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WE SHALL NOT BE MOVED

[An anthropological study on how Christian fundamentalist communities make sense of their surroundings in a globalized world.]

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Utrecht University

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Heilig zijn is zwijgend wonen

In de brandende bomen der waarheid,

Is in de aarde zien langs de ogen der wortels

Het moeilijke vliegen der vogels

Of achter een berg het groter geheim van de bergen.

Ook denkt men na over het voedsel der vlammen,

De wufte dieveggen van het luchtig vuur,

Of over de afgod, zijn aftocht historisch,

Eens voltrokken de verbrokkeling der wolken.

En op de afgedreven drempel staande

Ver zie ik het huis met luister,

Waarin de mensen mij bewoonden

En kwamen om er lang te overnachten

En gingen om spoorloos mijn vrienden te zijn.

De grote zee gaat immers onder in de kleine zon.

    - Paul Snoek

WORD OF THANKS

I would like to extend a word of thanks. Doing this research and finishing this thesis has been a process by trial and error. The past year has however been a wonderful journey. I am beyond grateful for having been surrounded and supported by many wonderful people. First of all, I want to thank my mother who has always been – and still is - unconditionally 'there': bedankt mam, voor alles. To my dear friends and family: Thank you for your love and support. To my peers in the MSc program 'multiculturalism in a comparative perspective': I enjoyed sharing our bitters and sweets during those long days at the library, jabbering about our writings, our coffee-breaks, our collective meals and cozy evenings. To Dr. Diederick Raven, my mentor: thank you for teaching me how to 'think outside the box' and for believing in me. To Paul and Monique: thank you for your hospitality, friendship and help. Last but not least, to my informants and other church members: thank you for your warm-heartedness, your hospitality and your help.

PROLOGUE

"I just wanted to announce that after the tonight's service everybody's welcome to join us for a meal at McDonald's"

Pastor Schüler, Bible Baptist church's senior pastor makes this announcement. He looks excited and rubs his big belly.

"Because, you know, that's what Baptists usually do: they study the bible, and then they eat".

The church members grin. The pastor looks at me and smiles. I smile back. Next to me, a woman I've just met asks me if I'd like to join her and her family to McDonald's, after the service. In a fraction of a second doubt crosses my mind. I think about all these horrifying images of animal abuse I recently saw about the McDonald's farms. I remember promising myself to never ever eat at McDonald's again. And I haven't even mentioned my nightmares about going to eat with a group of fundamentalist Christians. My mind creates horror-scenarios about the awkward silences that might arise whenever these people would ask me about my religion, how I think about the war in Iraq, abortion or homosexuality. How on earth should I respond when confronted by these topics? I have thought about this for a million times, but still haven't found the right answer. The only thing I can imagine right now is how my head would, slowly but surely, turn into the color of a ripened tomato.

"Euhm, yes! I would love to come if that's okay!" I quickly reply.

"That would be great! I'm Diane, by the way." We shake hands.

After the service, where the pastor has been preaching about how sinful people are and how everybody deserves to go to hell, Phil – the father of the house - drives his silver pick-up truck up in front and holds the door for us. Three polite, handsome little boys smile at me and step in the car.

"I am so sorry about all this mess! We're so chaotic!" Diane giggles

"When you have three kids, everything turns out to be quite chaotic" Phil says while winking at me.

During the ten minute ride to the McDonald's, the whole family never stops asking questions. It seems as if they want to know everything about life in Europe. They seem to be actually interested in me.

Before starting our 'Quarter Pounders' and our gigantic cups of soda, prayers are being said. Phil leads the prayer, which is about me.

"Thank you God, for Lie who made a long trip getting here to Abilene. Thank you for sending her here in safety. May all go well with her and her research and may you lead her way. Let her have a good stay and get home safely."

While eating, Phil asks me about my favorite American actor. I shortly reflect on this, and then answer *'Sean Penn'*.

I ask how he feels about Sean Penn.

John replies that he never goes to see any of his movies because the guy has had so many 'issues' in the past.

"Oh" I reply.

Another emergency scenario flashes through my mind. I imagine being expelled from the community after this evening and I am instantly angry at myself for not having overseen this. Stupid Sean Penn and his issues!

"Oh.. I didn't know that. What kind of issues, then?" I finally decide to ask.

"*No idea! Maybe something with alcohol or… Euhm… Honey, what kind of issues did Sean Penn have in the past?"* Phil asks his wife.

Diane doesn't know either.

"Well, anyway, I really loved Dustin Hoffman in Rain Man."

The conversation continues. I survived. Except for one quickly raised eyebrow, nothing happened.

That night, Diane takes me home.

"So on Monday's, we have volleybal night at church. On Wednesday's and Sunday's we have services at church, and after the church services we always go somewhere to eat. Oh, and on Friday night's we have pizza night at our home.

We always play board games until very late at night... So if you would like to come, please just call me and then I'll pick you up! We would be happy to have you as our new friend!"

Whenever we hear about religious fundamentalism these days, some kind of alarm sensor goes off in our minds. Images of airplanes crashing into the World Trade Centre, hostages being beheaded, homosexuals being cursed and abortion clinics being bombed, flash through our minds. To be quite honest: this is the way I pictured fundamentalists to be as well. The very reason why I wanted to do research among a fundamentalist Christian community is because I was fascinated by how they are often displayed on tv or even in scientific literature. Roughly spoken, I expected to encounter a group of narrow-minded people full of hate and disgrace towards the outside world. I remember being very nervous when going to church the first time: I was afraid they would not allow me to enter their church, being a nonreligious stranger wanting to 'observe' them and write about them. I really had to drag myself out of bed that morning. But then, as soon as I entered the church, I encountered a group of friendly, warm-hearted people with big smiles and that good old 'Southern hospitality' Texas is known for.

Their beliefs are, obviously, very different than mine. Indeed, I sometimes needed to restrain myself from interfering when they said things I perceived as 'insulting'. Whenever they called homosexuality an 'abomination' or some kind of disease that needs to be cured, I remember thinking about my dear homosexual friends back home. I felt sad about people feeling this way about gay people. I wondered what on earth is wrong with men loving other men while this can also simply be a matter of pure, beautiful love? On the other hand, this way of thinking reflects my own 'logical' frame of thoughts, the way I was raised and the way I believe others should be approached. To those who are raised with a fundamentalist Christian frame, the bible states the absolute truth. They sincerely believe everything it says and claims. To them it is not a matter of hate or holding a

grudge to others. God simply does not compromise.

While 'skyping' or e-mailing friends and family back home, a question they often asked me was if people at church tried to convert me. The answer here is yes: they extensively tried to convert me. One could designate this as 'annoying' or patronizing, but I am convinced they did this out of love. They did not want me to be 'left alone' when the world ends. They did not want me to go to hell, for they genuinely think this is where all those who aren't 'saved' go.

Fundamentalist Christians do not always meet the stereotypical image that is created around them. Even though they might all incorporate a similar doctrine they are not all isolated, antisocial communities as they are often presented. It is unfortunate that specific fundamentalist groups, for example the 'Westboro Baptist Church'[1], present a certain image that contaminates the name of all fundamentalist Christian communities. One of my intentions of writing this thesis is to simply show that they are not all like that. Even though I did not always personally agree with things they said, I cannot thank them enough for their hospitality, their time and patience in trying to explain their views. It is anything but self-evident to invite a random stranger into your car and your home, let her be around your children and your church family. I can't emphasize enough how I admire the fact that they did. Whether this hospitality and warm-heartedness was - as they would argue - 'a reflection of their love for Jesus' or if it was just their sensitivity for human nearness: I am beyond grateful that I was given the opportunity to be part of their community for a short yet intense period of time. I also want to note that all names and places described in this thesis, including the church, appear under pseudonyms.

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[1] church in Topeka, Kansas that is extensively portrayed in the media because of their picketing at army funerals and other occasions.

INTRODUCTION

> We shall not, we shall not be moved
> Just like a tree that's standing by the water
> We shall not be moved
> Jesus will not fail us
> We shall not be moved
> Though the tempest rages
> We shall not be moved
> On the Rock of Ages
> We shall not, we shall not be moved.
>
> <div align="right">Christian folk song</div>

This thesis investigates how a fundamentalist Christian community functions in a globalized world hallmarked by swiftness and fluidity. It examines how this community makes sense of its surroundings in a world in which Christian frameworks are not necessarily a self-evident source of reference. The arguments presented here are based on data gathered during a 87 day fieldwork period among members of a fundamentalist, bible preaching Baptist church community in Littlefield, Texas, the United States. The methods I engaged in were participant observation, (semi-)structured interviews and informal conversations. I went to many church services, activities organized by the church and 'hung out' with church members. Before entering the 'field', an extensive research proposal was written in which I composed research questions. The main question stated:

> How do fundamentalist Christians in Littlefield, Texas perceive their community in relation to 'Others' in a globalized world?

In essence, this is what I researched. Yet: what I encountered during my research was much more than that. The data I gathered were quite rich and sufficient to write perhaps ten different theses. It is necessary to remark that my perspectives and thoughts on the field and the social theories that can be found in these writings are subjective and shaped by my own frame of knowledge. Undoubtedly, by looking at my data from other perspectives one might come to different conclusions and frames of analysis that can be equally 'true' or relevant. However, I do not wish to

suggest that the line of reasoning throughout this thesis is 'coincidental': The processes and phenomena that are described are especially relevant to comprehend the ways of reasoning that incorporate the Bible Baptist church as a community. It might thereby be relevant to comprehend Christian fundamentalist communities in general. Also, light is shed on the American nation and its questioned Christian character. Finally, this thesis might be a relevant contribution to the contemporary discourse on secularism.

The overall goal of my research was, thus, examining how the Bible Baptist church as a religious community copes with the globalized world. My main argument throughout this thesis is that this church community attempts to offer a 'culture of protection' to its members against what they perceive as a 'culture of confusion'. I have developed these two concepts with the intention that it might shed light on how fundamentalist Christians give meaning to their surroundings. There is a broad range of literature to be found about how fundamentalist Christians perceive the world. Yet, this literature often a lacks nuance or neglects an in-depth inside perspective. While creating these concepts I attempted to search for compromises between large, abstract globalization theories and empirical observations. Let me briefly summarize the structure of this thesis.

In the first chapter I argue how a sense of nostalgia occupies the minds of Bible Baptist church members. Many community members seem to engage in the idea that life used to be better in 'the old times'. This sense of nostalgia, however, reveals a certain biased perception on the American history which also can be noticed in their perception on the contemporary world. Consider this first chapter as a useful leg, an attempt to 'set the stage' for the following chapters. In chapter two, the concept of a 'culture of confusion' is introduced and elaborated. 'The culture of confusion' refers to uprooting globalization processes that – to some individuals or communities – might be perceived as 'confusing'. These processes provoke a specific reaction among the Bible Baptist church community members. Perhaps we could even say that this is the case for other fundamentalist Christian communities as well. This very reaction is what I refer to as a 'culture of protection'. The mechanisms of this 'culture of protection' are thoroughly examined in chapters three, four and five.

In these chapters I respectively argue that communities strive to protect their members from this 'culture of confusion' by redefining their community boundaries, by engaging in mechanisms of 'Othering' and by establishing a relative 'counterculture'. The final, sixth chapter provides a second layer of analysis. Here, I engage in the discourse on secularism and how to make sense of this concept in the current American context. Perhaps it even sheds light on the overall comprehension of 'religion' in the globalized world. I hope this thesis might contribute to a better comprehension of Christian fundamentalism. I aim to contribute to a broader understanding of how these people give meaning to their surroundings. It is my intention to nuance existing analyses of these communities and the overall image they are assigned to.

1. NOSTALGIA

> What used to be acceptable, on tv or on the radio or in public, has
> completely changed from what it used to be. People get calloused because it
> happens over and over again. Tv shows, for instance: In the 1960's you
> couldn't show a couple sleeping in the same bed. A married couple! Now,
> they're showing what's happening in bed all over national tv! What used to
> be really bad is not as bad anymore. Does 'it' change? No! Sin is still sin. We
> have changed. We need to change our thoughts.
>
> Dave

It's a pretty chilly, gloomy Sunday night in February. I'm in an 'all you can eat' pizza
restaurant, joining approximately twenty members of the Bible Baptist church. They
always go out to eat on a Sunday night, after church. Every week, the pastor chooses
from their list of favorite fast food restaurants, and then announces the choice in
church on Sunday morning. To many church members, going out to eat is one of
their weekly highlights. Together with their family, friends and a nice dinner, they're
visibly relaxed. It's one of their favorite ways of having a sociable, pleasant
fellowship. I'm always welcome to join them, even though I'm not a church member.
Usually, after the Sunday morning service some church members come over to my
regular seat –on the right side of the aisle in the back, a little hidden so I don't stand
out to much- and ask me if I'll join them for dinner. This week we're at 'pizza inn', a
fast food restaurant that characterizes itself as this:

> Unlike the big 'corporate' chains, Pizza Inn is more like a collection of family-
> owned businesses; families who live in the same communities where we
> work. That's why our company has a long tradition of supporting
> community-based programs that focus on the needs of our neighborhood
> schools, churches, seniors and many other local care-giving organizations.[2]

This statement reflects, in a way, a perception of the world that many of the Bible
Baptist church members keep. On a broader scale, we could notice how this reflects

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[2] http://www.pizzainn.com/overview.html, website consulted on june 29, 2012

a way of thinking among a specific 'scene' of conservative Christians in the United States. The quote incorporates elements of a focus on 'locality', 'community' and 'family' in opposition to 'Others' that in their perspective don't. I noticed this line of reasoning among people at the Bible Baptist church. Similar to the fast food restaurant, they are a part of the modern world and incorporate many elements of modernity yet perceive themselves as more traditional and local.

1.1. The 'good ole' days'

While having a conversation, I often heard my informants talk about 'the old times' and how life was more pure and 'moral' back then. While talking about this, they seemed to oppose earlier times to life in the present. Some of my informants, however, are in their twenties and not even part of these older generations. They did not experience the older days and only know about former times through the eyes of others. This speaks of some kind of romantic image of the past. During his sermons, I often heard pastor Schüler talk about how America used to be a sacrosanct Christian nation where people still had God in their lives and homes. It used to be a nation full of people living up to their duties as good Christians, according to biblical standards. Another recurring topic in conversations with church members is how Sundays were still 'holy' back in 'the old times'. Stores and restaurants were closed on Sundays because people wanted to keep the Sabbath 'holy' as the bible recommends. Sunday seemed to be the day that people almost fully spent in church. People went shopping for groceries and cooked on Saturdays in order to spend Sundays meditating on the word of God and having fellowship with fellow church members. In an interview, pastor Schüler told me how in the old days people used to travel for hours to be in church:

> People back in the old days would travel 10, 15, 20 miles in a wagon and a
> horse to go to church. They would go and spend all day there. They felt that
> it was very important to have God in every single aspect of their lives. They
> were raised with proper motives and ideas.

1.2. The good past, the bad present and the ugly future?

Today, as it is argued by church members, people are not as religiously and culturally 'strict' as they used to be:

> People tend to do so many bad, extreme things today. This is because they lack something. There is a big empty space in their hearts. They tend to fill it up with entertainment, though they should fill up this emptiness with Jesus.
>
> Pastor Freeman, guest at Bible Baptist Church

People seem to engage in easy, 'entertaining' activities instead of going to church, meditating on their beliefs and the word of God. While asking about this in conversations, church members responded that doing or watching sports are examples of how church can often be 'replaced'. In today's world, the church members argued how baseball games and trips to the zoo seem more important to people than going to church and be with one's 'church family'. The pastor told me how he regrets to see this happening and that is nothing that we can do about it. It is just 'how the world works today'. This specific perception of life in earlier times is in sharp contrast to life as it is perceived nowadays. Pastor Greg, associate pastor at Bible Baptist church, explained how he sees the number of people at church diminishing:

> I've been in bus ministry since I was a teenager myself. Back then, we would pick up 500 to 600 kids, about 13 to 16 busses. Parents back then realized how important it is to go to church. Some of them didn't want to go to church anymore but they still saw the relevance of their kids going, so they sent their kids to church. The bus ministry has slowly declined because of the removal of church and how important it is. We see the numbers diminishing over time. Nowadays, if we have twenty to thirty kids on the bus on a Sunday morning, we feel like we've been pretty successful that day. Last Sunday we had twelve! There was no holiday or activity, or another clear reason for them to stay out of church. People just don't seem to want it anymore.

> Video games have kept the kids from playing outside, from being in contact
> with other children of the neighborhood and especially from going to
> church.

While taking a closer look on the American cultural and religious history, however, this idea of the past being morally, culturally and religiously homogenous seems to be not entirely accurate. American cultural history has always been characterized by ongoing cultural and religious struggles ever since the 19th century (Lears 1981, Hofstadter 1962, Lasch 1979). The industrial revolution and the processes of modernization it brought about resulted in a social malaise among people. In reaction to this, different schools of thought existed in order to restore people's socio-cultural well-being. These schools of thought especially criticized the importance American culture attached to prosperity, the seemingly fixed hegemony and the fact that rationalization affected multiple layers of society. In 19th century United States, superficial optimism was brought along as some sort of official ideology. This, however, was overshadowed by a tough, sharp reality (Lears 1981: 6): growing socio-economic problems as unemployment and lack of hygiene contrasted sharply to this alleged optimism. American culture at that period incorporated ambiguous images: On the one side self-authority and discipline, the image of the 'self made man' was emphasized as a virtue. On the other side, however, individuals were naturally expected to function in bureaucratic systems.

> Notions of disciplined character, self-denial, and individual autonomy - the
> ideological components of a Victorian bourgeoisie - were undermined by the
> wedding of men to specialized, technical functions in corporate
> organization.
>
> <div align="right">Marcus 1983: 864</div>

These contrasting expectations led to spiritual and cultural confusion. A crisis concerning cultural authority came into existence as a consequence to these circumstances. Obviously, there was no vast, authoritative moral system to which all Americans could refer.

Anti- intellectualism, which I consider part of 'antimodernism', arose in reaction to these phenomena, in search for a steady authority and notions of authenticity. Anti-intellectualism supposes a gap between intellectuals and 'the people' (Hofstadter 1962). This line of reasoning scapegoated scholars for the cultural confusion in society. Anti-intellectualists argued that more attention needed to be paid for the needs of ordinary people. Religion was at the basis of intellectualism as well as anti-intellectualism. More puritan forms of Protestantism laid the foundation of intellectualism because of their emphasis of knowledge and their famous 'work ethic'. Importance was attached to studying scripture, working hard and living a sober and chaste life. More progressive and liberal forms of Protestantism laid the foundations of 'anti-intellectualism': This particularly was inspired by ideas produced by the 'Awakenings' that also came into existing in the 19th century (Hill 2007). The 'Awakenings' attempted to satisfy cultural needs that existed among the American people; especially the longing for emotionality, authenticity and nearness. The main emphasis of the 'Awakenings' was to striving towards a personal relationship between the individual and God. Existing doctrines should hereby be avoided: while preaching, one needed to be inspired by the Holy Ghost Himself, not through studying scripture. These sorts of ideas connected with anti- intellectualism. The philosophy of the 'Awakenings' caused widespread disagreement among the conservative, puritan Protestant churches. Protestantism seemed to be more and more divided in separate branches: one emphasizing 'rationality' whereas the other one emphasized 'emotionality'. Hofstadter (1962: 55) argued that this dichotomy between rationality and emotionality causes social confusion and an indistinct morality in social settings.

This dichotomy concerning ratio and emotion, visible in the Protestant church as well as the broader American society, is still noticeable in the contemporary American social context. In the political sphere, both concepts are outplayed by politicians that tend to divide society in a liberal-Democratic camp and a conservative-Republican camp (McClay 2004). Politicians also banalize the schism between secularization and Christianity, and attach these concepts to respectively liberal and conservative political spheres.

It is not far-fetched to say that in America, religion is used as a political vehicle. To the interplay between religion and politics in American political environment I turn later, in the chapter on secularism.

What I have been arguing throughout this chapter is that the American socio-religious history is obviously not one of homogeneity. Ever since the 19th century a wide variety of religious as well as nonreligious ones schools of thought arose that often interacted and clashed. This led to the absence of a steady moral framework. I do not argue that people holding on to this nostalgic image, such as Bible Baptist church members, have a false idea of history. I do suggest, however, that this idea of nostalgia might be based on a subjective interpretation of historical processes. Their view of history is based on their frame of knowledge in which a specific scene of American society is embedded. Further, they tend to interpret their surroundings largely by referring to the bible and certain prophecies that are predicted in biblical scripture. They also interpret the world's current 'globalized state' according to their specific frame of knowledge that is embedded in them as a community and as individuals. In the following chapters I aim to explore their specific perceptions of the world and how they cope with modern, global processes. In the next chapter, I establish some theoretical handles that might help to comprehend how the Bible Baptist church as a community copes with the global situation.

2. GLOBALIZATION AS A 'CULTURE OF CONFUSION'

[Modern culture] has certainly empowered us, opened new worlds, broadened our horizons, and enabled many of us to live happier, healthier lives. Yet it has often dented our self-esteem. […] it has also revealed our frailty, vulnerability, and lack of dignity.

Armstrong 2000: 366

I don't think people attach as much value to community as they did before. They don't have to interact with people of their community. They can be friends with somebody all over the world and they don't have to depend on community like they used to. I think that community has been devalued and family have been devalued because of the way our society is turning. Families no longer eat together. Mom has a job, dad has a job, kids do their own thing. Everything is so 'get what you want right now.' We don't need to depend on anybody else to get it. And I think society has suffered and communities had suffered. I feel sad about that.

Diane

In this chapter, I explore the idea that modernization and globalization bring along different processes leading to a relative uprootedness of social contexts. This uprootedness can produce feelings of confusion and negativity with individuals and groups. They might experience this as a 'culture of confusion'. It is necessary to remark that these processes of modernization and globalization are fluid and dialogical. Because of the great complexity of the phenomenon of 'globalization', discussed and questioned by many, it is difficult to synthesize into clear-cut concepts. These processes are part of greater structures. The mechanisms of globalization that are introduced in this chapter are elements of this 'culture of confusion' and lead to defense mechanisms in which this religious community engages: a 'culture of protection'.

2.1. Exploring the 'culture of confusion'

2.1.1. Science in opposition to religion as 'authoritative social framework'

What can be seen as a first process leading to uprootedness of social contexts is secularization. Casanova's (1994, 2009) secularization thesis is widely criticized and therefore a sensitive concept, yet in this case applicable to a certain extent. The actual discourse of secularization will be discussed in the final chapter of this thesis. Let us, for now, consider the idea that 'the secular' has influenced American life in a number of ways. The increasing authority of science as a social construct of meaning might be a good illustration of how 'the secular' influences American daily life.

In contemporary American society, science is more and more considered as the main authoritarian form of knowledge. While Christianity used to be a much more powerful, 'common' framework and point of reference, nowadays science tends to 'replace' this social authority Christianity once had:

> Science coexists and competes for influence with religion, which once
> dominated intellectual life and explained the world. Religion no longer has
> the preeminence it once had in the field of learning.
>
> <div align="right">Neese 2001: 70</div>

To many, science seems to appear as a more 'logical', neutral way of explaining things. It is seen as a 'real object in the world', even though this is by some scholars also considered a 'cultural thing', a "*domain of mental representations that happens to be entertained by a number of human minds*" (Boyer 2001: 320). A way of looking at religion - Christianity in specific - and science is that they both correspond to human conditions of 'cosmic fear'. 'Cosmic fear' can be defined as

> [...] the trepidation felt in the face of the immeasurably great and
> immeasurably powerful [...] At the core of 'cosmic fear' lies, let us note, the
> nonentity of the frightened, wan and transient being faced with the
> enormity of the everlasting universe.
>
> <div align="right">cf. Bakhtin in Bauman 2011: 107</div>

Humans, by Bauman considered as naturally uncertain and vulnerable beings, tend to look for greater entities that provide them with a sense of security, in a physical as well as a metaphysical way. Both science and Christianity attempt to provide a sense of security to their adherents. However, they do this in different ways. Science extensively criticizes Christianity for its lack of nuance and, thus, its tendency to claim all-encompassing 'truths'. Science, on the other hand, has not the tendency to claim an all-encompassing truth. It is based on a broader line of reasoning. Statements and hypotheses are constantly nuanced and adjusted. It is flexible to change and might cover a wider set of contexts. Religion holds on to one, all-encompassing frame of knowledge and meaning:

> [Science] is based on evidence derived from the largest human perspectives and the most comprehensive sources of information, as judged by thinking minds. In contrast, many religions demand conformity to their traditions irrespective of what critics may say or the evidence obtained outside of their traditions may indicate.
>
> Neese 2001: 70

For their part, conservative and fundamentalist branches of Christianity tend to criticize scientific hypotheses or at least scientific theories that clash with biblical scripture. Darwin's evolutionism or 'global warming'[3] theories are issues they cannot compromise with because these contradict –respectively- biblical ideas of creationism and the End Times. Dave said this in an interview:

> I don't believe in this whole 'global warming thing' and even if I did believe in it: I'm not gonna be here when the world explodes. The bible tells me that Christ is coming again and that I'm going meet him in the air. So I'm not worried about all that. I'm not worried about what will happen to the earth. It's the people I worry about! Because they need to know that Christ died for them.

---

[3] Information on the rejection of the 'Global Warming' theory can be found on websites as http://www.globalwarminghoax.com (website consulted on july 13, 2012)

Phil explained to me that the idea of 'global warming' might be a 'hoax', a concept created by the media in their lust for 'sensationalism' to gain money and attention, or perhaps just biased scientists interpreting physical phenomena in a certain way and 'see what they want to see':

> I know that God is in complete control, and He has a perfect plan. If there really is global warming: so what? It is what God intended, and it is just a small piece of the plan. Does Global Warming exist? I don't think so, or if so, it is not something we are doing to make it happen. Will the world be destroyed by it? Definitely not.

I remember being surprised when hearing about the rejection of global warming, which I had always perceived as a 'self evident truth'. I had never even considered such a 'fact' to be false, considered scientists to be wrong. Yet again, this illustrates how my frame of knowledge – as a European 'critical student' - differs from theirs. It reveals how I am rooted in this idea of science being the most accurate way of explaining the world. I noticed, however, that by criticizing such 'scientific truths', they indirectly reject values that are claimed to be important by the mainstream society. This creates an atmosphere of cautiousness where these conservative Christians seem to be keeping their eyes open in order to not be 'misled'. To them, only predictions written in the bible are true. God does not compromise or 'mistake'. Adherents to this idea, as the Bible Baptist church members, might be on their guard by this 'scientification' of society. While Christianity used to be a more common way of explaining the world and overcoming notions of 'cosmic fear', it tends to be under pressure in contemporary contexts. In a way, Christianity becomes 'uprooted' since it is no longer a self-evident entity in the American society. This is one element of what I frame as a 'culture of confusion'.

2.1.2. The 'homogenization' of modern societies and the lack of a 'steady morality'

The second modern, global process that leads to uprootedness of social contexts is a rather abstract, yet at the same time a very tangible one. It encompasses the swiftness in which today's world moves and the increasing state of mobility and deterritorialization people find themselves in.

Due to globalization, the world has become more closely interconnected than ever before (Inda and Rosaldo 2008). These intensified connections among people of different social contexts can lead to many different processes. It has been widely argued that globalization instigates processes of homogenization as well as heterogenization of social contexts (Appadurai 1990, see also Hedethoft and Hjort 2002, Eriksen 2007). Even though there is a lot to say about both mechanisms and their complexity, I do not wish to engage in this profound theoretical discussion on this matter. To the purpose of the analysis of this field, I would like to focus on how globalization, relatively and to a certain extent, leads to a certain socio-cultural homogenization of the West.

Gellner (1983) has argued that modernity requires a certain degree of 'homogenization' in societies. He considered this homogeneity essential for modern settings to function properly. Gellner's argument is specifically aimed at the industrialization of Europe and the rise of nation-states in the 19th century. Yet, we could extend the argument and try to fit it in today's broader structures as well. Looking at globalization we might see tendencies of English becoming more and more of a 'standardized' language in which almost anyone can express him- or herself. We might also notice democracy being perceived as the most righteous form of state government, the free market economy being more and more of a standard economical system and the increasing importance of and attention to human rights. This is especially visible in Western societies, and Western societies often attempt to carry out these values to the rest of the world. My informants at Bible Baptist church acknowledge this relative homogenization of Western societies today. This, however, they interpret this on the basis of the bible. They argue that these events are only the beginning of an unavoidable process which eventually leads to the second coming of Christ. According to their line of reasoning, all of this has been prophesied in the bible:

> Paul told us that the 'spirit of the Antichrist' will already be present in the latter days. There is no literal line that's drawn but we can see today that many religions are withdrawing from the standards they once held and are growing closer together.

But not only will the churches grow more and more together: there will be the need for a world currency, a world government, we will all become 'one and equal'. You can already some things moving in that direction. That's one of the reasons America has to fall financially in order to become one with the others. Right now the nation is too powerful: it's the one super power. But when it falls it will all come into one bucket, so to speak.

Pastor Schüler

By 'the spirit of the Antichrist' pastor Schüler refers to the Christian idea that the 'End Times' are near. In short, this means that they are convinced that they, as true Christians, will not be subject to this homogeneity which is in fact the road to destruction: everyone engaging in it inevitably awaits hell. This is more profoundly elaborated in the next chapter.

As argued above, the emphasis on 'human rights' might be considered an example of this homogenization. We might notice that Western nations seem to have established an overall notion of 'what is right and wrong', regardless of specific socio-cultural or religious settings. Nations keep a close watch on each other and do not hesitate to criticize other nation's failures. These tendencies go beyond religious or cultural traditions. This might be clashing with specific worldviews as it opposes biblical truths. The human rights debate concerning homosexuality illustrates this well. The idea that homosexuals have the right to live their lives openly, regardless of other beliefs and views, gains more and more support. An American example hereof is the abolishing of the 'don't ask, don't tell rule' in the American military. Abolishing this rule has been opposed by many religiously conservative Americans, arguing that the bible calls homosexuality an abomination. While conducting fieldwork I noticed that Bible Baptist members strongly 'disagree' with what they refer to as a 'homosexual lifestyle'. They hold on to the idea that one is not born a homosexual. They perceive this as a choice one makes and they strongly believe that it is sinful to every extent:

It's a lifestyle. People who drink, choose to drink and they choose to be an alcoholic. People who are homosexual, choose to be homosexual.

It's like a drunk, he wasn't born with a beer bottle in his hand. He chose it. Homosexuals chose to be like that.

<div align="right">Dave</div>

I don't really know a lot of homosexuals because the people I surrender myself with are Christians. They're not like that. I don't think you're born that way, I think it's a choice. If you're Christian, you don't choose to. I don't believe God would make anybody be 'like that' when he condemns it in his words. God is not hypocritical like that. He says one thing and it's true, all the way.

<div align="right">Julie</div>

I would like to make clear that is not my intention to suggest that Christianity opposes human rights. As for the Bible Baptist church, they do not think homosexuals should be cursed or hated. To them, this is simply a matter of sin since the bible condemns it. About homosexuals I often heard them say that they 'convict the sin, but not the sinner'. In their view, everybody is subject to sin because of the human sin nature, yet God still loves them. On the other hand, however, they would not become friends with a 'practicing homosexual'. In a conversation with pastor Schüler he told me that homosexuals would not be allowed to join the church family. While asking him what he would do if someone talked about being homosexual, he responded that he would make an effort to make him realize that he is living in sin and that this will ruin his life. If this person would repent, he would be welcome to join the church family. One could thus argue that the modern tendency to consider homosexuality a normal, common phenomenon is confusing to church members. This is intensified by the fact that they still consider America as a 'Christian nation' in the way they perceive Christianity should be approached. While talking about this increasing homogenization of Western societies and how this leads to 'downfall', my informants especially seemed to be concerned about the 'lack of morality' that globalization instigates. Homosexuality is one example among others such as abortion, the use of alcohol and premarital sex. Again, one might conclude that Christianity is no longer the only accurate framework in American society and that this can be frustrating for those who hold on to this framework.

A large part of American society, however, seems to support these modern and global tendencies. The overall argument here is that modernity and globalization instigates a certain homogenization of Western societies, relatively exceeding cultural and religious values and resulting in the uprootedness of what might be perceived a 'vast moral system' to some social or religious groups. In this case, it results in the uprootedness of Christianity as a fixed moral framework. To those who still see Christianity as a self-evident moral foundation, this might be a confusing phenomenon.

2.1.3. Individualization leading to uprootedness of communities

The third modern, global process leading to uprootedness is the growing focus on individual experience in modern societies that tends to transcend ideas of a 'shared identity'. Today's world seems to be all about discovering individual passions and needs and following one's own path in life regardless of the 'traditional framework' in which an individual is embedded. Individuals are encouraged to 'think outside the box', find a lifestyle that meets their wishes and desires. Zygmunt Bauman (2001) argues that individualization has become the trademark of modernity, or at least in the case of Europe. I do think this argument is also true for the American context. According to Bauman, individuals strive to become individuals '*de facto*': "*Masters of their own fate, and not merely by public proclamation or self-delusion*" (2001: 72). Due to this increasing individualization one becomes, in a way, uprooted from what used to be one's safe environment. One's socio-cultural or religious background is no longer taken for granted. At the Bible Baptist church, I often heard people talk about individualization. They especially connected this to people's tendency to neglect the church and 'God' for they see a correlation between both phenomena. Many of my informants perceive this individualization as a negative thing.

In an interview my informant Susan described it as follows:

> People are busy. They are more into other things than church. I think that is why the world changed. Immorality happens because people forgot about their cultural values. They're not learning about the Lord!

People can't go to church because they have to go to work. People have

their computers. They travel everywhere and forget church. You know…

People just forget what they're living for.

Weber (cf. Dawson 1998: 137) suggests that 'formal rationality', the rationalization of human needs that takes place in modern societies, results in individual uncertainty. The individual is expected to be different persons at different moments in time. This makes individual self-exploration and self-fulfillment problematic, if not hardly possible (1998: 137). The individual is confounded in a web of choices and options and experiences the lack of a concrete, vast directory in his or her life. Giddens ([1995] cf Kinnvall 2004: 744) argues that *"[…] the individual feels bereft and alone in a world in which he or she lacks the psychological support and sense of security."* Modern societies are more and more characterized as 'abstract' and their implicit anonymity and alienation causes many lives to be 'uprooted' in the sense of detached from their original environments. This can lead to increasing social vulnerability and to individuals experiencing existential anxiety (Bauman 2011).

In the search for a scapegoat for this lack of morality in the global world, neoliberalism is often appointed. The free market economy, neoliberalism's hallmark, brings along the notion that 'everything is for sale'. This is also what Marx has pinned down as 'commodity fetishism', which he considered one of the greatest traps of capitalism (Marx 1945). Notions of commodification affect social contexts greatly. In his most recent book, Bauman (2011: 72) argues how the consumer market replaces our moral plights and takes away our guilt when we fail to take care of others. Bauman considers 'taking care of others' as the very foundation of 'morality' and 'solidarity': they are essential in social contexts (2011: 72). The idea that 'money makes the world go round' and tends to outnumber social interconnectedness implies that the current global situation has a lack of social sensitivity, while this is highly necessary for societies to function.

Individualization and current neoliberal tendencies thus result in the lack of a fixed, steady moral framework. Together with, as I have been arguing above, the scientification of Western societies and their relative homogenization, an uprootedness of earlier social contexts is revealed.

Some individuals and groups might experience this idea of uprootedness as liberating and inspiring, while other individuals and groups might perceive these processes of uprootedness as confusing. They notice how their environment has changed over the last decades and they are unable to make sense of their surroundings. This environment used to instigate feelings of safety, or at least –to a certain extent-, which is now replaced by uncertainty and dynamism. They perceive this new situation as confusing and even frustrating.

2.2. Introducing the 'culture of protection'

In correspondence to what some perceive as confusing uprootedness, the longing for recognition, nearness and dialogue might arise. Individuals may consider this 'uprootedness' as a negative phenomenon and create the need for a safe haven, a 'steady' small-scaled group to which they can refer and feel at home with (2011: 112). In others words, people might experience the need to belong to a community. Durkheim (cf Marshall 2002: 361) argued that people tend to seek the company of those who they perceive as thinking and feeling as they do, especially in times of uncertainty. Globalization can result in the redefining and reclaiming of community boundaries. To this I refer as a 'culture of protection'. By this 'culture of protection' I understand a set of mechanisms of protection a community might 'offer' its members, in order to cope with these uprooting globalization processes. The community, in a way, strives to reduce this insecurity that modernization and globalization processes steer. Security is a core concept in this idea of the 'culture of protection' in the sense that removing and preventing insecurity is one of the most fundamentally important tasks of a community. Security can thus be analyzed as a 'thick signifier': it is considered in a broader framework, placing the individual and the group inside the wider continuities in which they are embedded. Eric Hobsbawm (cf. Bauman 2001) has observed that

> never was the word 'community' used more indiscriminately and emptily
> than in the decades when communities in the sociological sense became
> hard to find in real life […]

Men and women look for groups to which they can belong, certainly and forever, in a world in which all else is moving and shifting, in which nothing else is certain.

<div align="right">2001: 15</div>

While doing fieldwork I noticed that the Bible Baptist church as a religious community - sometimes implicitly, sometimes explicitly - provides this 'culture of protection' to its members. In a world hallmarked by multiple truths, they hold on to one clear-cut message and answers to complex problems: God has a plan for everything and He is coming back to save His people. This inspires community members to resign in their fate and accept difficulties and inexplicable circumstances occurring in their lives. It gives them footing. It creates a warm, joyful atmosphere which is, I can't help but noticing, catching. During my stay, I felt how cozy a community can be. I noticed the warmth and the affinity people feel towards each other.

In the following chapters, I consider and investigate this 'culture of protection' and how the Bible Baptist church as a community provides this to its members. I examine how they cope with these 'uprooting processes' that are present in the global age. I consider multiple mechanisms of this 'culture of protection' they engage in: how they explore and define their community boundaries, who they consider as 'Others' and eventually how the community is literally 'protected' from the 'outside world' by creating a relative alternative society or 'counterculture'. Let us start by exploring the Bible Baptist church as a community.

3. COMMUNITY

'Rapture'

"Are you ready?" The pastor asks.

"Are you ready for the return of Jesus? How great the day will be when He returns! I am ready to be with Him up in heaven. Amen?"

"A-men" is widely mumbled.

People at Bible Baptist church aren't exactly the boisterous type, but they won't hesitate to confirm their enthusiasm with a modest Texas style *'A-men'*. It's a hot Sunday evening, and I'm sitting with Diane and her family in the middle of the simple church auditorium. All church members are in their usual spots, freshly washed and neatly dressed. The pastor stands on the small stage in the front with a KJV bible in his hand.

"The tribulation is close, you can see signs everywhere. The bible tells us that people are going to laugh more and more about God and Christians. They will make fun of us and our Lord because they are misled by Satan. Eventually they will even ignore our voices because they are too blind to see the truth. Do not worry: this will all be over soon… It could even be today! That would be great, Amen?"

"A-men!"

"I tell you: It is worth the waiting and the suffering. After the Lord's return, he will rule on earth for 10.000 years. We have to stay strong until the time comes. Living righteous is not easy because Satan tries to mislead you in every way that he can. He is everywhere, hiding and waiting for you to fall into his traps, but we serve a powerful God. Amen?"

"A-men!"

One man nods and adds *"That's right!"*

"It will be difficult, but it will be worth it!"

Then, the pastor turns to the children in the front.

"What would you like to have for dinner, your first night in heaven?"

"Chocolate ice cream!" one of the children replies.

"Key lime pie" another one says.

The adults chuckle.

The pastor then replies that he would like to have a big piece of the triple fudge chocolate cake one of the older ladies at church baked him the other day. He rubs over his big stomach and grins.

"I guess in heaven, I wouldn't need to worry about getting bigger though! When we will be with Him, we will be sorrowless. There will be no sin. Hurt and sadness do not exist in heaven. We will be so happy and joyful!"

By looking at Diane's face, I can nearly feel her hope and her great expectations.

"But just imagine how it must feel to be left behind here on earth. Just imagine how it must be like for all these sinners, all these people who are deviated from the path of God. Or people who have rejected Him as their savior. Or people who have never even heard of the Gospel of Christ. That makes me sad. Amen?"

"A-men!"

"We have sinners among us that aren't saved. They are in desperate need of the Lord."

I know the pastor is not specifically referring to me, but it feels as if he's talking to me in person. Every once in a while, someone cautiously lays eyes on me. I am, of course, one of those who could be lost forever. I can tell that they pity me.

"Think about how awful it would be, knowing that there's no hope, living without the light of Christ. They would have to go to hell for eternity. It is only by grace that I am saved. Amen?"

"A-men"

"So we are very lucky to be a community of believers and know that we have a home in heaven. Do you have a home in heaven?"

"A-men!"

3.1. The church as a family

> And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works:
> Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some
> is; but exhorting one another; and so much the more, as ye see the day
> approaching.
>
> Hebrews 10: 24-25 [4]

This bible verse was quoted by many of my informants in describing why it is important to worship as a group, and to have a 'church family'. God, they explain, has directed His people to come together and inspire each other to continue being living temples of His word. Next to the fact that they were instructed to do so, they see many other advantages of being in a group. Moreover, many feel that being in church is as being with family. It is a place where they can be with others who share their faith and ideas. Diane puts it this way:

> It is important to spend time together as a group, as a family. Because that's what we are at Bible Baptist Church: we're a family of believers. We're all in God's family and we love each other like a family. So it's very important for us to be together and to be with those who share the same beliefs that we do. When I worship as a group, I have the support of others who stand beside me.

Church members seem to consider being in church more than just a 'tradition' or a ritual of singing, praying and reading scripture. Being in church feels like being with family, in a safe environment. It feels like being home.

> Having a church family means that you always have support. If something happens they're always there to help. You can just ask for help. Even better now, I don't even have to ask. Whenever there is a problem they will always do whatever they can to help. They're very good people.
>
> Phil

---

[4] In this thesis, whenever a bible verse is quoted I refer (as my informants) to the 'King James Version' of the bible. *Reference: 2011 KJV Study Bible, Uhrichsville: Barbour Publishing*

Church members share their beliefs, daily issues and their love and passion for Christ whom they believe to be their savior. It is a place where they 'belong'.

Let us, for a moment, approach this group of people that form the Bible Baptist church as a social construct. Belonging to a group or a community where one feels recognized and accepted is argued to be human instinctive tendency. This feeling of belonging is multilayered, fluid and complex for identity has many levels that can be ambiguous and overlapping. Important aspects of one's social identity are established on the community level. Belonging to a community is argued to be essential in one's life: *"A community is where people acquire their most fundamental and substantial experiences of social life"* Cohen (1985: 15) The construction of a community is often seen as a dialogical, relational process: defining the 'Self' occurs by referring to a 'significant Other' (Cohen 1985, Boon 1982). The beginning and the end of a community is marked by imagined, symbolic boundaries that are rather fluid then vast. These boundaries are representations to how the community characterizes itself to the outside world. They do not always represent the community in its full, complicated shape, but rather reflect the community in a 'simplified mode'. Next to representing themselves in a simplified way, communities might tend to simplify features of other groups and put them in contrast to how they represent themselves. In other words: a collective identity is established by creating implicit or explicit contrasts between the own group and 'Others'. This can then be seen as the foundation of a 'collective identity' (Brahim 2011: 7).

It might be interesting to consider the theological concepts of the 'End Times', more specifically the idea of 'Rapture' as a symbolic boundary that encloses the Bible Baptist church as a community. The biblical book of 'Revelation' explores these concepts thoroughly. Historians have argued that the texts were written by the apostle John during his banishment from the Roman Empire. They can be interpreted as a protest to the tyrannical, secular Roman power. It is argued that the book's underlying intention was to reassure believers that God's justice is eternal and will eventually triumph (Bivins 2008: 172). The texts are interpreted in a variety of ways by different Christian denominations, whereas some read them symbolically and others take them literally. Bible Baptist church members claim to take prophesies as

predicted in 'Revelation' literally, just as the bible in its whole is believed to be the explicit word of God.

The book of 'Revelation' narrates Paul's vision of how the world as we know it will gradually come to an end. It declares what will happen in these 'latter days' before the End Times take place. It also describes how Christ will return a second time. Other biblical books, such as '1 Corinthians', also appoint to this 'second coming of Christ':

> Behold, I shall shew you a mystery; we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed. In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. Or this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory.
>
> 1 Corinthians 15: 51- 54

The idea that all members of the community are saved and have eternal life offers a source of identification. I consider this to be an important aspect of their collective identity. They are 'God's people'. On the other hand, 'Others' supporting other ideas or systems of belief are considered to be wrong. Yet, Rapture is not a fixed symbolic boundary: my informants often claimed that there are 'saved' people in all religions or belief systems. In essence, the only thing one has to do is accept Jesus Christ as his or her savior. This could be considered as the 'simplified mode' in which they present themselves to 'Others'. Being a Christian means being 'saved'. However, the 'End Times' seem to be much more than only a community 'boundary'. The idea that heaven awaits them seems to give members of the Bible Baptist church strength and calmness. It helps them to put occurrences in perspective and it assures them that life will eventually get better, regardless of difficulties and struggles on earth. One evening at Diane and Phil's place, I joined them and some other church members for 'game night'. We were having dinner and playing board games. All of a sudden the conversation turned to the topic of 'being saved'. Anecdotes were told about how

comforting and assuring it feels to be 'saved' or, as they poetically named it: 'having a home in heaven'. They explained how it helps them to cope with losing beloved ones. Janice told me that her grandfather, when he died, was incredibly peaceful and at ease with his fate. She told me that *"he knew he was going to be with the Lord and that one day they would all be united in heaven"*.

Being 'saved' is thus an element that unites the Bible Baptist church as a community in multiple ways. It provides a 'boundary' which helps defining their community. It also provides a sense of nearness and security to the community members. It helps them accepting their fate. However, while these boundaries present the community in a relative 'simplified' form, it needs to be remarked that the Bible Baptist church is essentially more complicated. This is noticeable when we take a closer look on morality and moral guidelines. My informants often argued that being a Christian means being 'Christ like': the ultimate goal of life is to live one's life close to the way Jesus did. One, thus, has to follow biblical 'suggestions' and codes of behavior. However, these suggestions do not always appear to be clear-cut since biblical language is often metaphorical and vague. This can lead to diversity inside the community.

3.2. Diversity

To many church members some rules are obvious and unassailable. Not drinking alcohol, being pro-life, and protecting the 'sacredness of marriage' are examples. Other informants, for example, said to occasionally drink alcohol and did not condemn abortion in all situations. The following two quotes on abortion reflect the variety of ideas inside the church community:

> I believe that Abortion is murder in all forms. Someone's rape wouldn't change my idea about the decision or about how I feel about the abortion. Because we're taught that life begins at the moment of the conception. God knows that child.
>
> Diane

> [Abortion] can be right under certain circumstances. If you were raped you
> had no control over that situation, and so you either have an abortion or you
> can give the baby up for adoption.

> Julie

Also consider diversity in stands towards alcohol. The biblical book of Proverbs states a verse on alcohol: *"Wine is a mocker, strong drink is raging: and whosoever is deceived thereby is not wise."* (Proverbs 20: 1) My informants often quoted this verse while taking a stand on alcohol. Yet, it serves as justification for either drinking alcohol or renouncing it. Dave explains it as follows:

> The bible says that every man is persuaded in his own mind. And drinking…
> if I was to drink, I'd feel like it would be wrong. The bible says that you
> should not enter sin. To me it means that I shouldn't drink. If I was to go to
> drink, it would definitely count as sin.

Julie, on the other hand, interprets this passage in another way:

> I occasionally drink an alcoholic beverage. I don't drink on a daily basis or a
> lot. The bible says 'don't be drunk'. It's the idea of not letting something else
> take control of you. You have to be in control.

These quotes illustrate how vagueness of biblical language can lead to internal differences inside the community. It can even cause members to question their fellows' 'salvation', or at least questioning if they're as 'Christ like' as Christians according to them should be. A passage in the book of Matthew states *"Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them."* (Matthew 7: 20). The Bible Baptist members that consider themselves 'more strict' often quoted this verse to clarify that the more persistent one follows biblical advises the more 'Christ like' one becomes. Being 'Christ like' is considered to be the highest virtue because to them Christ equals perfection. This flexibility in the meaning of 'being a good Christian' can occasionally lead to implicit divisions within the community, or strengthens the existence of 'cliques' within the community.

While going shopping with Janice one day, she said that even though she considered each of the church members as her family, she could not always relate to everybody at church:

> Some people at church are just different. They talk about different things than me and my closer friends do. You know, they sometimes go to a club or drink alcohol and stuff… There is just some kind of a barrier. When I'm with the people that I usually hang out with, I just know that we are on the same wavelength.

When explicitly pointed to this, however, church members explicitly reaffirm the existence of 'cliques'. They argue that their church is one big family. To emphasize their homogeneity and relativize the other's 'Otherness', however, 'Romans 3: 23' is often brought up: *"For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God"*. At Bible Baptist church, the sin nature of all humans is often emphasized. Everybody is subject to sin and repeatedly needs to ask God for forgiveness. Each Wednesday evening service, church members can ask their fellows to pray for them, people in their environment that have problems of any kind and also sins they have personally committed. While entering the church everybody receives a 'Prayer Request form'. All kinds of prayer requests are written down. Displaying one's sin can in a way be considered as a legitimation of other church members' sins and acknowledge the community's diversity.

3.3. The community as mediator

Community boundaries can sometimes be presented as clear-cut entities. Yet, in reality they are vague and blurred. When it comes to moral and social guidelines biblical language is often vague and metaphorical. In Protestant Christianity[5] there is no clear set of such guidelines as there is in Catholicism, Islam and Judaism.

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[5] The Bible Baptist Church does not consider itself to be 'Protestant' even though they historically derive from An|glicans, a branch is Protestantism (Hill 2007: 268). They argue that they derive directly from disciples of John the Baptist, and thus form a branch on their own.

Because of the vagueness in scripture a wide variety of interpretations comes into existing among Protestant denominations. These different interpretations often contradict each other. God does not always seem to concretely speak for Himself, and so there is the need for another, more concrete point of referring. The actual authority of the bible can be considered as limited when it comes down to 'daily life'. One might argue that the community then holds the position of presenting clear moral codes for its members. The Bible Baptist church pastors can be seen as incorporations of this authority. Especially the senior pastor Schüler is considered a trustworthy 'source' of knowledge and can be considered as a reflection of this communal compromise between the biblical 'vagueness' and the contemporary reality. Also, the associate pastor is a marriage- and child's counselor. Church members can consult them when they need advice. The moral suggestions the pastor offers in sermons are considered to be worthy of pursuit. Members seem to take them into consideration:

> Pastor Schüler always talks about how sports are becoming more important than going to church. How people miss church because their kid has this or that going on. But what's more important? What's gonna last forever? We're not gonna play baseball forever. Baseball will eventually stop. God never stops. He is forever. Pastor has a point there.
>
> <div align="right">Dave</div>

> Lately, the pastor has been putting a lot of emphasis on not drinking and not smoking. Honestly, I don't do it that often. Lately, he has also been talking a lot about forgiving people and getting right with them. Forgiving of their downfalls and things like that. I'm like 'yeah, I probably should do that a little bit more'. It can be hard, right? But he is certainly right.
>
> <div align="right">Julie</div>

A religious community can strive to rest on a concrete set of social and moral handles to which the individual can refer. As argued, processes of globalization might result in communities being subjected to pressure.

Individuals and groups that experience this uprootedness as a 'culture of confusion' might try to redefine community boundaries in order to protect their community against these processes. Durkheim has argued that when social contexts are subjected to changes, these changes need to be internally generated and need to gain moral legitimacy in order to reinstall the social cohesion in the group (cf. Dingley 2010). Yet, in today's world communities are constantly subjected to social change and there is to argue that the community boundaries are "*blurred in the very effort to define them*" (Bivins 2008: 18). In line with Durkheim, I noticed that the Bible Baptist church as a community guides its members in the search for balance between the flexibility globalization requires of individuals, and their need for stability. As the community serves as some kind of 'connecting piece' between the individual and God, it also incorporates this function between the individual and the 'outside world'. Who they define as 'the outside world', and how this occurs is further explored in the next chapter.

4. OTHERING

'Eating Jesus'

"Today, churches all over the world have difficulties." Pastor says.

"There is too much selfishness, too many deviations. God's word is God's word! In this church the true word of God is preached, Amen?"

"A-men" the church members respond.

"I see other churches place the emphasis on 'comfort'. They have a 'cross without blood'. They only think about themselves, give too much attention to personal stories and get away from Jesus. They try to be 'nice to everybody'."

"That's right" one man says. People nod and make affirmative sounds. They agree.

"The Lord's Supper is a good example of how other churches are deviating from God's path. Let me give you some examples of deviations. Did you know that Catholics believe in 'transubst…'"

Pastor grins

"Wow, that's difficult to pronounce. How did they even came up with such a word? I mean 'tran-sub-stan-tia-tion'. It means that Catholics believe that Communion is the body and the blood of Christ. So Catholics actually believe that it's Jesus' body that they're eating, and that they're drinking his blood. That's dreadful, ain't it?"

While mostly quiet and composed, there's a sudden hum in the audience. Church members seem disgusted and upset by the idea of 'eating Jesus'. Some people shake their heads and sigh. I notice one lady looking at her son who is sitting beside her, shaking her head and whispering something in his ear. Diane, who is sitting next to me, stares at me with a concerned look in her eyes. Knowing that I was raised a Catholic, she quietly asks me if it's true what the pastor said. I feel uncomfortable by this sudden mute reproach, and indecisively about how to respond. I know that she knows I'm not a practicing Catholic, but I still feel targeted. Reflecting on it for a moment, I never thought I was actually 'eating Jesus' when I used to receive Communion in church and I really don't think Catholics actually feel that way. I then cautiously whisper that this might be a little exaggerated.

There are also those who believe in 'consubstantiation'." Pastor continues

"They don't really think that the Communion is the literal body of Jesus, but they believe He is 'inside' or that He is 'present'. Also, there are those who believe that the Lord's Supper is a social meal, even those who think that taking Communion leads to salvation! "

The latter seems to shock the members of the church as well.

"Fortunately, Baptists don't want to ruin the Gospel. The Lord's Supper is a memorial service where we look at the scripture. It is not a means of receiving saving grace. It does not help you to get saved. It's just a symbolic tradition. The others are just… wrong!"

"A-men!"

"But in Jesus' time, when He lived, there were no such things as 'denominations'. Back then, the simple and plain truth was preached! More and more people these days are doing things in church that doesn't have anything to do with the bible anymore!"

"We have to go and tell as many people as we can about the true word of God. Amen?"

"Amen"

"That's right!"

"Are you in the Lord's army?"

"Yeah!"

"Remember that song? Let's sing it together!"

Pastor raises his low, warm voice and bursts into a song. The church members merrily sing along.

> I may never march in the infantry
> Ride in the cavalry
> Shoot the artillery
> I may never fly o'er the enemy
> But I'm in the Lord's army!
> Yes Sir!

4.1. Christianity, Truth Claims & Othering.

> For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is
> written. The just shall live by faith.
>
> <div align="right">Romans 1:17</div>

At this point I would like to make a note on Christianity. I already engaged in the discussion about the vagueness of biblical language and how this can lead to diversity within a community. Now, I aim to broaden this discussion to the difference among Christian denominations and – concretely - how this can lead to 'Othering'. Although I do not consider this the place to digress into profound theological discussions, it is relevant to shed more light on this topic for it helps understanding how my informants consider other Christians.

The very essence of Western Christianity is that one has to believe in Christ whose blood has covered earthly sins. Bosch (1991: 187) identifies Western churches as '*staurological*' deriving from the ancient Greek word '*stauros'* which can be translated as 'wood'. Western Christianity tends to focus on the wooden cross. Sin is central: Bosch argues that "*In the West, the emphasis was [is] on the ravages of sin and the reparation of fallen humanity through a crisis experience.*" This core idea is held in common by all branches of Western Christianity. Next to this central thought many variations in conceptions, rituals and interpretations of scripture exist among different branches within Western Christianity. As argued above, the bible can be interpreted in a variety of ways even inside fundamentalist Christian communities that claim to take the bible literally. The passage of the Lord's Supper, where the ritual of the 'Holy Communion' is presented, serves as a good example. This is what the KJV bible literally quotes:

> And as they all were eating, Jesus took bread, and blessed it, and brake it,
> and gave it to the disciples, and said, Take, eat; this is my body. And he took
> the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, Drink ye all of it; for
> this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many of the
> remission of sins.
>
> <div align="right">Matthew 26: 26-27</div>

Many Christian denominations rest on different interpretations of this part of scripture (Harrison 1992). This is expressed in a wide variety of rituals. At Bible Baptist church the Communion is only received on select occasions in all serenity and intimacy. On such an occasion, scripture is recited and there is a bible study session where the meaning of the 'Lord's Supper' is examined. When they perform the actual ritual of Communion they eat crackers and drink grape juice. The ritual is strongly emphasized for its symbolism. The Communion serves as one example among many. In general there is to say that different Christian branches have different understandings and interpretations of biblical passages and rituals. Since every Christian community rests on their own frame of interpretation, they often explicitly disclaim other interpretations of the bible than their own (Hill 2007).

Even though I previously argued that the Bible Baptist church appears to be a complicated community, the church members seem to agree to a 'general doctrine' which they consider an all-encompassing truth. They genuinely believe that there is no other way of leading one's life correctly and going to 'heaven' than by 'being saved'. John 14: 6 is often quoted: "*Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me."* Being saved means accepting Jesus Christ as your personal savior and asking Him to come into your heart. Other denominations seem to have other convictions or customs to establish this. Bible Baptist church members claim those other convictions to be false:

> Some other denominations believe in fundamentally different things. For instance, speaking in tongues, or being saved at baptism. That's just not good. They're teaching the wrong things and they believe it. That's so sad! I just wished they would look it up in their bibles and see that that's just not the truth. If they would just see how wrong they are and then see what the truth is and that any of them can get saved… that would be wonderful.
>
> Matt

People are starting to believe more in other religions or no religion at all. People believe in 'whatever'. These days people seem to know nothing about God. That's a problem. Even teachers or pastors can teach you wrong things about the bible, wrong ways of living. People don't open their bibles anymore. You know, there's so much immorality. People don't know what God stands for anymore. They don't know about all these great things God has done for us. They don't know what the bible actually says. People lost the truth.

<div align="right">Christina</div>

Brahim (2011: 10) argues that it is a common characteristic of religions and ideologies to claim 'universality'. He distinguishes two features on which this universality is often based: The first is the idea of a group claiming to have exceptional or superior values that should be extended to other cultures for their own benefit. The second feature is that *"the 'superior culture' is considered as a systematic and pure set"* (2011: 10). Both of these features are clearly present in the beliefs of the Bible Baptist members. Their tendency to convert as many people as possible in order to give them 'hope and truth' underlines this. In an interview Susan said: *"When you're saved, you know where you're going. How would you feel if someone dies and you know you wouldn't ever see him again? That's sad, isn't it?"* The, to them, 'fact' that they are saved is a clear boundary that encloses them as a community, and clearly sets them apart from 'Others'.

'Other Christians' that adhere to other denominations are often referred to as 'false prophets' by Bible Baptist members. The concept derives from the bible and is often used in connection to the 'End Times'. When the 'End Times' approach, states the bible, there will be an increase in the existence of 'false prophets' stating 'false truths':

And false Christs and false prophets shall rise, and shall shew signs and wonders, to seduce, if it were possible, even the elect. But take ye heed: behold, I have foretold you all things.

<div align="right">Mark 12: 37</div>

Most of my informants at Bible Baptist church are convinced that the 'End Times' are near[6]. They see these false prophets in many 'Others', especially in 'other Christians'. They adhere to 'false doctrines' and are perceived to be under the influence of Satan. Satan is said to put the faith of 'true Christians' to the test. Other versions of the bible are also perceived as one of Satan's tricks:

> These days you have the ESV, the RSV, the GW, NLT[7]… All these different
> interpretations of the bible. But I think this is just Satan trying to trick
> people. If you take the truth and add just a little bit, or take away a little bit
> of the truth… Then you don't have the truth anymore.

> Dave

In his sermons, Bible Baptist church's senior pastor frequently warns against these false prophets and doctrines. 'Mega churches' are especially targeted because of their contemporary form of worshipping, music style and their emphasis on individual testimonies. In one of his sermons Pastor Schüler argued this:

> On tv, we see false prophets preaching. Actually, they are cowards. They
> adjust their sermons to the modern society which is obsessed by
> entertainment. Some of them even deny that Jesus is the son of God. The
> bible warned us for false prophets. Everything is changing in the world: the
> ethics, for example. This is of the spirit of the Antichrist. I'm not saying that
> it is the Antichrist himself. Not yet! But it is of the spirit of the Antichrist, and
> we should be very aware and cautious for this.

In an interview, the pastor stated this:

> You have some mega churches like 'Calvary' over there that have a doctrine
> and a teaching that is like 'we'll get along with every lifestyle that you want'.
> A lot of these large churches are like that: they have coffee shops, stores
> and so on. They seem to feel that it's more important to drink coffee than

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[6] Even though most of my informants proclaimed how they saw signs of the nearing Rapture, they did not claim a specific date.
[7] These abbreviations mean respectively: English Standard Version, Revised Standard Version, God's Word and New Living Translation.

actually hearing the word of God. I think they have been pressing God out of their minds. They know His name but they don't actually know who He is. […] Or Methodists: They believe that the bible was written for a different time, and they don't believe what it says. They preach what I would call a 'social gospel'. I think they're teaching and preaching a false doctrine, a false teaching.

The way people at Bible Baptists church perceive 'other Christians' illustrates this concept of 'Othering' well. Again here, we notice that religious matters serve as symbolic boundaries: by defining other Christians that adhere to other denominations as 'Others', they define themselves as true believers and advocates of the truth. This results in the creation of an in- and out- group (Kinnvall 2004). The ingroup consists of everyone who adheres to their specific interpretation of the bible which they see as 'the truth'. This contributes to the reinforcement of their collective identity and thus of them as a community. The outgroup is considered and often referred to as 'the outside world'. 'Othering' does however not only occur in correspondence to other Christians. Let us consider this phenomenon in a broader sense and take a look at other components of this 'outside world': non-Christians.

4.2. '*In* the world but not *of* the world'

The other day we had our neighbors inviting us over. We were really nervous because... they might be drinking! They might have alcohol! So we decided we would still go and if they'd offer us a drink, we say 'no, we don't drink'. We knew we were gonna say no but we were worried they might have had it. We would make sure that whatever we would be drinking, we were gonna ask if it contains alcohol before we drank it. It turned out to be fine: there was no beer or anything but… You never know! Because I didn't know them! We didn't know if they were saved or not. We didn't know them like we know Diane and Phil or other people at church… I could invite them over to eat and don't have to worry about them ordering a beer or something. I know they would never do that! But if I might go out with some of our other neighbors and we would be like 'Yeah, let's go to 'Chili's' and

they would order a beer and I'm having to sit at the table with them, that would make me very uncomfortable.

I'm not supposed to be around them. That's something I don't want to associate myself with.

<div align="right">Dave</div>

While doing research, I noticed an ambiguity in my informants' attitude to non-Christians. On one side they explicitly turn away from them because these 'Others' incorporate many things the bible condemns. On the other side, however, they express concern for non-Christians. This paradox can be connected to the biblical passage of John 15:19: "*If ye were of the world, the world would love his own; but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you."* In sermons and conversations at church or in interviews this verse was often quoted. In multiple passages the bible states believers are not 'of' the world but prescribe them to be 'in' the world. To Christians, life on earth is but a temporarily phase. They believe their 'real lives' start when they will eventually be united with Christ up in heaven. To become as much 'Christ like' possible, to honor Him fully, they should not intensely engage with non- believers: they could distract them from their goals. Satan is also said to be hiding anywhere in order to mislead them or test their trustworthiness as believers. Partially, thus, they do not wish to engage in deep friendships with 'them' because they cannot seem to relate to them in a specific way:

We can't have those friendships because they're so… I mean we care about them, they can be great people. But the difference is that we're forgiven and they're not. And that's a big difference. I probably won't engage in having an actual friendship with them where you can share your deepest feelings and… That kind of relationship is just not possible.

<div align="right">Diane</div>

The idea that they are 'not of the world' contributes to the establishing of a 'counterculture'[8]. Yet, on the other hand, Christians are said to be 'in' the world and provided the 'duty' to carry out a Christian lifestyle, to be a 'good example' and spread the gospel to as many as they can. Pastor Greg has uttered it this way:

> We need to live in the world, to be a help to the world. We are to warn people about what they're doing. But how can we warn people when we're not different than them? I've got a screensaver on my computer and it's a lighthouse. If that light does not shine in the darkness the ships cannot be saved from any danger. It's similar. We have to stand out. We have to be different. We can't be dark like they're dark. Otherwise everything crashes.

Engagement in the 'Other' is important to Christians because it can lead to more people 'finding the Lord'[9]. The bible has incited believers to spread the gospel and thereby try to convert as many people as they can. John 20, verse 21 is an example of a verse that underlines this: "*Peace be unto you: as my father hath sent me, even so send I you."* Converting 'Others' is a topic that often recurred in church sermons and conversations between my informants. Going from door to door in their own town and supporting missionaries all over the world are examples of their engagement herein.

4.2.1. Stereotyping 'Others'

Twice a month, on Wednesday evenings, the church has missionaries coming over to tell stories about their 'field' and perform a sermon in the hope to gain financial support to continue their work. The stories told by missionaries contribute to how 'Othering' occurs among the church community. This happens in a specific way. Consider this example. On a Wednesday evening in march, the church welcomed Kurt Logan: a missionary to Rome, Italy. During his sermon he talked about how Rome - on the surface - appears to be a beautiful 'ancient' city. Yet, deep down, he stated that there is a very dark side to Rome. He said that Catholics are told by their

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[8] This idea of 'counterculture' is further explored in chapter 5 of this thesis.
[9] 'leading someone to the Lord' means helping someone in their conversion to Christianity.

church that they are intellectually incapable of reading the bible and therefore leaving this to their priests. I, being raised a Catholic, know for a fact that this is not accurate. He also said that 'the church of Satan' is the upcoming religion in Rome, established by many immigrants living there. He presented statistics to reinforce his words of which I sincerely question their scientific dependability. Protestant missionaries were said to be chased off by Catholics. "*Therefore*," he argued, *"Romans are in desperate need of the gospel."* I noticed that people at church were shocked about what they were told. I was quite surprised about how 'sensational' his story was. This was nevertheless not an exception. Another Wednesday night a missionary to Cambodia nearly pretended as if the genocide was still taking place. He asked the church to help him turn Cambodia 'the living fields' instead of 'the killing fields'.

Looking at the Bible Baptist church from a scientific point of view, missionaries could be considered as a contributing factor in how 'Others' are perceived. This can be perceived as an illustration of how 'Others' can be portrayed in a 'simplified', stereotypical way. In the previous section I have also illustrated that other Christians are generally all seen as 'false prophets' and hereby portrayed in a – sometimes even fictive – stereotypical way. Recall the example of 'eating Jesus'. As argued before, considering actors of 'the outside world' in such a relatively uncomplicated way helps church members to create differences between their own community and 'Others'. It contributes in defining the own collective identity.

Yet, we should not neglect the complexity of these mechanisms of 'Othering'. The image a community has of a group of 'Others' can be adjusted when these 'Others' are actually encountered. Let us quickly consider an illustration hereof: myself. I, a European, agnostic yet catholic raised 'Other' popped up in at Bible Baptist church, wanting to build 'rapport' and thus wanting to be part of these people's lives for a short period of time. Even though in interviews they stated they could not befriend 'Others', they have let me in their church and their homes without hesitation. They seemed genuinely interested in who I was and what my beliefs were, sharing their own beliefs and convictions with me. They were however also hoping that I would 'find God' and be 'saved' as well.

This was an often raised topic. Even though as 'good Christians' they are called up to do this I never experienced this as some kind of 'plight' they felt they needed to meet.

In this chapter I have been exploring dynamic, ambiguous mechanisms of 'Othering' that I encountered among people at Bible Baptist church.

I have been arguing that church members define their own community boundaries by opposing themselves strongly to 'Others'. These 'Others' are 'other Christians' as well as 'non-Christians'. Together they constitute what church members define as 'the outside world'. By portraying the actors in the outside world in a simplified, stereotypical way they oppose themselves to them. This leads to the redefinition of their own boundaries as a community. Now let us further explore how Bible Baptist church members cope with the 'outside world' in their daily life. In the following chapter I elaborate further on the idea of how this 'in the world and of the world' is put into practice: by establishing a relative counterculture or an 'alternative society'.

5. TOWARDS AN ALTERNATIVE SOCIETY?

'Sunday School'

"Okay kids, let's play a little game. It's called 'follow the leader'. Let's all stand to our feet. Now copy me!"

The Sunday school teacher taps her head with one hand and then rubs her stomach with her other hand. The children try to copy these gestures but they seem to be difficult.

"Good job, boys and girls! You can all take a seat now. Well, you have been copying me because I asked you to. Is it always good to do what people tell you?"

The children stare at the teacher.

"No, it's not a good thing! In the end it's only the word of God that matters. This can be very hard sometimes because people can be very convincing in getting you to follow them. They could say things like: 'Hey, it's okay to try a cigarette. No one will find out. Just try it, once!' Or they could ask you 'Hey, do you think the bible is truly the word of God? This can't be true!' Or they could say 'Humans derive from monkeys'. Isn't that the craziest thing, kids?"

The children laugh at the idea of humans deriving from monkeys.

"People have a soul. That's what makes us different from animals. God blew a soul in every one of us. Animals don't have a soul. So we don't derive from monkeys. That's just a plain lie! So never believe when somebody says things like that! Ok, now let's stand to our feet and sing and dance along."

The children stand up, look at the teacher and start singing and dancing along. The song goes like this:

> I'm no kin to the monkey
>
> The Monkey's no kin to me
>
> I don't know much about your ancestry
>
> But mine didn't swing from a tree

5.1. Counterculture

> I think the church is some kind of an alternative society. If you look at the
> world today, you see that most societies drink, dance, wife swap,… Those
> things have become 'common'. But not in church! The book of 'second
> Timothy', chapter three states that in the latter days, men shall become
> lovers of themselves; blasphemers, disobedient to their parents, without
> natural affection, false accusers, fierce, despisers of those who are good,
> high minded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God. People will turn
> their ears from the truth. When a person becomes a Christian, the Holy
> Spirit indwells them and they become living temples of God. So we create, in
> essence, a separate community within the world.
>
> <div align="right">Pastor Schüler</div>

Karen Armstrong (2000: 215) has argued that fundamentalist Christians in the 20th
century strived to install a counterculture, an alternative society inside the
'established' American society. Concretely, she refers to the fact that the
fundamentalist scenes have been creating universities, television- and radio-
stations, stores, museums and other accommodations for those who do not agree
with the 'modern lifestyle' in which the mainstream society engages in: "*There were
'two nations' in America, unable to share each other's vision of the modern world."*
(2004: 217) Gramsci (cf. Worsley 1997), in developing this concept of
'counterculture', argued that people acquire ideas about their place in society
through 'cultural apparatuses', public or private institutions instigating ideas on
'customary forms of social behavior and dominant moral codes' (1997: 264). These
codes become dominant in the sense that individuals experience them as 'natural'
and 'common'. In order to turn away from these hegemonic structures other
ideologies should be organized in such a way that people adhering to them truly
internalize its set of ideas and genuinely believe in them. Gramsci argued that due to
this a counterculture could come into existing. If we think of 'culture' from such a
structural point of view, the link with the concept of a 'culture of protection' is
anything but far-fetched. Yet I do propose we should leave more room for the
dynamic elements of concepts as 'culture' and 'counterculture'. In reality notions of

'counterculture' appear to be more fluid, relative and ambiguous. Consider the example of the biblical concept of 'in the world but not of the world' as examined in the previous chapter and how this leads to an ambiguous attitude to 'Others'. Yet, to a relative extent it is no exaggeration to say that people at Bible Baptist church strive towards this creation of a 'counterculture' or 'alternative society'. As mentioned before they strongly oppose to some elements in mainstream society. Tv is a good example hereof. Phil said the following:

> If something on tv has a lot of bad language to it, I feel offended by that. If something is too 'sexually overt' or based on homosexuality I'm probably not gonna watch it. 'Brokeback Mountain' is a good example. I have no desire to see it. The whole movie is based on homosexuality. They propagate it as 'a good thing'. I just cannot agree with that.

It is to note that the contemporary American society provides many accommodations and elements in order to satisfy the need for a 'counterculture' or even this 'alternative society'. As Armstrong (2004) mentioned, the conservative Christian 'scene' has been establishing an entire infrastructure to meet Christian lifestyles: museums promoting 'Intelligent Design', Christians broadcasting companies, Christians stores and Christian music record labels among many other things. A concrete illustration of how - and to what extent - this 'alternative society' functions is how church members educate their children.

5.2. Raising Children

Since mainstream society incorporates many lifestyles and social codes of behavior that do not correspond theirs, it is relevant to consider the education of children within the Bible Baptist church. Raising children, I believe, provides a good illustration of their relative strive towards a 'counterculture'. In conversations and interviews with informants the subject of raising and 'protecting' families was often discussed. Families are seen as the 'cornerstone' of the community and their importance is highly emphasized. Dave and his wife are married for a few years now and cherish plans to start a family in the near future.

They already pictured concrete plans about how their children were going to be raised:

> I don't want my kids to grow up believing in evolution. If you're a Christian you don't want your kid to believe that. You want it to believe in God and God's word. We'll teach them God's word and say 'this is the truth'. As they get older and understand, I will teach them about what 'the world' says, and what the school is trying to teach them.
>
> <div align="right">Dave</div>

As before, I can't help but noticing how they seem to mistrust society and its assumptions. They tend to see 'the truth' and what society or 'the world' say as two separate things. The 'culture of confusion' becomes apparent here. Matt confirmed this notion of protecting children from the outside world: "*I guess if I'd have children it would be easier if they weren't exposed to 'those stuff' until you have established a good foundation.*" Yet my informants at Bible Baptist church seemed to realize that actually sheltering children is nearly impossible. Even though people at church raise their children with a specific frame of meaning and knowledge, they realize their children will eventually learn about other perceptions about the world too:

> We always teach our children according to the word of God. We don't want them to be sheltered from society either. So we always tell them what society says about things too. And then we compare them. We say 'the world may tell you this but here's what God has to say about it… Here's what we believe and why. Then we show them what scripture says.
>
> <div align="right">Diane</div>

5.3. Sacrifice

Durkheim (cf. Dingley 2010) has argued that when communities are subjected to social change, this can be experienced as pressure. Previously, I examined the idea that changes need to be incorporated in the community. In the Durkheimian view, each social context or community has its own unique social order, a specific style of cooperative rules and relations, morals and obligations.

This 'uniqueness', what characterizes the community, can be referred to as 'the sacred'. Durkheim suggested that worshipping a deity actually reflects worshipping the own society - in this case the community - and its 'sacredness'. When social change occurs this might be seen as 'profane' and threatening to the community's sense of unity. When 'the sacred' is 'profaned' it can be sanctified again through sacrifice.

Let us now examine the Bible Baptist church in the Durkheimian view. This church community has its own Christian oriented frame in which members understand and explain the world. They see the bible as the main source of authority which can - literally as well as figuratively - be interpreted as a 'sacred' object. We might, then, consider the 'culture of confusion' as 'profane' for social changes pressure or 'threaten' their community. The relative 'counterculture' in which the church community engages in, the renouncing of parts of society, might be considered as the 'sacrifice' a community makes in order to reinstall their 'sacredness'. Relatively not taking part of mainstream society can thus be interpreted as the sacrifice church members make for being able to live within their specific frame of knowledge and meaning in today's global situation. In an interview Julie said that she rather stays away from things or situations that do not correspond to their lifestyle and morality:

> There are so many things you can do that aren't Christ like. Drinking, smoking, sleeping around, partying,... I mean, really, there are a lot of things that you can do. Sometimes friends or colleagues ask me to join them when they go to a club. But I just know that I'm not supposed to go there because there are so many 'temptations'. People get influenced so much by the people around them.

Pastor Greg told me about his son who wanted to go to his high school prom with a non-Christian girl and how he coped with that.

> My son is 18 now and he wanted to go to the prom with a girl but she doesn't believe in what we believe. So I said 'would you date her?' He said: 'I can't!' Then I stressed: 'Don't ever date a girl that you wouldn't be willing to

marry!' When you date you're binding emotionally and physically and spiritually. There's no reason to spend your time on somebody with that nature. I also told him about dancing. You know, there are a lot of different modes of dancing but some of the dances aren't… Some of them will be 'slow' and then you'll need to dance together. You don't need those feelings. I said 'if after praying and seeking the Lord about it you feel really comfortable and have peace of mind to do it… go ahead and do it!' So the other night somebody asked him if he was gonna go to prom and he said no. He asked him why and he said that he would be afraid his testimony would be ruined if he would go. I was very proud of him.

There is to notice that, indeed, sacrifices have to be made in order to maintain the 'sacredness' of their religious community. Yet, there is still a degree of ambiguity to their actions and perceptions. This also lies in the fact that they, as American citizens, do not and cannot fully withdraw from society. They are, whichever way you look at it, part of society. This becomes even more complicated if we consider the fact that most of my informants express themselves as patriots and proud members of their nation.

5.4. The great, doomed nation

America is still the greatest country on earth.

Pastor Schüler

A question that often occupied my mind while conducting research was: *"How can you love a nation while you despise most of it?"* To me, this is a fascinating phenomenon. Bible Baptist church members, as for many fundamentalist Christians, perceive America as 'doomed' and in 'downfall'. Yet, on the other side my informants expressed strong feelings of love and concern for their nation. Phil explained it to me as follows:

I'm proud of being American but I'm not proud of what America stands for sometimes. These are two different things. Let's put it this way. Let's say I've got two brothers. I'm proud to be a 'Jones'.

> Now let's say my brother has done some bad things. Does that mean that
> I'm not proud of being a Jones anymore? No, I'm still proud of being a Jones.
> It's the same thing with being an American. I'm still proud of being an
> American! I still believe that America is a great country. The great
> opportunities and the freedoms we have make it a great country.

Let us attempt to analyze this friction. First of all, most of my informants consider America a Christian nation. While talking about this nearly all of them referred to the 'Founding Fathers' and how the constitution is based on Christian values. Julie, for instance, said: *"America was based on biblical values. If you look at the constitution and you look at the different rules and laws in the bible, you'll find many parallels."*

Whether America could be considered a Christian nation is an ongoing discourse among historical and political scholars. Broadly, two sides of the debate can be identified: the conservative, religious side and the liberal, secular side. Both sides of the debate provide profound argumentation. In the eyes of the secularists, America is basically not a Christian nation. They rest on the official separation between religion and politics which prohibits religion to interfere in the political discourse. They argue that 'misled conservatives' are trying to change this secular reality (Heclo 2007: 84). These conservative Christians are perceived by their opponents as 'misled' because they cling to an 'oversimplified image of Christianity' and its place in society. They state that the nation is built by Christians and evolves from Christian values. To them, Christianity basically shapes the 'authentic American identity' (2007: 61). An official separation and strict categorization of religion and politics is founded problematic if not impossible (Asad 2003). To the secularism debate I turn in the following chapter.

Bible Baptist community members are obviously to be found on the conservative side of the debate, even though they do feel that the Christian nature of the nation is under pressure. In one of his sermons, pastor Schüler said the following:

> Another way you can see that God has blessed the United States is the fact
> that, until a while ago, the US was a very Christian nation. The last few years,
> however, it's becoming a mess.

We are on dangerous grounds, these days. The returning of the Lord is very
near. You can see that because all these things are happening.

A common explanation of why America is 'turning away from Christ' is, thus, the statement that the 'End Times' are near. Let us also recall pastor Schüler's quote in chapter 2, where he talks about the world becoming more and more 'one and equal' and that America eventually has to 'fall' too because the country is too powerful. The pastor stated in the same interview that he could see how the End Times are approaching because of many 'strange things' happening these days. President Obama, for instance, were not to be a legal American citizen:

I seriously doubt that Obama is even a legal citizen of the United States. He
has never publicly submitted a birth certificate. His brother lives in Kenya,
and if you notice: his allegiance lies with Muslims. He is definitely against the
Jewish nation. And he made that statement of America not being a Christian
nation. He said that we are not followers of Christ anymore. And I hate to
think that. I really don't think America is heading in the right direction today.

Pastor Schüler

Nevertheless the pastor, as all of my informants, express feelings of concern for their country. America is considered a 'blessed' nation. This can be linked to Bellah's concept of 'American Civil Religion'. The concept expresses this notion among a part of the American people that they possess a vocation to carry out God's purposes (cf. Taylor 2007: 447). This part of the American people considers itself as being on a Godly inspired mission that ought to save the world from downfall. They, partially, see in America the 'ideal' country led by God. The idea of Civil Religion is classically expressed in the Declaration of Independence and in nearly all presidential inaugurations. Even though the bible does not mention America, they still feel that the country covers a 'special' position to the world.

An illustration of this 'special position' they see God has placed America in, is the case of 9/11. Even though they sincerely perceive this as a great tragedy (some of my informants expressed strong emotions when we talked about this) some of them interpreted the event as a 'wake-up call'.

They do not explicitly argue that God had caused it but do assume that He allowed it to happen and that it was a meaningful event.

> I definitely know that our country needed a wake-up call back then. We're founded on Christian values and we have strayed so far from that. I think God was giving America a wake-up call to be drawn back to him. Because when it happened our country was drawn back to Him. I think that many souls were saved during that time. I think that God had it all on a plan. What we might see as a tragedy God can use to bring good. We have to trust that whatever his plan was, we will know it. We will see that he works all things together for our group.
>
> Diane

There is, thus, a degree of complexity and ambiguity in how Bible Baptist church members engage in this idea of establishing a 'counterculture'. They are said to be 'in' the world but not 'of' the world, supporting this idea of creating this counterculture. On the other hand, concern for 'Others' and feelings of patriotism complicate this matter. Even though American society provides many accommodations that make it possible for individuals or groups to reject taking part in mainstream society, I have argued that this is not as simple as it might seem. Now, let us connect the previous analysis of the Bible Baptist to another, more abstract level of analysis. I would like to examine how we can connect this interesting case of the Bible Baptist church to the broader discourse on secularism.

6. THE SECULARISM DEBATE

In this final chapter I would like to take a moment to examine how the case presented in this thesis might contribute to the debate on secularism. The argument explored in this chapter is that even though Casanova's secularization thesis has been rejected and criticized extensively, there might be an element of truth in it. Ofcourse, this idea is not to be generalized. I do think every socio-religious context has its own story, its own way of evolving. Yet, on the other hand, it is not irrelevant to look at some overall structures and try to, on an abstract level, make sense of the place religion holds nowadays.

6.1. Secularism in the American context

Casanova (1994, 2009) has argued that when societies 'evolve' to modern settings, religion ends up separated from politics and other public institutions, privatized in its own sphere. He also stated that its overall social significance strongly diminishes. This secularization thesis was sharply criticized and rejected by many other scholars. Asad (2003) considers secularism to be inherently connected to religion, indicating that both have influenced each other throughout history and continue to do this in contemporary contexts. Religion cannot be defined in its own category because it interferes with other spheres in society (2003: 201). It is a dynamic, fluid phenomenon. One might notice that this argument is particularly true for America (Taylor 2007). As argued before, the country's religious situation is multilayered and complex. Politicians tend to place 'religion' and 'secularism' out of their contexts and use them as political vehicles (Davis 2001, Heclo 2007). The debate on abortion illustrates this well: conservatives traditionally position themselves against abortion, while liberals tend to support it. As a result, Armstrong states, America seems to incorporate 'two nations'. Followers of the secular and the religious branches tend to stereotype and 'demonize' each other:

> Secularists and religious living in the same country cannot speak one
> another's language or see things from the same point of view.

> What seems sacred and positive in one camp appears demonic and deranged in the other. Secularists and religious both feel profoundly threatened by one another, and when there is a clash of two wholly irreconcilable worldviews […] the sense of estrangement and alienation is only exacerbated.
>
> <div align="right">Armstrong 2004: 367</div>

This established interference of religion and politics might raise questions about the very position of religion in contemporary American society. It has been widely argued that religion in contemporary American society is still popular, especially when compared to the situation in Europe (Davie 2002). 80 percent of the American people claim to believe in a God and 43 percent consider themselves as 'born again Christians' (Raven 2008: 184). Particularly more liberal and 'modern' forms of Christianity seem to be gaining popularity (Hill 2007). As I have been arguing in the chapter on 'Othering', Bible Baptist church members experience the popularity of these denominations as a frustrating phenomenon. They argue that their doctrines are beyond the scope of 'real' Christianity. Pastor Schüler named their doctrines 'social gospels', arguing that they adjust themselves to modern contexts in order to attract as many people as they can. To him, as to many fundamentalist Christians, these liberal Christian churches are all about entertainment.

The Bible Baptist Church opposes itself to these liberal forms of Christianity, describing itself as a 'fundamentalist, independent bible preaching church'. It adheres to a branch of Christianity that claims to be resting on the foundations of their religion. They could be considered - and certainly consider themselves - as Christians in the traditional sense. They strive to live up to biblical values and prescriptions that can occasionally clash with modern ideas and lifestyles. I have been suggesting throughout this thesis that fundamentalist Christianity - 'religion', if you will - does not always successfully merges with modernity. This is not entirely in line with the current discourse on religion and modernity.
 In her ethnography on Shi'i Muslim women in Lebanon, Deeb (2006) argues that these women have found modern ways to practice an authentic form of their religion.

The main purpose of her book is to reject Weber's idea of 'disenchantment'[10], stating that religion can be compatible and inherent to modernity. The women in her field perceive their own 'authenticity' and 'conservatism' as a modern phenomenon. Deeb argues the following:

> This notion of 'authentication' is built on my interlocutors' sense of a shift that has occurred in their religious understandings and practices, a shift that is a key aspect of how they conceptualize social change and the dynamics of Shi'i identity in the contemporary world.
>
> <div align="right">2006: 8</div>

This implies that modernity instigates or 'stimulates' the appearance of an authentic religious identity. Deeb's broader argument then is, in line with Asad, that modernity does not necessarily bring along the diminishing of the importance of religion. She states that her informants *"imagine modern-ness without disenchantment."* (2006: 8)

    Yet, consider another way of perceiving this phenomenon: what Deeb seems to neglect that these forms of 'public piety' might imply the very struggle with modernity. The fact that people in her field make themselves explicitly known as 'authentic' already implies the existence of other structures. It gives the impression that these other structures are 'threatening' their lifestyle and need to be 'conquered' and 'overcome'. Deeb seems to consider the notion of claiming a religion's authenticity as a sign of 'strength' while this might actually reveal the opposite. In this view, the claiming of an authentic form of one's religion, which she refers to as 'modern piety', can be considered as a reaction to modernization of society and globalization processes. It reveals, to a certain extent, a part of the struggle between religion and modernity that I have attempted to present throughout this thesis. Now, consider the Bible Baptist church in this frame of analysis.

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[10] In short, the idea of disenchantment means that religion in modern, industrialized societies will be unnecessary and that its importance will strongly diminish. This merges with the concept of 'formal rationality' as explained in chapter 2. See Weber 1963.

6.2. The 'culture of protection': a form of 'modern piety'?

Before conducting fieldwork and writing this thesis, I considered Christian fundamentalism as an inherently modern phenomenon. I pictured myself to be arguing that, in line with Deeb and many other scholars, ideas of 'disenchantment' and this 'secularization thesis' were not accurate. Yet, paradoxical as it might sound: while living among this church community and writing this thesis, I couldn't help but notice an element of truth in these theories of secularization. This becomes clear when we examine the concept of a 'culture of protection' on a more abstract level.

I regularly noticed that my informants uttered feelings of frustration towards modernization and globalization. I encountered how they question and criticize these processes, and how they reflect on their own participation in it. Throughout this thesis I have been arguing that Bible Baptist church members experience certain uprooting processes instigated by modernization and globalization as a 'culture of confusion'. Secularism - visible in the 'scientification of society' - is considered a component of this 'culture of confusion' for it tends to outnumber Christianity as a common frame of reference to a larger and larger segment of American society. The community's struggle with the 'culture of confusion', thus, also implies a struggle with secularism. Secularism seems to affect American society in multiple ways, even those parts of society that wish not to engage in it. From this point of view, we could consider the 'culture of protection' as a 'defense mechanism' to counter these processes of modernization and globalization and, thus, towards secularism. The 'counterculture' conservative and fundamentalist Christian branches strive to establish could be considered as a part of this 'culture of protection'. It unites Christians that feel threatened by these processes and strive to offer an alternative. We could consider the search for authenticity in religion to be not so much a 'modern' phenomenon but a reaction against modernity itself. As a reaction to these uprooting processes, community boundaries are redefined and claimed.

Ofcourse, this does not mean that fundamentalist Christians are not modern. The fact that they live and participate in today's globalized world already makes them elements of globalization.

It also does not mean that such fundamentalist Christian communities, as the Bible Baptist church, are 'against' modernization and globalization per se. They participate in these processes just as nearly everybody in today's world. They incorporate elements of modernity and globalization. I suggest that instead of looking at fundamentalist Christians as 'modern', we consider the 'whole picture': we take the broader structures in which these groups are embedded into account. Fundamentalist Christian communities, then, can be analyzed in this broader framework.

CONCLUSION

> In an ever-changing world, we need a never-changing God.
>
> Bible Baptist Church' slogan

What I have been examining throughout the chapters of this work is how the Bible Baptist Church, as a fundamentalist Christian community, gives meaning to its surroundings in a globalized world. The Bible Baptist church's slogan, presented in the above quote, basically summarizes the overall argument of this thesis fairly well. Let us briefly consider the arguments that have been made throughout this thesis and the conclusions that might be drawn.

In this thesis I have examined how certain modernization and globalization processes lead to the uprootedness of social contexts. Even though globalization is a dynamic, fluid phenomenon difficult to capture into concrete concepts, I have made an attempt to name the very processes that instigate this uprootedness. The processes I appoint are the 'scientificiation of society', the relative 'homogenization' of the West and far advanced individualization. Even though people might perceive these processes as an ultimate source of liberty and inspiration, others might experience them as confusing, disorienting phenomena. They might, more concretely, experience this as a 'culture of confusion'. Bible Baptist church members make sense of their surroundings and their lives while resting on a Christian frame of meaning and knowledge. To them, these processes of uprootedness often clash with the way they perceive the world. In reaction, I have argued, they offer a relative 'culture of protection'. This can be considered as a 'countermovement', a reaction to these uprooting processes. I investigated the mechanisms of this 'culture of protection' throughout three chapters, each considering this 'culture of protection' at another level. In chapter three, I examined how the Bible Baptist church defines and creates community boundaries, exploring the concept of 'the End Times' as a boundary. The idea that all community members are 'saved' and will collectively go up in heaven when the 'Rapture' takes place stimulates feelings of 'belonging' and coherence among members. In chapter four, then, I examined how Bible Baptist church members engage in mechanisms of 'Othering'.

By considering other Christians – or at least those that interpret the bible in a different way - as 'false prophets' they directly oppose themselves to them. They, on the other hand, perceive their own interpretation of the bible as the one and only correct way. Also, I have revealed the community's ambiguous relationship to non-Christians: On one hand they turn away from them while on the other hand they express feelings of concern for them. This paradoxical idea is connected to the biblical idea of being 'in the world but not of the world'. The paradox is further elaborated in chapter five, where I investigate how the Bible Baptist church community engages in creating a relative 'counterculture' or even an 'alternative society' inside the American society.

This 'culture of protection' I have been exploring has to be considered with nuance. Again, I do not wish to give the impression that Bible Baptist church members are antimodernist or refuse taking part in the globalized world. Contrary: they see many advantages of globalization. They are not isolated or ignorant to the rest of the world. They support missionaries to different places in the world, making it possible to 'spread the gospel' among people of all walks of life. The church members also make extensive use of social media and the church has a neatly designed, up-to-date website. This 'culture of protection' primarily describes how these community members attempt to overcome the 'culture of confusion'. They seem to fear that their Christian frame of meaning and knowledge would eventually fade away. As argued in the final chapter, the 'culture of protection' implies a struggle with modernity and the processes of secularism it brings along. America, to a relative degree, is becoming more and more secularized - 'disenchanted', if you will -. Even though they would claim that all these occurrences are simply signs of the 'End times' being near, or at least that it is all part of God's perfect plan for this world, I do perceive that they sense Christianity losing its grip on the American society. I noticed it in the pastor's sermons, in people's conversations and in interviews. They do fear that their safe environment will eventually be pushed away by greater structures of modernity and globalization. The community, then, offers a source of security, nearness, warmth, acknowledgement and compromise.

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* The illustration on the cover is a picture of 'Salvation Mountain' in California,

United States. It is a picture of another picture taken in a museum in Houston, Texas.