the project of providing food at a shelter,
youth mission trips, tutoring children, and other initiatives. For the most part,
conversation was balanced between our ministry to the N neighborhood and our ministry
to the world. A couple members expressed regret that our congregation hasn’t yet
penetrated the university campus very deeply in light of our proximity and connections
there. This is recognized by some as a major area of opportunity and growth in our mission.

**Intergenerational Ministry**

The multigenerational impulse of the LC, as experienced on mission trips, in the children’s Eucharist, in Godly Play, and at many other levels, was affirmed repeatedly. This reflects the life and ministry of Jesus, who singled out playful, little children as uniquely able to catch the gist of his kingdom, and who was born into the arms of a courageous teenage girl. The Middle Eastern dinners held for many years in which the youth served the adults were cited. Others liked the concept that the LC’s functions like a “village” in its members’ care for one another across families and generations. The welcoming and inclusion of children, as well as their instruction in the faith by elders, were seen as treasured elements of our common life. Our youth, who engaged deeply in these conversations, stressed the value of an ongoing youth ministry and the importance of continuity in its leadership.

**Innovation, Creativity and Change**

A few parishioners also said that the leadership and people of the LC are unusual for so eagerly welcoming change. Change, it seems, has become a way of being here. We heard from others how they valued freedom and encouragement to pursue their ministry impulses. People have a sense that this is a time of high energy in the life of the congregation, in which innovation and risk-taking are possible. The Spirit is moving and up to something among us!
Wishes for the Future

Finally, when invited to articulate three wishes for the future of the LC, members shared a variety of comments which can be summarized under the following key themes:

(1) Spiritual growth: People want to go deeper in their spiritual journey with God and one another. This theme was repeatedly mentioned. (2) Stewardship and sustainability: The need for growth in personal financial stewardship (both in number of families pledging and in amount) was cited as critical to the church’s future. Others referenced maintaining the church building and upgrading the kitchen. At the same time, sustainability in leadership was a frequent wish (for clergy, the Governance Board, other leaders, etc). One of the challenges facing the LC is deepening and sustaining the current energy, creativity and momentum for the long haul—stewarding well the gifts God has given us. (3) Youth, Children’s and Family Ministry: The importance of youth ministry (its leadership, vision, and activity) also enjoyed pride of place. An emphasis on young families, caring for children, and supporting the nursery also came up, particularly in light of the demographics of our surrounding neighborhood, which are dominated by young families. (4) Student and Young Adult Ministry: Greater connection with the university student body and also the further development of our young adult ministry were seen as places God is leading us to grow. (5) Connection between Service Attendees: A few wished that there was more camaraderie between the 8:00 and 10:30 crowds. Some hoped that the breakfast and Adult Forum could facilitate greater fellowship between these groups.
When the people of the LC bring together our deepest desires and our greatest gifts as we follow the Way of Jesus, what kind of future will God bring forth among us?
A on April 8:
Add B's preferred question

How can we deepen our relationships with God, one another, and the stranger?
Con April 3:

Wants clarification if all the questions from previous GB meeting are included.

When the people of the LC bring together our deepest desires and our greatest gifts as we follow the Way of Jesus, who kind of future will God bring forth among us?
A on April 8:
Emphasize the following elements of the question:
- To investigate

When the people of the LC bring together our deepest desires and our greatest gifts as we follow the Way of Jesus, what kind of future will God bring forth among us?
E on April 16:
Agrees with D, and suggests two changes:

To begin the question with other than 'Will '
and added a phrase of the people of the LC bring together our deepest desires and our spiritual gifts.
As the people of the LC bring together our deepest desires and our gifts.

A on April 18:

Suggests changing D's "spiritual gifts" to

Agrees with E on beginning the question of who rather than "should we..." and a clear agenda.
On April 20:

Let's consider adding more inclusive language.

The plot suggests a different ending.

As the people of the LC bring together our God-given gifts and deepest desires, where do you see?
Don on April 30:
Likens B's formulation, but suggests changing "bring" to

As we the people of the LC together our God-given gifts and deepest desires where do you see Jesus leading us as individuals and as a community of faith?
As we the people of the LC together our God-given gifts and deepest desires where do you see Jesus leading us as individuals and as a community of faith

On April 21:

Wondering if "gather" could be associate with "Sunday only", and seems to prefer the original
Spiritual discernment emerges from a shared desire to discover what God is saying to us together as a community. While spiritual consensus can produce compromise, more typically those gathered start to see the situation from a new perspective that reveals a path not previously imagined. Whereas a compromise rarely energizes anyone, a totally new idea that breaks through from God produces enthusiasm (en theos, literally in God).
APPENDIX C

THE POWER OF THE QUESTION

From: Peter Block, *Community: The Structure of Belonging* (2009, p.104-107)

Questions with Little Power

How do we get people to show up and be committed?
How do we get others to be more responsible?
How do we get people to come on board and to do the right thing?
How do we hold those people accountable?
How do we get others to buy in to our vision?
How do we get those people to change?
How much will it cost and where do we get the money?
How do we negotiate for something better?
What new policy or legislation will move our interests forward?
Where is it working? Who has solved this elsewhere and how do we import that knowledge?
How do we find and develop better leaders?
Why aren’t those people in the room?

Questions with Great Power

What is the commitment you hold that brought you into this room?
What is the price you or others pay for being here today?

How valuable do you plan for this effort to be?

What is the crossroads you face at this stage of the game?

What is the story you keep telling about the problems of this community?

What are the gifts you hold that have not been brought fully into the world?

What is your contribution to the very thing you complain about?

What is it about you or your team, group, or neighborhood that no one knows?
APPENDIX D

FOCUS GROUPS AND IMAGINATIVE ACTIVITIES

Art Ministry Group: Painting
Family Faith Group: Sharing Favorite Children’s Story Books
Former Senior Wardens Group: A Story Wall Exercise
Godly Play Teachers Group: Playing with Legos
Hospitality Ministry Group: Designing a Menu
Social Justice Ministries Group: Imaginative Balloon Ride into Future
Staff: Taking Pictures
Thursday Group 1: Playing with Legos
Thursday Group 2: Imaginative Balloon Ride into Future
Thursday Group 3: Playing with Legos
Thursday Group 4: Imaginative Balloon Ride into Future
Worship Team Leaders: Dwelling in Liturgy Sources
APPENDIX E

DWELLING IN THE WORD

The way in which the researcher facilitated Dwelling in the Word during the LC’s process of discernment is inherited from the researcher’s engagements with work done by Church Innovations Institute, St. Paul (MN). It involves the following process:

(1) Every member of the group is handed a copy of the particular biblical text; (2) the group is told that somebody from the group will read the text out loud; (3) everybody is asked to pay attention where her or his imagination is caught during the reading out loud of the text. (4) it is announced to the group that there will be a few minutes of silent reflection after the text is read; (5) a member of the group is asked to read the particular text out loud; (6) after the reading of the text and the few minutes of silent reflection, time is allowed for anybody from the group to share with the rest of the group where her or his imagination was caught during the reading of the text; or, alternatively, two people would be given the opportunity to listen each other into free speech on where their imaginations were caught, before given the opportunity to report to the entire group what the other person shared; (7) at the end of the time of sharing, everybody is invited to return to the text at any time they wish to do so for the duration of that particular meeting or event.
APPENDIX F
THE THREE THREADS

The following is a summary from the document that the LC's Governance Board used to prepare their presentation to the LC's Annual Meeting on the three threads that emerged in their interpretation of the focus group events:

Relationality – Diversity – Openness

The first overarching description was identified around the core themes of relationality, diversity, and openness. It refers to the significant way in which members of the LC describe the culture of St. Matthew's as relational rather than programmatic, embracing the LC as an increasingly diverse community (especially racially, culturally, internationally, and intergenerationally), and valuing the openness and flexibility within the LC to make room for difference and otherness.

These three core themes also signify to members of the LC their integrated journey inwards and outwards. In this sense, the future of the LC is associated with a relational focus of this Christian community in relationship with broader communities; with a diverse congregational culture embedded in the diversity of surrounding neighborhoods; and with embracing openness in the LC as a way to welcome strangers.

Eucharist – Mystery – Spiritual Practices

The second overarching description was identified around the core themes of mystery, Eucharist, and spiritual practices. It refers to the language of mystery when
many members of the LC describe their relationship with God in metaphors of *awe* and *wonder*. Connected to the language of mystery is how frequent the *Eucharist* is mentioned as a shaping dynamic in these experiences of awe and wonder. Equally important is how these experiences of mystery and Eucharist are related to the importance of *spiritual practices*. This context of mystery (awe, wonder), Eucharist, and spiritual practices leads to an emphasis on a posture of *humility* and a life of *discernment*.

**Continuity – Change – Abundance**

The third overarching description was identified around the core themes of *continuity, change, and abundance*. It refers to a congregational culture that embrace both the *continuity* with the past and the *risk taking* of *change* for the sake of the future. It chooses to work with an economy of *abundance* rather than a mentality of *scarcity*. As such, it is a culture build on *trust* rather than *fear*. 
APPENDIX G
EMERGING THEMES

The following is the linear export of a mindmap developed during the Governance Board’s reflections on what has emerged to them during their reading and interpretation of the transcripts of the different Focus Group events:

Hospitality Group

Food and Spiritual and Fellowship

Abundance: Food and Talents

Concrete and Sensual: Not only intellectual (Noticing the attributes of food and specific in terms of how we are relationally) Embodied Theology

Diversity and Inclusiveness: Feasting, Emotion, Memory

Intentional Choices because of historical or spiritual significance in the LC

Food: Special place for adults AND children (intergenerational)

Should we bring back some of the old recipes?

Cook this menu for the Governance Board PLEASE

How do we think theologically about the importance of food in the LC?

Is there anything we can do to support them or create opportunity for growth?

How do we get more people to participate?

Fun, but scary

Loafs and Fishes Scriptural Passage
Former Governance Board Leaders

Welcoming Culture of the LC
Discerning Community
Very conscious
Determining direction
Open to Change
Leaps of Faith
Building addition
Full time Pastor
Going deeper Spiritually
Restaurant at Fair
Would be fun to do something like this again
Informed through discernment
God was always here
What's our next leap of faith?
Community vs Openness: As we grow, did we lose something; do we still have the same kind of community we had in past; balancing community with openness to strangers
Do we have as much fun as we used to have?

Worship Team Leaders

Healing (Physical and Spiritual)
Eucharist as core
Worthiness (embracing it) & to stand before God
Invitation to the table (inclusiveness)
Missed when not as frequent as here

Difficult sometimes with small kids (in the "joyful" section)

Children involvement

How do you reach parents & keep kids involved

Community and Relationships

"We will..."

How all of these liturgical moments are incorporated in the life of the LC?

How does it encapsulate what was going in conversations and in their hopes?

Pilgrimage

Openness

What riches do we keep with us, and what do we leave behind in able to move forward?

Baptism as community based (including other churches in neighborhood)

Staff

Beauty (hidden and expected) in contrast and diversity

Many parts make up the whole (community)

Attentiveness and Listening intentionally for God's voice

God's grace and abundance (including God's overflowing love)

Change as a constant (often good)

Children as both the future of the LC and our window to God (showing a natural spirituality in their joyfulness - they are also forming us)

Just be in community - thats where formation takes place

Nature (growth) - analogy of a grape arbor and sanctuary and worship

Lots of flower pictures
God in light and sun ("shining through the trees")

Joy of community: worship should be life giving and fun

How can we get more humor and joy?

Intergenerational worship (extended family)

How do we bring the beauty that we see in the world back into the LC?

Very little pictures of the LC?

How do you focus in on the particular in ministry as you do with a camera? Question of attentiveness

Is there a need for more attentiveness.... no!... whats that all about?

Thursday Focus Group 1

Community and Relationships

Diversity

Flexibility and Moving forward

Not much focus on past

Strong leadership

Humor and Fun

Movement and Action

Church doing a lot of things; acting outwards

Question about "practical" things?

Trust and Openess

Trust related to question of how do we know where God is leading us?

Holy Ghust

Caring for those in need
Children and Nurture of Younger generations

Ancient and Modern Structures integrated

Respect for ancient, yet moving forward into future

Not much inward focus

More community rather than personal spiritual focus

How do we know where God is leading us?

Staying in relationship with those who are not satisfied vs transience in community (to be open to the movement of people leaving and coming)

We are doing this already in the LC: what are all of these, and how is it related to the lego models?

**Thursday Focus Group 2**

Comfortable space

Questions

Should be reconfiguring our space here? To be more comfortable and inviting. Eg. for Taize or a Youth Service or Labyrinth or Coffee Shop

Interaction here and in community

Develop own ideas

As oppose to building programs and assuming people would come

Relationships

Question: Who do we reach out to? Could we go to their space rather than trying to get them here?

Permeability: In and out

Soul Satisfying
Thursday Focus Group 3

Diversity

Community

Inputs/Outputs

Come and go freely

Welcoming of ideas

Bringing gifts in to go out in world

Listening

Mystery

Wonder and bewilderment

Spirituality

Children

Church as Shield of Faith

Safety in ever changing world

Doubt freely - comfortable and safe to it here

Flexibility

A positive counter-culture

Live your life as Jesus would

Rest of lifes not only Sundays

For kids to see something different than in culture

Faith in Progress

Support and Acceptance for People in different stages of their life

Humility
Family Faith Group

Music

Children can see story without being expressed in words: embodied and modelled (eg. drop in dinners)

Wonder and Profoundity

Thanksgiving and Eucharist

Participating in God's Economy of Abundance rather than Culture's Economy of Competition and Scarcity

Gift of having many children

Variety and Diversity important

Relationships

Also God initiating community with us

Cautiousness about Change just for the sake of change

Fewer things, but more depth and clarity

Content with what is going on right now and direction we are going (intergenerational direction)

Growth and Expansiveness rooted in the Spirit/Gospel

Question: how is it going with the family faith groups, and what can we do to help foster these values? Also the Sunday morning attempt with Grades 4-5

Question: How can we even be more intergenerational? And how do we draw families without children into these conversations?
APPENDIX H

QUESTIONS AND COMMENTS AT ANNUAL MEETING

Relationships-Diversity-Openness

- How can we more fully engage with other churches in the community? Is this something God is calling us to do?
- How about offering our gifts of hospitality & relationship to others in the diocese?
  How about relationships with H, (unintelligible), & I
- I am so thankful and blessed by the people here and the relationships I’ve made. How do I continue to do this in various stages of life?
- I am a bit disheartened each time during Eucharist that I have to change/imagine “he” as “she” or “God” and “Father” as “Mother” or “God”, because the liturgy is so dependent on God as a male Father figure. God is that AND so much more, or perhaps God is neither male nor female… Please let us look at this with open hearts?
- We can be a bubble: WONDERFUL to look at; enchanting to contemplate, and always renewable.
- How can I value the member of the LC’s who is most different from me?
- How do we decide which social justice ministries God is calling us to participate in and those we are not called to participate in? I think we need clarity and focus, and that less is more.
• The presentation was good and inspiring. The LC’s church have a good community of family and friends.

• More intentional welcoming of the stranger – the practice of Sunday hospitality – not just (unintelligible) outreach – learn this together.

• I think we can strengthen our relationships by making sure the ill can trust us.

• Continue & expand opportunities to meet & get to know each other. Always get better at welcoming new members.

• Diversity – reach out to connect with communities, such as other faith or denomination communities. A shared service? A meal? Ecumenical project home helps us connect with neighborhood churches. How about the Z and S communities – not far from SAP?

• How can we be more open to change & “accept” change?

• Continue to develop our social ministries by involving more in the parish.

• How do we invite/develop new activities? Such as grief group, marriage group…

• (even) more culturally diverse experiences (services, fundraisers, forums (esp. hosted by our diverse member to personalize.)

• I am grateful to God every day for bringing me into the LC’s family. I am inspired to work harder to deepen my relationship with people in the LC.

• I think relationship and spiritual practices are interrelated. It is important to continue to broaden relationship (not just those who have always interacted) so that our spiritual practices together reflect that openness.

• How do we encourage ideas that people have to be rought out without tying them down to executing it?
• How do we discover and encourage our individual gifts and talents among us?

• What can be done to increase diversity?

• Can we bring these strands into our social justice ministries – service of those outside our church.

• I would like to see some other ethnic/heritage based services developed. I have enjoyed the Irish, American Indian, etc.

• Continue “Befrienders” group, more trainings, etc.

• Continued emphasis on learning about others – culturally & spiritually.

• Can we move beyond conversation among ourselves, to deeper conversation with those ‘outsiders’ we ‘serve’?

• What other/new diverse populations might we form relationships with? How might we live more deeply into diversity?

• How do we welcome new people at the LC and encourage involvement rather than overwhelm them?

• What about creating or being associated with a job seekers network? I.e. The X at The Church of the Y. They have a network of churches.

• How do we build relationships around the world that are infused with the mystery of the body of Christ, sharing our abundance?

• Cultivate imaginative listening.

• Increase the relationship building at 20-30 group. Could it also include the 40’s.

• Keep reaching out to the community.

• Many relationships have blossomed here – spiritual and personal and that has become a great source of personal strength.
• Reach out to bring the gospel – esp. to young people.
• How could we invite, more into our worship? How diverse could our worship be?
• I resonated with the idea of niches. We all have different gifts. We’re not all intellectuals or singers or artists, etc (though we are blessed with many). What other gifts; contributions can we elicit from parishioners?

**Mystery-Eucharist-Spiritual Practices**

• If not me, who?
• Sunday Evening Contemplative prayer – meal – more contemporary.
• Thank you! More thought and (unreadable) – Worship continues to be more important (unreadable)
• How can we re-energize the Wednesday Eucharist service and reach out to a larger community for it?
• Footie Pajama day at both services.
• I believe we have provided a wonderful “faith format” but should continue to develop more spiritual practices to reach out and relate to more people.
• Develop and implement more prayer groups to help people be consistent in the spiritual practices.
• I heard a lot of talk of “spirituality” – but where do we explore the depths & strengths of our historic denominational identity – especially liturgically? I feel we sometimes are losing the mystery by making faith a ‘personal experience’. We are in communion together in the mystery of God, and that is not always a warm, fuzzy place. I miss the Thy & Thou, and I miss being Bold to say the Lord’s Prayer.
• Into more silence.
• The theme of ‘wonder’ of deeper spirituality challenges me… I have far to go in facing my doubts. I continue to have faith but sometimes it is very hard.
• Have some type of open forum or setting where parishioners can voice their deep spiritual and theological wonderings. This could strengthen relationships as well.
• Not only look for the future, but glance back to why & where we have been to form a firm foundation on planning.
• I want to thank the LC for a respite from cynicism.
• Brainstorm some verses from the Bible and assess them in real life.
• Where do we fit in, see ourselves, in relationship to our denomination which is in such a state of flux? Are we, should we be an island and just be independent?
• Opportunity to learn from the various groups – opportunity to share what God is doing with each of us.
• Mystery – become open to healing.
• Does Taize service need to evolve? Maybe a ‘spiritual practices’ service?
• Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others.
• If more emphasis and training in spiritual practices, including Bible study.
• Spiritual practices set to help us turn wonder into Awe – awe of creation/universe, God’s love for us within this huge universe.
• The traditional liturgy provides continuity; embracing world liturgies offers change, openness. Continuing these both will help us stay on our path.
• How many ways can we pray?
• For our service: folk music by AF – with her mandolin. It is very joyful music!
• I appreciate that the LC is a place where it is OK to wonder…. Questioning, doubting, re-imagining is central to my faith journey.

• Continue to involve arts and the senses to reach each person individually.
  
  Bringing the church practices from around the world increases our awareness of God’s impact in the world.

• How will our worship services change? Will they change? How will we approach God together?

  **Continuity-Change-Abundance**

• I love change – love new ways to worship. How can we worship in ways to meet everyone’s needs?

• How will we keep this imaginative discussion going in the future?

• How is the denomination carrying out its mission? What are its problems and how is it solving them?

• Abundance in the world is threatened by human use of natural resources. How do God’s people respond?

• When do our greatest gifts become quite evident?

• How do we live more fully into these (unreadable) – Mon – Fri – 8 – 5.

• Continue the international worship service focus.

• I love the drop-in dinners – please keep them up!

• How can our current space better enable us to live into our calling?

• Are there concrete ways to encourage each other to continue feelings of abundance?
• If God had wanted nothing to change s/he would not have created tomorrow. Our job is to prayerfully and thoughtfully find our place in a world of change.
• If not now, when?
• To live more fully – keep some fun & imagination involved. Keep involving a variety of new people in small ways – so they can see if they want to do more.
• We need to feel what is constant and holds us together, yet be continually open to new things and the changing world.
• How can we fully appreciate everyone’s unique gifts?
• How could we be more present with people in prayer, in food, in death?
• When the new kitchen?
• Keep ‘doors’ open – imagine, imagine, imagine…
• We need to continue the discussion to include people who, like (unreadable), have been skeptical. I am one of those.
• I imagine (wonder) how we can share our collective abundance with the poor (the invisible) of our community.
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