Blessed Disruption: Culture and Urban Space in a European Church Planting Network

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by

John D. Boy

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Abstract

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Adviser: Professor John Torpey

New Protestant churches are being founded in cities around the world. They are the product of a conscious effort on the part of evangelicals to found, or “plant,” new churches in urban areas. Behind this effort are a whole host of actors, including denominations, churches, seminaries, and parachurch organizations, who come together in church planting networks to establish theologically conservative churches that will speak to young urban professional audiences. The hope is that these efforts will scale up and turn into a movement bringing about religious revival among culturally influential groups. Among the focal areas for these efforts are European cities.

The presence and vitality of newly planted churches in the European metropolis counters the trend of secularization observed in these places since the middle of the previous century. How do church planters go about and succeed in their quest to bring doctrine to hipsters and yuppies in the European metropolis? This dissertation studies the actors, sites and cultural processes behind a European church planting network to answer this question. The focus is on the anatomy of the network enabling church planting, the engagements with urban space and public culture by church planters, and their understanding of pastoral work. The dissertation engages both supply-side and neosecularization theories in the sociology of religion to make sense of the practices, successes and challenges of church planters in contemporary society. While the supply-side theory goes some way in explaining the form and dynamics of church planting efforts, understanding how the church planters engage with cities requires drawing on other bodies of work, such as David Martin’s revision of secularization theory. With Martin I argue that culture and the lived experience of urban space matter in the context of religious change, not just market dynamics in the religious economy.
The project is based on multisited research employing focused ethnographic and interview methods. The main focus of the field research was on church plants in four German cities: Berlin, Hamburg, Frankfurt, and Cologne. In order to gain additional comparative insight, additional interviews and observations were conducted for shorter durations of time in Amsterdam, Paris, and Prague. In addition to field research, the dissertation draws on publications by church planting insiders, media reports, and digital resources.

In addition to this research on what has been called contemporary evangelicalism’s “cutting edge” and “default mode” of evangelism, the dissertation also asks how and why Europe came to be seen as a mission field. It argues that the conception of Europe as a mission field dates to the interwar period, when mission societies began framing the European continent in these terms. Analysis of these framing processes shows that early instances of framing Europe as a mission field portrayed Europe as occupying an interstitial space between Christendom and heathendom. This history is a reminder not to exaggerate the novelty of contemporary trends, and it also helps to differentiate what is really distinctive about the contemporary mode of evangelistic engagement.
für coje
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and who welcomed me to their church services and bible studies. As I hope this study makes clear, church planting is hard work, and to set aside time in the midst of such an intense endeavor is truly an act of generosity.

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Glossary

ARDA  Association of Religion Data Archives

BFeG  Federation of Free Evangelical Churches

CMP  City Mentoring Program

CPM  Church planting movement

CtCE  City to City Europe

CtC  Redeemer City to City

DISC  Dominance, Inducement, Submission, and Compliance

ECM  European Christian Mission

EFG  Union of Evangelical Free Church Congregations

FTH  Giessen School of Theology

MNA  Mission to North America

PCA  Presbyterian Church in America

VEF  Association of Evangelical Free Churches

WCC  World Congress of Churches
Chapter One

Introduction

In cities around the world, new Protestant church congregations have come into existence since the beginning of the millennium whose presence and vitality belies the trend toward increasing secularization observed throughout much of the twentieth century. Although these churches vary widely in terms of the outward expressions of the Christian faith they give room to, they share a conservative theological orientation and an association with the evangelical spectrum of Protestantism. These new churches did not just sprout up spontaneously, but rather they are the product of conscious efforts to found, or “plant,” new churches in urban areas. Networks dedicated to church planting have brought the practice to cities on every continent, where thousands of new congregations have successfully been founded. One of these, which was also one of my sites of research, is located in Berlin, the city once referred to by the sociologist Grace Davie as “the capital of secularity” (Davie 2007: 38). Growing from humble beginnings in the apartment of one of the church’s two founding pastors in 2005, the congregation now, ten years later, has an attendance of about five hundred mostly young, middle-class professionals. For several years now, the congregation has held its main service in a movie theater located just off a square named for the revolutionary Rosa Luxemburg. Its very location thus highlights the city’s history of radical working-class currents which were often hostile to the church.

This church plant in turn has also planted several new churches, contributing to what many evangelicals hope will become a movement bringing about exponential growth. By growing the supply of doctrinally sound churches in the world’s major cities, church planters hope to foment spiritual renewal in the places where cultural production is overwhelmingly located. If you build it, they will come?

This dissertation is a study of the actors, sites and cultural processes behind church planting
efforts. How do church planters go about their quixotic quest to bring sound doctrine to hipsters and yuppies, and how and where do they succeed? I build on recent departures from the secularization paradigm in the sociology of religion to understand how aspects of contemporary society are contributing to the flourishing of religion rather than its decline. Church planting constitutes a particularly apt object to study the interplay between religion and society. Church planting networks consciously enter urban spaces, and they back religious entrepreneurs (i.e., the church planters) who engage with public culture in innovative ways in pursuit of their mission. Rather than working against the ways of contemporary society, these religious entrepreneurs exploit the opportunities they present.

So far, the phenomenon of church planting has gotten only modest attention from researchers in the social sciences. The studies that exist tend to focus on individual congregations in their localities, and they have little to say about the larger organizational dynamics behind the practice and the efforts to scale it up into a veritable movement. In this study, I seek to fill this gap by studying not just individual church planting efforts, but an entire network dedicated to church planting that is active in all parts of the world. For my research, I traveled to seven European sites to conduct observational and ethnographic research, and I conducted extensive interviews with the founding pastors of church plants in those sites. Furthermore, I interviewed representatives of numerous organizations on both sides of the Atlantic supporting the work of these pastors and their congregations in a variety of ways. I attended conferences for church planters, studied print materials, and gathered data from digital sources to help illuminate the nature and the spread of the practice. Through these combined efforts, I was able to get a sense for the anatomy of the network facilitating these projects and the variety of practices and engagements that lead to their success.

Before providing a more detailed account of church planting and its place in contemporary evangelicalism, for the remainder of this introduction I will situate the inquiry which follows in relation to debates on the interaction between religion and contemporary society. This interaction has occupied sociologists for as long as their discipline has existed, and it remains a contested topic. I will begin by outlining some of the theoretical contributions from classical social thought,
organizing my account around the concept of religious voluntarism. This is a particularly fruit-
ful concept to understand the situation in which church planters, who are mostly unburdened 
by the historic territorial churches on the European continent, are working. I then proceed to 
discuss two directions in which these classical insights have been taken in more recent contribu-
tions to the sociology of religion: the religious economies approach of Rodney Stark, Roger Finke 
and others, and the historical-comparative approach of David Martin.

**Religious Voluntarism and Social Change**

Religious voluntarism is sweeping many parts of the globe. Pentecostalism is booming, and in 
other, non-Christian faith traditions, horizontal and dispersed movements are on the rise as well. 
This finding has been forcefully stated by the sociologist David Martin and the economist Robert 
Fogel (Martin 1990, 2002; Fogel 2000). Both argue that, in the current moment, we are seeing a 
revival movement in a line with the awakenings in Europe and North America of the eighteenth 
and nineteenth centuries. Although Martin and Fogel, like urban theorist Mike Davis (2004, 2005), 
focus on developments in the dispossessed areas of the planet in the global south and inquire how 
the rise of religious voluntarism in these areas helps or harms poor and socially marginalized 
groups, the boom of religious voluntarism is not limited to these areas. If it was, we could explain 
these revivals as responses to the “ontological insecurity” experienced by these social groups 
(Norris and Inglehardt 2004). However, even the core of the world-system is swept up in this 
movement as the historic churches find themselves in decline and Christian religiosity takes on 
new forms. Religion is more than a coping mechanism.

In classical social thought, religious voluntarism occupies an important place. Social thinkers 
such as Adam Smith and Alexis de Tocqueville wrote about the important role played by “sects,” 
that is, religious communities whose members are members by virtue of a personal decision 
rather than territorial belonging. Adam Smith, presaging the modern-day rational choice ap-
proach in the sociology of religion about which I will have more to say below, argued that minis-
ters in sects face a different set of economic incentives because member contributions are volun-
ary. If a member feels a minister is not earning his keep, she can withhold contributions since they are not levied as a tax. Church members do not face sanctions if they withhold their contribution. As a result of these incentives, ministers in sects will likely show much greater “zeal and industry” (quoted in Iannaccone 1991: 157) than their counterparts who derive their income from state funds.

To de Tocqueville, the presence of sects in America was a crucial factor in explaining the differences between Europe and the new continent. In his analysis, sects and other voluntary associations were an incubator for the democratic mores of American society, while in Europe religion was often associated with the ancien régime due to the territorial church’s close association with secular power (Tocqueville 2000). Consequently the populace in continental Europe often came to reject religion altogether. In America, on the other hand, religion is able to maintain its sway because of the paradox “that by diminishing the apparent power of religion one increased its real strength” (Tocqueville 2000: 296). Voluntary religiosity, because it does not count on state institutions for support, appears to be in a less powerful position but actually ends up having far greater influence on the conduct of individuals.

Thus, both Smith, who focused on incentives for individual ministers, and de Tocqueville, who regarded the social standing of religious institutions, voluntarism was associated with greater religious vitality.

Early sociological thinking about religion from the late nineteenth century onward also made much of voluntarism. Ernst Troeltsch, who in his work on the social teachings of the Christian churches was inspired by Georg Simmel’s approach to the study of social forms (Simmel 1992), identified the sect, along with the church and “mysticism” (Spiritualismus), as one of three perennial forms of religiosity (Troeltsch 1960). On his view, religion (or, as Simmel would say, religiosity) never disappears but rather takes on different social forms throughout history. Sect is a bottom-up form of religiosity that Troeltsch (much like Niebuhr after him) saw as being associated with the lower classes (his historical reference for this type were the Anabaptists). In contrast, “[t]he essence of the Church is its objective institutional character. The individual is born into it, and through infant baptism he comes under its miraculous influence” (Troeltsch
Because it exists in tension to the wider society, Troeltsch finds that the sect is able to effect social change in ways that the church cannot.

Max Weber appropriated two of Troeltsch’s forms, church and sect, as ideal types (Weber [1956]). In addition to Troeltsch and Simmel, Weber may have also been influenced by de Tocqueville (Hecht [1998]), though he went further than de Tocqueville in characterizing the sect as the “prototype” of voluntary associations. He used his types, among many other ideal-typical distinctions, to make sense of the economic ethics of the world religions (Weber [1972]). Weber’s famous argument about the “Protestant ethic” (Weber [1958]) asserts that the religiosity of the Puritans, which hewed very closely to the sect type, gave rise to the patterns of behavior that made modern rational capitalism—that is, a mode of production in which the capital relation dominates all other forms of production and exchange—possible. Thus, contrary to Troeltsch, he associates the sect type with upwardly mobile bourgeois strata, not the lower classes. Although the empirical validity of his argument has been thoroughly questioned by economists, Weber’s main contribution is a model for thinking about the effects that forms of religiosity can have on the conduct of individuals and the development of social institutions. For Weber, religion has an effect on social life primarily by way of its influence on the everyday conduct of individuals and groups. Sects were able to have an especially strong effect because they effectively regulated everyday life. Churches with their “objective institutional character” may embody a more formal power structure, but its demands could easily be met by just going through the motions. Voluntary associations, on the other hand, put the individual in the position of regulating her own actions. Precarious as this may be, it ends up being far more effective than externally imposed discipline.

If Max Weber’s sociology is ultimately an account of progressive rationalization in modernity, then religious voluntarism is a driving force in this narrative. Weber himself believed that this

2. Scholars have noted parallels between Weber’s sociology of religion and Michel Foucault’s account of biopolitics.
force would ultimately be spent (Weber 1946). He expected the sects to lose significance as a result of “the steady progress of the characteristic process of ‘secularization,’ to which in modern times all phenomena that originated in religious conceptions succumb” (Weber 1946: 307). The social significance of religious voluntarism would become extinguished by structures it helped to bring into existence. That is the tragedy of modern culture according to Weber, that its spiritual underpinnings are all eventually absorbed into an overwhelming utilitarianism.

Weber’s expectation that secularization was an ineluctable force was tied to another of his beliefs: the normativity of the European experience (Boy 2012; more generally, see Wallerstein 1997; Dussel 2000; Amin 1989). When Weber wrote on these topics in the first decade of the twentieth century, he implicitly made a contrast between the core experience of continental Europe and the peripheral experience of North America and other parts of the Anglosphere. In the periphery, the offshoots of revivalism (Methodism and its ilk) were still active. On the continent, on the other hand, Protestant churches, including the United Protestant Church in Baden of which Weber was at least a nominal member, were largely fending off or absorbing revivalist movements like the Pietists and its outgrowth, the Fellowship Movement (Gemeinschaftsbewegung). In 1909, the Protestant church in Germany issued the Berlin Declaration, strongly condemning the nascent Pentecostal movement which had begun just three years earlier during the Asuza Street revivals in Los Angeles (Simpson 2011). It is unlikely that this was on Weber’s radar at the time, but it gives a sense of the context he was writing in. Weber had every reason to believe that Europe’s territorial churches acting as bureaucratic institutions (Anstalten) would eventually become the norm, not the enthusiastic attendees of camp meetings, revivals, and open-air baptisms. The experience of the core was normative, and the peripheries would gradually but inevitably follow suit.

**Religious Economies**

Increasingly, sociologists agree that Weber’s prediction was misguided. There is growing consensus that secularization, if it is occurring at all, is a local and contingent process, not a universal
and linear one. As a result, the concept of secularization is no longer the (only) way to understand the dialectic of religion and society. In this section, I discuss one particularly radical way this relationship has been reconceptualized.

In the early 1990s, American sociologist Stephen Warner (1993) proclaimed a “new paradigm” in the sociology of religion. The “old” paradigm, secularization theory, had dominated debates in the sociology of religion for much of the twentieth century. The new paradigm amounted not simply to a revision of the secularization story, but rather sought to break with this view on the relationship between religion and modern society altogether. Although this new paradigm as Warner conceived of it was more expansive, it is most often associated with the rational choice or “supply side” approach introduced by a tight-knit group of American scholars consisting at its core of the sociologists Rodney Stark, Roger Finke and William Bainbridge as well as the economist Laurence Iannaccone.

In *The Sacred Canopy*, Peter Berger, at the time a proponent of secularization theory, argued that the lived reality of pluralism in modern society had ushered in a “crisis of credibility” for religious faith (Berger 1967: ch. 6). Because people in their day-to-day lives encounter many different worldviews, the idea that one of them could make an exclusive claim to the truth becomes implausible, he argued. Thus, there is a negative correlation between pluralism on the one side, and religious belief on the other. As one goes up, the other must fall.

The core empirical claim of the supply-side approach is the exact opposite: religious pluralism is good for religious vitality. Why? It is the prediction of the economic theory of religious mobilization (Stark and Bainbridge 1987). Because religious pluralism means there is greater competition in the religious economy, religious firms participating in the economy will be forced to bring more and better religious products to market. Religious consumers will then be more inclined to shop. As a result of greater competition, there is greater supply, which in turn raises demand. The religious economy is bustling with activity. The absence of religious pluralism, on the other hand, results in a monopoly situation. Monopolists lacking competitors have no incentive to improve on their product, so they will offer the same stale commodity. Consumers will not find the outputs of these firms particularly palatable, so they will rather stay at home. The result
is an overall cooling of activity. This is a familiar line of argument revolving around dynamics of
supply and demand. Usually these kinds of arguments are made by neoclassical economists with
regard to the “actual” economy, that is, the sphere where material goods and services are pro-
duced, bought, and sold. Economists in this school of thought argue that rigidities that hamper
the ability of capitalists to innovate lead to economic slowdowns, leaving everybody worse off.
Stark, Bainbridge and Finke believe, however, that this theoretical perspective extends to the
religious realm as well—and they produced a voluminous scholarly output dedicated to showing
how market dynamics shape the religious life in various places and historical epochs. Mostly
these studies revolve around correlations between measures of religious pluralism and levels of
religious observance in crossnational (Iannaccone, Finke, and Stark 1997) or subnational (Finke,

These scholars arguably have made the most decisive break from previous orthodoxy in the
sociology religion. They reject previous work not just as misguided but as being unscientific
and ideologically tainted by secularist animus (see especially Stark and Finke 2000; cf. Lehmann
2010). They need not have been quite as dismissive. Even Berger, in the aforementioned Sacred
Canopy, used market metaphors and spoke of the church’s need to market its commodities and
in so doing take consumer wishes into consideration (Berger 1967: 145). And as the preceding
discussion of classical social theory was meant to demonstrate, many earlier social thinkers also
argued that a “free market” situation results in various positive externalities.

Even so, the supply side approach has some things to recommend it. First, by not consign-
ing religion to a separate sphere but rather regarding religious organizations and activities in
entirely mundane terms, they are not merely subject to a variety of macro processes ending in
“ization”—modernization, urbanization, industrialization, and of course secularization—but are
manipulable by human agency. Ultimately, those who create religious supply, the entrepreneurs
at the helm of religious firms, determine the fate of religion in society, not disembodied processes
driving social differentiation. Of course, the kind of human agency that rational choice theory
allows for is based on a very limited conception of human nature as homo economicus. In this per-
spective, people are mechanical optimizers of expected payoffs who neither hold cultural values,
nor care about history, nor think too far ahead about the future. This view of the agency of pastors and other religious entrepreneurs could be expanded somewhat with reference to another sociological classic, W. E. B. Du Bois. In his account of the characteristics of the black church (Bois 2007: ch. 10), Du Bois emphasizes how pivotal preachers were in fostering the church in the hostile and violent context of the American system of racial hierarchy. Preachers had to combine a multitude of roles. It is not enough for the preacher to be a cunning salesperson; he must be “a politician, an orator, a ‘boss,’ an intriguer, an idealist,” must function as “bard, physician, judge, and priest” (Bois 2007: 129, 132; see also Bois 1967: ch. 12).

The second thing the supply side approach has to recommend it is that, like rational choice approaches more generally, it is a very simple, parsimonious theory. This makes it easy to derive hypotheses and to test them. Again, this apparent strength is also a weakness. I already mentioned that the core substantive claim derived from the supply-side theory is that religious pluralism is associated with greater religious vitality. In a devastating review of work by supply-side scholars claiming to back up this prediction with empirical data, Chaves and Gorski (2001) found the work beset with major methodological problems. Once these failings, which were mainly mathematical, were accounted for, most positive findings in the supply-side literature substantiating the link between pluralism and participation disappeared. The central claim of the supply-side theory on the positive relationship between pluralism and vitality could not be supported. That does not mean that the view of secularization theorists that the two are inversely related should be accepted. “The relationship between pluralism and vitality is not uniformly positive, but neither is it uniformly negative” (Chaves and Gorski 2001: 274–275), so the real question concerns the conditions under which one or the other applies. There likely is no general law, Chaves and Gorski conclude, but rather contextual conditions (cultural, social and otherwise) that influence how religious competition shapes the success or failure of religious actors.
Uneven Secularization

In the middle of the 1960s, when several of the major books in the secularization paradigm first appeared (e.g., Berger 1967; Wilson 1966; Luckmann 1967; Cox 1965), David Martin wrote an essay calling for the elimination of the concept of secularization (Martin 1965). He has since swung back, joining scholars like José Casanova (1994) in penning revisions of secularization theory rather than abandoning the term. The general thrust of Martin’s revision is to portray secularization as contingent and varied through time and space, not as a linear historical process tied to modernization. He suggests that the resonances of religiosity are either picked up or fade away in spaces of everyday life, particularly in urban areas where the cultural and economic life is concentrated. As such, Martin can help illuminate the contextual conditions that either promote or hamper the mission of religious entrepreneurs.

On Martin’s account, the profound cultural impact of voluntary religious associations described by the classical theorists discussed above continues to this day. As Pentecostalism is booming in areas of Latin America and West Africa where previously the Catholic Church (the anti-sect, so to speak) held a monopoly, this form of religiosity is gaining new ground rapidly (Martin 1990). As Peter Berger puts it, “Max Weber is alive and well and living in Guatemala” (Berger 1999: 16). Martin argues that this has implications going far beyond the realm of the religious. The forward march of voluntary religiosity forms part of a broader historical turning of the tides. Martin sees the historical trajectory beginning with the French revolution giving way to the “trajectory of 1776” ushered in by the American revolution (see also Torpey 2012: 293–295). The voluntarist boom is enabling individuals in dispossessed areas of the globe to take their lives in their own hands and improve their material situation without the help of class or party.

Martin may be biased. As a Methodist and a classical liberal, he could just be trumping up the victories of his team. A less optimistic way to see the processes he describes is as a diffusion of what Macpherson (1962) called “possessive individualism.” But even more critical scholars agree with the general drift of Martin’s analysis. Mike Davis sees Pentecostalism and voluntary forms
of Islam as competing directly with socialist and anarchist forms of resistance—and winning:

“Indeed, for the moment at least, Marx has yielded the historical stage to Mohamed and the Holy
Ghost. If God died in the cities of the industrial revolution, he has risen again in the postindustrial
cities of the developing world” (Davis 2004: 30). Though David adds an important qualification
(“for the moment at least”), this finding is not far from Martin’s view that the “trajectory of 1789”
is in decline.

Although Martin’s focus is on the spread of Pentecostalism in the global south, he suggests
that similar processes are also at play in Europe. There he sees the “welfare view of religion”
slowly retreating in some places, making way for the “entrepreneurial and activist” religiosity
of the U.S. (Martin 2005: 68). The empire strikes back, indeed. Martin notes that “vulnerabil-
ity” to voluntarism is unevenly distributed in Europe, down to the city level. Thus, although he
frames his work in the grand overarching dialectic of two competing historical trajectories, he
makes a powerful argument that the secular and the religious are embodied in very local objects
and processes, such as the built environment of cities and the rhythms of everyday life. Martin’s
street-level approach adds an ethnographic dimension to his historical-comparative work. No-
tably, it jibes with some recent work in the sociology of religion emphasizing the importance of
place and contestations over space in the religious field (Bender et al. 2012; Knott 2010). Here,
for instance, is his discussion of how secularization materializes in the Dutch capital city:

In Amsterdam the spatial clues lie in the absence of a clear focal point. The federal
and dispersed nature of Dutch society and politics is manifest in a dispersion of the
sacred. But there is another point worth considering. It is that there was once a
Catholic centre to Amsterdam before it was forcibly converted to Protestantism, and
that centre is now the university. The university can be seen as a mutation of the
Universal Church, so the sacred can now be relocated in the University of Amster-
dam. Alternately it can be found in the Rijksmuseum or the Concertgebouw Hall.
(Martin 2005: 54)

Building on Martin, then, we can frame the enterprise of church planting as a localized expression
of the global switch of historical trajectories. Church plants in Europe contribute to a reshaping
of the religious landscape in the image of voluntary religiosity.

Here is how this dissertation is organized. In the following chapter (2), I introduce the ob-
ject of this study in greater detail by providing an account of the practice of church planting
and the networks and movement behind it. This chapter contains details on the significance of church planting in the context of today’s evangelicalism, its global dimension, and the local sites in Germany and neighboring countries where I conducted my study. This is an important starting point to understand the context of the following chapters. Chapter 3 presents a historical study of how Europe came to be regarded, in some parts of the Protestant missionary movement, as a mission field during the interwar period. The case of the European Christian Mission considered in this chapter forms a precursor to the contemporary phenomena I focus on otherwise. The historical chapter is intended to serve as a reminder not to exaggerate the novelty of church planting, while also helping to bring to the foreground what really is new about it. Chapter 4 gives an account of the anatomy of the church planting movement by focusing on the actors in the network that is the chief focus of my account. I introduce some of the actors involved in the network, including a network organization, a denomination that is very active in church planting, and a seminary that many church planters graduated from. The puzzle considered here is how the church planting network succeeds at acting in coherent and strategic ways despite not having a clear command structure. In chapter 5, I study the same network, this time asking how it uses urban space in its work. Drawing on the distinction between conceptions and perceptions of space in the work of Henri Lefebvre, I study both theoretical formulations of the urban in the network and specific spatial practices used in the work of church planters. Chapter 6 looks at the work and role of the pastors at the head of the church plants. The main concern here is how this role is defined when pastoring consists primarily of entrepreneurial work. Finally, in chapter 7, I conclude by reviewing some of the discussions on the potential impact of church planting on the religious landscape of Europe and relating my findings to the theoretical frame outlined above.
Church planting is the term used by insiders to describe the founding of new church congregations. Those who engage in church planting are called “planters,” while churches in the early years after their founding are referred to as “plants.” In this chapter, I first introduce the practice of church planting and its significance within present-day evangelicalism. I then provide a sketch of its global dimension and introduce the main object of analysis of this study, the church planting network Redeemer City to City (CtC). Finally, I provide a short portrait of each of the church plants in the CtC network that I studied in the course of my research for this dissertation.

**Church Planting and Contemporary Evangelicalism**

In the segment of contemporary Protestantism identified with terms like “conservative,” “evangelical” or “born again,” church planting is all the rage. According to Tim Stafford, a senior staff writer for the influential American evangelical periodical *Christianity Today*, “church planting is the default mode for evangelism” (Stafford 2007: 68), having steadily displaced the evangelistic

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1. Johnson (2010: 336) offers this more expansive definition: “Church planting’ is an expression used to describe the process of starting an autonomous church with the help of a network or parent body that provides leadership training and initial financial support. In many cases, these plants are of independent, non- or cross-denominational evangelical churches without an overseeing authority. While partner churches share the doctrinal beliefs of their sponsors, they typically have license to adapt worship practices according to their geo-cultural locations.”

2. On these and other labels in the American context, see Woodberry and Smith (1998). Similar definitions are often used in other contexts; for a German perspective, see Hempelmann (2009). I will use “conservative Protestant” and “evangelical” interchangeably to refer to the spectrum of Protestant churches, denominations, institutions and organizations (negatively) defined by its rejection of liberal or modernist theology and historical-critical readings of the Bible. This can include Pentecostals, though rather than including them in the category of conservative Protestants, I generally mention them separately.
crusade format popularized by Billy Graham. Mass evangelistic events and interpersonal “wit-
nessing” still have a role to play, but church planting is considered “the cutting edge.” That is not
to suggest that church planting is an altogether new concept. It has long appeared in public dis-
course by evangelicals. For instance, Jerry Falwell, upon dissolving the Moral Majority in 1989,
said, “I have no confusion about my calling. It is to be a pastor, a preacher, a church planter”
(Cassidy 1989). Insiders frequently tout church planting as the “most effective way to grow God’s
Kingdom.” Others characterize church plants as “ecclesial laboratories” that may not contribute
much to growth but that foster innovation and find new ways the church can engage with the
wider culture (Paas 2012a). These ideas are not necessarily at odds; many who champion church
planting hope it will make itself felt both quantitatively and qualitatively.

Megachurches like Calvary Chapel and Vineyard Christian Fellowship, both originally based
in southern California, can be seen as the early innovators of church planting. During the 1980s
and 1990s, these evangelical churches with roots in both neo-Pentecostalism and 1970s coun-
terculture popularized the practice of growing by founding new congregations (Miller 1997).
Calvary and Vineyard both were extremely successful (Robbins and Lucas 2008), adding many
congregations not only in the United States, but around the world.

Since then, a broad range of institutional players in American evangelicalism have pinned
their hopes on church planting. Many evangelical denominations have set up programs to sup-
port planters. The Southern Baptist Convention, the largest evangelical body in the United
States, has an aggressive strategy for church planting. At one point the denomination was start-
ing four new churches a day in hopes of doubling its number of congregations in two decades
(Stafford 2007). American domestic mission societies like the Presbyterian Church in America’s
Mission to North America (MNA) employ Church Planting Coordinators and a Church Planter
Development Director. The MNA even runs a support network for “church planting spouses”
(presumed to be female). International missions, too, have turned to the model of church plant-
3. From the subtitle of a book co-authored by Ed Stetzer, an influential evangelical survey re-
searcher (Moore and Stetzer 2009).
ing in their work around the world (Winter and Hawthorne 1999). Church planting has indeed become the “default mode” of outreach in contemporary evangelicalism.

In addition to popularizing church planting, Calvary Chapel and Vineyard also helped launch an important organizational form in the world of church planting, the network. Sometimes considered quasi-denominations, networks are loose associations of like-minded congregations that may differ on individual questions of doctrine (such as the question of infant baptism) and even belong to different denominations but nonetheless maintain links. Examples of well known networks include the Acts 29 Network, CtC, Stadia, Association of Related Churches, Sojourn Network, Glocal.net, and NewThing (see Stetzer and Bird 2010). Most of these networks have both a domestic focus and a global one. Some networks maintain close ties to denominations, but sometimes their coexistence with denominations is seen as inherently conflictual (Stetzer 2013). Networks care about starting new congregations, regardless of which denomination, if any, will ultimately be able to “claim” them, while denominations often want to ensure their resources are going toward growing their denomination.

In recent years, some practitioners of church planting have taken to viewing these efforts as parts of a larger strategic and coordinated effort. Thus, at least in the way that insiders talk about it, church planting has begun to take the shape of a movement. I will set aside for the time being whether the CPM meets the criteria of what sociologists call a social movement—“a collective, organized, sustained, and noninstitutional challenge to authorities, powerholders, or cultural beliefs and practices” (Goodwin and Jasper 2009: 4)—and take the insider perspective at face value. As a movement, church planting has some recognizable predecessors, including the church growth movement associated, among others, with the aforementioned Vineyard Fellowship (see McGavran 1959; Wagner 1986). The anatomy of the church planting movement can best be described in the language of network analysis. In this network, there is a great variety in both the nodes (the actors that participate) and the edges (the ways in which they are linked). I discuss this in greater detail in chapter 4.

In the U.S., conferences dedicated to the topic of church planting with names like Dwell, Ignite, Vault, Velocity, and Exponential draw hundreds of aspiring ministers from a range of de-
nominational backgrounds interested in planting a new church. The naming of these conferences gives some indication of the entrepreneurial—and masculine—culture that suffuses the world of church planting. It is important to note as well that black conservative Protestants play a very marginal role in this world. They are mostly absent from the leadership boards of the major networks listed above, as are Latino men and women. However, some majority-white denominations seek to plant churches in black or Latino neighborhoods around the U.S. in hopes of achieving growth among these demographic groups.

In addition to national and international conferences, church planting is also discussed and diffused through two other trends in contemporary evangelicalism. The first is the emerging (or emergent) church, a loose movement—or “conversation,” to use the insider term—begun in the late 1990s mostly as a response to the culture wars. Rejecting a series of binaries in theology, especially conservative versus liberal, its methods for reimagining the meaning and practice of church are *pastiche* and *bricolage*. Among other things, emerging evangelicals draw on monasticism, performance art, Eastern Orthodox liturgy, and postmodern philosophy. Sociologists Martí and Ganiel, although aware that definition of a movement that eschews identification must fall short, define the emerging church as “a discernable, transnational group who share a religious orientation built on the continual practice of deconstruction” (Martí and Ganiel 2014: 6). “Deconstruction” refers to the practice of questioning the validity of inherited categories of thought and forms of organization in the Christian tradition. This orientation finds expression in a spirit of experimentation that becomes embodied in new congregations, of which the Ikon Collective in Belfast is perhaps the most famous.

The second tendency in contemporary evangelicalism bound up with church planting—and arguably the more relevant one for this study—is the New Calvinism. Identified by *Time* a few

6. The MNA, which is affiliated with a predominantly white denomination (ARDA 2010), says the following about selecting a site for a church plant: “Site selection begins with a commitment to ministering among all the people groups of our North American communities” (Mission to North America 2008: 36).
years ago as one of “ten ideas changing the world right now” (Biema 2009), the New Calvinism emphasizes doctrinal orthodoxy against what it sees as contemporary evangelicalism’s overly lax handling of theological truths (Oppenheimer 2013). In Max Weber’s terms, the New Calvinism wants to inject evangelicalism with a healthy dose of innerworldly asceticism after it has been led astray by the prosperity gospel preached by Joel Osteen, among other departures from orthodoxy. As a movement, it is associated with a few influential individuals, churches and organizations, some of which we will encounter in this study: Mars Hill Church in Seattle and its former head pastor Mark Driscoll; John Piper, formerly senior pastor of the Minneapolis multi-campus Bethlehem Baptist Church and founder of the Desiring God online ministry; Tim Keller, founding pastor of Redeemer Presbyterian Church in Manhattan; and the Gospel Coalition, an umbrella group for Reformed churches. Two of the most influential church planting networks, Redeemer City to City and Acts 29, also are closely tied to the New Calvinism and have helped broaden its appeal among young evangelicals. The practices of the “young, restless, Reformed” (Hansen 2008) are frequently in stark contrast to the playfulness of the emerging church bricoleurs. At the risk of oversimplifying and overdrawing the contrast, the emerging church’s practice is premised on the idea that the church is the performative embodiment of God, whereas the New Calvinism stresses the transcendent and sovereign nature of the divine. New church plants first and foremost have to communicate the majesty of sovereign God in a doctrinally sound manner; experimentation with form is secondary at best. Perhaps for this reason there appears to be an association between the New Calvinism and the view that church planting can constitute a movement that can and should scale up. To the New Calvinism, church planting is not a matter of experimentation, but a matter of serious business that has to be reproduced over and over again.

Digital resources also play a big part in diffusing ideas about church planting and related theological concepts. In addition to the websites of the above-mentioned Desiring God ministry and the Gospel Coalition, blogging plays an especially important role in the emerging church movement. Driscoll is still sometimes considered to be connected to the emerging church movement, but he has strongly distanced himself from it, calling it “the infecting of biblical truth by postmodern philosophy” (Driscoll 2009).
ment (Moody 2009). Video and audio podcasts of sermons and recordings from conferences are another important digital channel, extending the reach of usually American or British evangelical ministers far beyond the borders of their own countries. Even print resources circulate quite widely internationally and constitute another mechanism of transmission. On its website, the Gospel Coalition raises money to finance the translation, publication and distribution of foreign-language editions of books by American evangelical authors. But transmission can work in less direct ways, too. Evangelical publishing houses around the world often follow the same publishing trends (some would say fads) as big American Christian publishers. At least as far as the readings lists of evangelical seminarians around the world are concerned, American evangelicals are agenda setters. As a counterpoint, the French historian of evangelicalism Sébastien Fath (personal communication) noted that trends like the emerging church fail to fall on fertile ground in France because they originate in a very different context. In the United States, the emerging church is in large part a reaction to the proximity between evangelicalism and political power. The situation in France is very different in this regard, so the ideas formulated in the American context fail to translate.

Church planting has gotten modest attention from researchers in recent years. As religion researchers have begun taking stock of the emerging church movement, they have also noted the trend of starting new congregations. James Bielo’s ethnography of emerging evangelicals (Bielo 2011b) has two chapters dedicated to the phenomenon of church planting, particularly its manifestation in U.S. localities. Although Bielo did not initially plan on studying church planting, he notes that informants kept returning to the topic during his fieldwork (for a critique, see Martí and Ganiel 2014: 138; Wollschleger 2014). The discourse of church planting thus was part of the life-world of the evangelicals Bielo studied. Bielo notes that, in their practice of church planting, emerging evangelicals seek to shed the shopping mall culture of suburban megachurches by building small, place-based and, above all, “authentic” spaces for worship and community.

8. A search in the database Sociological Abstracts for “church planting” in early 2015 came up with four articles; none of them have it as their main focus area.
While a few scholars have paid attention to church planting and the networks behind it in the United States, even fewer have accounted for the global scope of the practice or the ways in which the CPM seeks to scale up to affect broad cultural change. This study is unique, then, in exploring the phenomenon of church planting beyond the borders of the United States. It focuses on the activities of one major, globally-operating church planting network in Europe. In addition, unlike American studies of church planting that usually focus only on the locales where individual church planters operate, I give an account of the anatomy of the wider movement and trace the ways the movement seeks to make an impact at a larger scale by operating at the intersection of culture and urban space.

In my interview with Ken, a American staff member of the Greater Europe Mission based in Cologne for two decades who is also involved in the work of a regional church planting network, he noted that there has been an increase in interest in church planting since the mid-2000s.

We’re just seeing young people coming out of the woodwork and getting involved. It’s just awesome. Over the twenty years we’ve been here, I’ve spoken in chapel services at some of the bible schools in the area before, and I would always talk about church planting and “you can do this!” and try to motivate and try to give some scriptural reasons, and then I’d say, “After chapel, I’d be happy to talk with anybody about this,” and then I’d stand up there in front and not one student would come and talk to me. I don’t think it was because I’m a bad speaker [laugh]. I think it was because the interest, there just wasn’t interest in church planting, and now there is. Ken confirmed for his context what the previous section attempted to show as being the case more broadly, namely the rapid rise of church planting as the mode of engagement among contemporary evangelicals.

As noted above, there are a number of networks that are active in church planting, and many of them are active in Europe as well. There are several reasons that speak in favor of my decision to study CtC as a means to explore the anatomy and practices of the CPM as well. Arguably only second to the aforementioned Acts 29, CtC is one of the most prominent church planting networks, both inside the U.S. and beyond. Acts 29’s work in Europe concentrates on the United Kingdom; they only recently began working in Italy under the name Impatto. CtC, in contrast,
is more active on the continent. Since what David Martin calls the “Anglosphere” has had a sustained voluntary religious presence (Martin 2005), church planting work on the continent, where until recently religious (quasi-) establishment was the norm, is more interesting in the context of this study. Because of its prominence, CtC is widely regarded as a leader in the broader movement. It models a portable practice and formulates a transposable message (Csordas 2009) that other church planting networks can adopt and adapt. Additionally, there is a simple pragmatic reason; CtC has been around for a while and their work is visible, so it is possible for an outsider like myself to identify individuals and churches affiliated with the network, visit their spaces of worship, and approach them for interviews.

In the following I will briefly introduce CtC to provide some background for chapters 4–6 where I will address in greater detail the network’s (and broader movement’s) anatomy, its engagement with urban space, and its understandings of the work of ministry respectively.

CtC defines itself as “a leadership development organization” and calls itself “a sister organization to Redeemer Presbyterian Church” (CtC 2014b), an influential New York-based evangelical church about which I will have more to say in chapter 5. Leadership development in the context of CtC is all about church planting: “We find and develop leaders in the art and science of starting new churches” (CtC 2014b). The organization has a number of leadership development programs mostly focused on training and mentoring future church planters and leaders of church plants. These have changed somewhat in their focus, naming and duration over the years that I conducted research. CtC has also attempted to decentralize its work somewhat. Thus, while most planters working within CtC used to have stints in New York going through training or doing an internship, now the work of City to City Europe (CtCE) has become more autonomous, with the other regional networks (City to City Asia Pacific, City to City Australia and City to City Latin America) slated to follow course. At this point, CtC offers a five-week International Intensive program targeting urban church planters from around the world, a two-year Incubator to develop planters in New York and “other selected strategic cities” (CtC 2014b), and a one-year Fellows Program for planters within two years of launching their congregations. In addition, a two-day Gospel in the City “learning experience” targeting a range of “urban leaders” is of-
ffered through partners in locales throughout the United States, and a half-day City Lab to train church leadership teams is offered in New York. To make its role as an actor in theological education official, CtC is partnering with Reformed Theological Seminary and will begin offering a degree program terminating in a Master of Arts in Biblical Studies in Fall 2015. Finally, CtC recently launched its Faith, Work and Leadership Initiative described as seeking “to help churches and church planting networks in North America and around the world develop effective, gospel-centered marketplace leaders” (CtC 2014b). The initiative is being led by a former Silicon Valley CEO. The focus on work and entrepreneurship is also pronounced in the activities of Redeemer Presbyterian Church, which runs a Center for Faith and Work that offers events and conferences to its urban-professional membership on a nearly weekly basis.

I asked Mattijs, a young Dutch minister going through CtC’s Fellows Program in New York to become a church planter in his home country, about the content of the training. I found him serendipitously through the social networking site Twitter, where I frequently monitored keywords relating to church planting. We met for coffee in El Barrio, in a café not far from where he was staying while going through the Fellows Program. As part of the program he worked with a minister who had recently started a new church in downtown Manhattan that was part of the Christian Reformed Church. In addition, he was part of a cohort of fellows that had regular meetings to discuss material or to meet people who had already been through the process of planting a church. Like other participants of CtC programs that I interviewed, he emphasized there is a heavy reading load, including several selections from Tim Keller’s numerous publications. The group discusses the readings at weekly meetings, and Keller joins these sessions once a month when the group discusses passages from a voluminous manual to answer questions. Asked about the content of the readings and discussions, he answered:

*Mattijs:* Tim Keller makes sure that there is a big theological component in it, but the practical aspect of it was brand new to me. I’ve been doing a lot of theology, but no practical aspect. We did that a lot. The interesting thing to me was that these guys that are in the program, they almost only asked practical questions, whereas I always find myself on the theoretical level. I just realized that’s how I was trained, basically. I’m always trying to figure out where he contradicts himself, et cetera. So I’m trying to be more practical. I got better at that thing. These guys are in the
program, and they’re already freaking out because they have to start a church in a year or something, right? They’re talking about money, they’re talking about how to fundraise, they’re talking about how to grow this core group. All these things are in their minds, and not so much the theology, which in my view was pretty much assumed sometimes. The only theological debated topic was homosexuality, obviously, because it’s so controversial. Obviously when you’re a pastor in the city that’s always the first question you get. [...] 

JB: That was really an exception, that you went down that road. It’s normally mainly about how do I do fundraising, how do I do leadership, small groups...

Mattijs: Yeah. And we talked about movement, too, which is more of a Redeemer thing than an individual church planter thing, because they want to have a worldwide movement. That’s just not the first thing on your mind when you’re a church planter. You just want to have your own thing work first.

JB: Movement meaning that every church becomes a mother church that tries to plant daughter churches?

Mattijs: Yeah, just trying to influence the culture, as Redeemer does with the Faith and Work Center.

This indicates that what CtC terms leadership development has more to do with acquiring a set of skills than with becoming versed in theological notions.

Aside from teaching and training would-be planters and leaders, CtC also becomes more directly involved in individual church planting projects. In this part of its work, the organization operates as a central node that brings together the work of a series of regional or city-based networks. Its own role in the planting of churches varies from case to case, from “catalytic” to “supporting” (CtC 2014d). Some churches in its network have flagship status, while others are only loosely embedded in the network, mostly drawing on connections and support from other sources, such as denominations, sister churches, or other networks. According to CtC, the organization has helped start more than three hundred churches in forty-five cities since 2001. For

9. The directory at CtC (2014c) lists a total of two hundred and forty, but directory data is not always up to date. According to Miriam, in the case of CtC’s European work, “it’s a little tricky with the numbers ... It depends on if you’re talking about churches that City to City helped plant, and then churches that are kind of affiliated with churches we helped plant a while ago or that have grown out of certain church planting networks in Europe. ... The directory on the website are all churches we have either directly helped plant, or they are planting with us, which means we have provided some kind of training—like, they could have just attended a conference or they came to the Intensive or we are providing coaching to the mother church ... A lot of churches we don’t want to have on there [in the directory on the website] because we don’t want to take
an overview of their global spread, see the map in figure 2.1.

The largest number of CtC churches is in the United States, where CtC congregations are concentrated on the coasts, the Midwestern global city of Chicago being the one exception. The New York area is heavily represented, with more than twenty churches in Manhattan, almost thirty in the outer boroughs (excluding Staten Island), and a smattering throughout the greater metropolitan area, indicating a presence of former Manhattanite Redeemer members that relocated to the suburbs (the church makes a point of following them when they move). Congregations in Boston and the District of Columbia extend this regional cluster to the north and south, and even further to the north there are a few congregations in Toronto and Montreal. With the exception of Miami, the American south is noticeably absent, even though the denomination of Redeemer, the network’s “mother church,” has a strong presence in Mississippi, Alabama, the Carolinas, and Georgia (PCA 2015; ARDA 2010). Despite the close affiliation of CtC with Redeemer Presbyterian Church, the network is not restricted to its denomination, the Presbyterian Church credit for them. ... It’s kind of difficult to keep really accurate numbers for the network because of all the different relationships.” Of course, some of the three hundred churches may have also folded since they were started.
in America (PCA), nor to Presbyterianism. The network includes congregations affiliated with various Baptist denominations, the Evangelical-Free Church, the Christian Reformed Church, and even Calvary Chapel.

CtC is present throughout the southern hemisphere. There are churches around the Pacific, including Australia, Singapore, Malaysia, South Korea, the Philippines, Hong Kong, Taiwan, and even one in mainland China. There are also CtC-affiliated plants in India and one in Dubai. There are sixteen churches in Central and South America, with five each in Mexico and Brazil. On the African continent, there is a clear concentration in South Africa, but one affiliated congregation each is located in the Democratic Republic of Congo and Madagascar. Altogether, fifty-two congregations, or about one out of five, in the CtC network are located outside of North America and Europe.

In Europe, eighty-six churches are affiliated with the network. That is more than a third of the congregations in the network including North America, indicating the major place Europe has in the international work of the network. Table 2.1 provides a breakdown by country, and figure 2.2 shows a map indicating the locations of CtC plants in Europe (only cities with more than one congregation are labeled). Looking at the regional breakdown, the first thing that jumps out is the strong concentration of CtC congregations in the Netherlands and the United Kingdom. Almost half of all CtC congregations in Europe are in these two countries, twenty-four percent and twenty-three percent respectively. Of the twenty-one congregations in the U.K., fifteen are in England, three are in Scotland, and three in Northern Ireland. The large number in the United Kingdom perhaps is not too surprising. The shared cultural and religious history with America and the absence of a linguistic barrier make it easier for the practice and message of church planting to take hold there than elsewhere in Europe. A bigger factor yet may be the openness of the Church of England to church planting and so-called “fresh expressions.” In 2004, the Anglican Church issued a report, *Mission-Shaped Church*, that quotes Ulrich Beck and Manuel Castells as it makes the case for experimenting with new kinds of organizational models (Mission and Public Affairs Council, Church of England 2004). Church planters do not have to work against existing institutions, but can count on their support. The monopoly holder is not shutting out
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Total CtC Congregations</th>
<th>CtC Congregations per 1 Million Urban Pop.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Belgium</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Croatia</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Czech Republic</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finland</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>0.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greece</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hungary</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ireland</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Netherlands</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>1.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Romania</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Russia</td>
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<td>0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spain</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ukraine</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>0.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Serbia</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.25</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Sources: Redeemer City to City, personal communication; CtC (2014a); population numbers and urban proportion extracted from ARDA (2011).*

Table 2.1: CtC Congregations in Europe by Country.

new competitors.

The Dutch case, where the number of congregations is not only large in absolute terms but also in relation to the country’s urban population, is more puzzling. Amsterdam alone, a city of less than a million people, counts nine churches. Knippenberg (2006) has argued that the historical legacy of the Dutch system of “pillarization” has left a favorable opportunity structure for religious newcomers. Pillarization was a system of managed pluralism, and the work of the British sociologist David Martin (1978) suggests that, with this legacy, the Netherlands is culturally closer to Anglosphere than to its continental neighbors. Dutch society may be considered in some regards as the closest thing to an Anglo-American outpost on the continent (see Martin 2005: 77). Two further things are notable about church planting in the Dutch context. First, it is the historic churches associated with the Netherlands’ long-dominant Calvinist tradition that engage in church planting, not marginal or new bodies, as is the case in France or Germany. Sec-
ond, at the Free University of Amsterdam, the smaller of the capital city’s two public universities, the theology department has a named chair for church planting. Church planting is part of the curriculum of theologians being trained at this public secular institution, indicating the degree to which the practice of church planting has been institutionalized.

These numbers seem to confirm the economic theory of religious mobilization discussed in the introduction. The preponderance of these two countries should not be taken to suggest, however, that CtC is active in Europe only insofar as there are low barriers to market entry. According to the International Religious Freedom reports issued by the U.S. State Department (cf. ARDA 2011), five of the seventeen countries with a CtC presence have “restrictive limits” on foreign missionary activity. Recent growth in particular has taken place mostly outside of the Anglo-Dutch core of the European network. In 2014, the network added churches in Ireland, Belgium,
Italy, and France, all majority-Catholic countries; in Finland, where the Lutheran and Orthodox churches are legally designated as national churches; in Germany, where the Protestant and Catholic churches enjoy a privileged relationship with the state; and in Russia, where the Orthodox church has extensive privileges in addition to having ties with Putin’s political machine. If we regard these countries as having “religious economies” as the economic theory of religious mobilization suggests, then many of them are structured in such a way that make it difficult for new firms to arise as competitors. Even so, the church planters in the CtC network are trying to capture a share. Former Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams spoke of a “mixed-economy church” in England; perhaps that is a useful label to describe the morphology of the religious landscape of Europe in the medium term. I will return to this in the closing chapter.

MEET THE PLANTS

In my research I focused on CtC church plants in four cities in Germany, and in order to have additional points of comparison, I also studied church plants in three neighboring countries: the Czech Republic, the Netherlands, and France. Here I will briefly introduce each of these sites to provide some additional background for the following chapters.

Berlinprojekt

Widely considered a successful church plant even outside the borders of Germany, Berlinprojekt was an obvious church to study. It also (unofficially) has the status of a flagship church plant in the CtC network. In 2005, a young duo of male ministers, Matthias and Philipp, started the church with the help of a core group or “start team” of eleven people. Since then, the church has not only managed to grow to a size of about five-hundred regular attendees, but has even sponsored several “daughter churches.” People that attend are mostly between the ages of twenty-five and thirty-five, and they are frequently part of Berlin’s “creative class.” This is remarkable given the

10. For an account of the subterfuge an American evangelical organization had to engage in to practice church planting in Russia, see Glanzer (2002).
11. For more on my choice of research sites, see the methodological appendix A.
context. In his magisterial study of working-class religion in major nineteenth-century cities, Hugh McLeod (1996) found high levels of that indifference or apathy to religion in Berlin around the turn of the century, driven especially by the social conflicts between elites controlling the state church and radicals among the working and middle classes. During much of the twentieth century, the eastern part of Berlin lived under a regime of “forced secularity,” and this “successful experiment” (Wohlrab-Sahr, Karstein, and Schmidt-Lux 2009) in state-sponsored secularization has made the former East Germany “the world’s most secular society” (Martin 2010: ch. 9). More than two thirds of the population is not affiliated with either of the major churches, compared to less than a third in the West (Pollack 2003: 78). A recent study of church membership and church attendance in Germany (Lois 2011) confirms this finding, but also found relatively higher probability of membership and attendance among members of younger cohorts in the East born after 1961 and especially after 1975. Members of Berlinprojekt live in an environment in which church membership and attendance is rare, but they are also part of a cohort that is more likely to join and attend a church than the previous generation.

In its target area consisting of the central districts of Mitte and Prenzlauer Berg in the former East, and Kreuzberg in the West, the church has changed locations several times. After moving out of Matthias’ living room, where the first services were held, the congregation met in a gallery space in a cultural center called Kulturbrauerei (Culture Brewery) in Prenzlauer Berg, an area which was heavily gentrified starting in the decade following Germany’s unification (Bernt and Holm 2009). This space was sufficient for about sixty people. After the gallery space became too small to accommodate the average number of attendants at Sunday services, Berlinprojekt relocated its services to a larger event space in the same cultural center able to accommodate about one-hundred and twenty people. The next move, in 2008, was into the district of Mitte, to a movie theater called Babylon located just off Rosa Luxemburg Square. Here services are held on Sunday mornings, and, since 2010, the church also offers an evening service that initially met in a co-working space in Kreuzberg before finding a space in Prenzlauer Berg that can seat a greater number of people in 2014.

As befits the setting in which they are held, the worship services have a fairly informal style.
The pastors often appear on stage in tight-fitting v-neck t-shirts. A small band with vocals, guitar and percussion leads the congregation in song which, unlike in many congregations that embraced the genre of Contemporary Christian Music (Gormly 2003; Howard and Streck 2004), are almost all in German. Perhaps surprisingly given the general informality of the setting, worship services are much more liturgical than in most evangelical churches, and the pastors make a point of explaining the intention behind liturgical forms every Sunday. The biggest part of the service—typically about half—is taken up by the sermon, lasting up to forty-five minutes. Sermons always relate to scripture and have a scholarly tone even as they reference popular culture and everyday life. The bulletin containing the order of worship usually has an excerpt from a poem, essay or article printed in the front, and sermons often touch on this text. Their content is neither fire-and-brimstone invective nor merely therapeutic babble. Overall services are conducted in such a way that newcomers feel welcome and members do not have to feel embarrassed to bring non-church-going friends along.

The space of the movie theater with fixed rows of seats does not lend itself to socializing, but after the service people congregate in the foyer where coffee is served. Those who attend Berlinprojekt regularly are part of small bible study groups called Sofagruppen (sofa groups). These small groups usually meet once a week in the homes of congregation members trained as small group leaders, a way for congregation members to feel as part of a community outside the hours set aside for the worship service on Sundays. The church also runs a program for volunteering and charity work for the benefit of children’s and refugee organizations in the city.

In 2006, Berlinprojekt organized its first art conference that drew over one hundred participants, and in 2008, when the staff started renting permanent office space in the district of Mitte, they also rented the adjoining gallery. This way, the church is able to participate actively in the city’s creative scene that many congregation members feel a part of.

Three Berlinprojekt daughter churches are located in the Berlin districts of Kreuzberg (founded 2012), Friedrichshain, and Wedding (both 2014).
Hamburgprojekt

Hamburgprojekt is Berlinprojekt’s oldest daughter church. It, too, is regarded as a success, having already been involved in the planting of a daughter church of its own. Martin, the founding pastor, worked with Berlinprojekt for over three years before relocating to his native Hamburg to plant a church there. Like Berlinprojekt, the church started with a core group of a dozen people. A second pastor, Eric, was involved from the earliest stages, but he did not officially join the staff until about two years later. According to Martin, sixty people attended the first trial service in late 2008. A year later, one hundred and forty people attended services on average. In late 2014, Eric reported that this number was up to three hundred and fifty.

The church has also changed locations since it was founded. Initially they rented an space in a cultural center neighboring a long-time (since evicted) squat in the Sternschanze neighborhood. This space seated one hundred and fifty people. After a year this already started to get crowded. The congregation began meeting in a movie theater in a more upscale but centrally located part of town. In 2013, the congregation moved again, this time renting a municipal concert hall seating over four hundred people. The church retains a presence in the Sternschanze neighborhood through the office space it rents there, in addition to holding an afternoon service in a small venue.

In many ways, Hamburgprojekt has copied what worked in the context of Berlin. A pastor in Hamburg I spoke to informally referred to Hamburgprojekt as a “franchise” of the Berlinprojekt brand. There are, however, adaptations for the Hamburg context. Hamburg is in a culturally Protestant region, so most people have had some exposure to the Lutheran Volkskirche and have derived ideas about what a church service should look like from this context. During my initial visit in 2010, Martin told me:

In the last ten years, two hundred thousand people have left the [North Elbian] Land...

13. Incidentally, compound names for churches ending in Projekt have spread to other areas. For instance, in Cologne there is a church plant called Kölnprojekt. It follows a different model, however.
deskirche. Even accounting for the eleven million people in Schleswig-Holstein and Hamburg ... that is an incredible amount. In just ten years. ... Still, many, many still have a traditional view on church. ... They were baptized, confirmed, and often they are traditional and want the Our Father or this or that. And you noticed, we do a few things. Usually we even include one or two of the old church hits, a little jazzed up, but they know them. The form— we accommodate that and say the Our Father. We also say a creed ... I suggested to Martin he is a “liturgical pragmatist,” to which he responded: “Yes exactly. That is spot on.” Then he qualified: “We look closely at the people, we look at their hearts and so on. In that sense, yes, I’m a liturgical pragmatist. But not in the sense that I completely do what they all want.”

When I returned two years later, I wrote the following in my field notes: “The service is so much like a Berlinprojekt service—more so than last time 2.5 years ago! They meet in a movie theater, have similar bulletins communicating similar information, they sing similar songs led by similar types of people, etc.”

Frankfurt City Church

Preparations for planting Frankfurt City Church (FCC) started in late 2005, around the same time that Berlinprojekt started getting underway, and the official launch was in summer of 2007. The founding pastors, Ulli and Dae-sung, studied theology at an evangelical seminary in Giessen, about an hour away from Frankfurt, and a lecturer there who also played a part in encouraging the efforts of Matthias and Philipp of Berlinprojekt, asked them if they would be interested in planting a church in their hometown of Frankfurt. Initially the church plant was a non-denominational project, but the question of denominational affiliation kept being raised. “Then the people ask, well, what is the background to this?” Ulli recalled. “Is there a denomination that you are a part of? When we answered, no, not really, that was a little bit strange, a little cultish. So we thought it would be advantageous to become a part of something.” They decided to join the Evangelical-Free Association, the same denomination the Berlinprojekt and Hamburgprojekt are a part of.

The church plant started with a core group of fifteen people that grew to about fifty people by
the time of the launch in 2007. The initial meeting place was the private home of Ulli’s parents, followed by Ulli’s apartment, followed by a barber shop. Then they started renting rooms from the YMCA until settling in a building formerly used by a Methodist church (and still bearing its name) centrally located in walking distance from the main train station (Bahnhofsviertel). When standing in front of the church building, it is possible to see the highrise towers of Frankfurt’s financial district to the east, only a mile away. The building is unassuming and does not look like a church at first glance. Next door is a low-end hotel, and across the street is dilapidated five-story commercial building. Unlike in Berlin and Frankfurt, where the Projekt churches started out in the neighborhoods where the target population of young urban professionals lives, FCC sought out a central location to make it easy to reach for commuters. Frankfurt is a city of only about seven hundred thousand, but on business days the city draws over a half million commuters from the wider conurbation. Further, according to the pastors, social milieux in the city are not very concentrated in particular neighborhoods, so there was to them no obvious choice of a neighborhood to base the church in. That was another reason for picking a central location. It makes it possible for people to gather from various neighborhoods as well as from beyond the city limits.

Ulli and Dae-sung are both second generation Korean-Germans. They were familiar with the idea of church planting even before being approached by the lecturer in Giessen because leaders from Korean congregations in and around Frankfurt had been encouraging them to start a new church specifically for the second generation. When plans for FCC took shape, it was clear to the pastors that they wanted, as Ulli said, “no congregation for the second generation of Koreans, but simply an open one, for all.” Still, FCC draws a sizable number of Korean-Germans. They attribute this to network effects, since the church grew out of personal relationships. Ulli added, “I think, when a new person comes in, they notice that. It is not a typical German church. ... We try to pay attention that there aren’t too many Koreans standing in front. When we can, we try to make it balanced.”

Services are held in the afternoons in the main sanctuary, which features a big mural of the Last Supper. The congregation sits in rows of chairs. Like in Berlin and Hamburg, members are in
their early twenties to late thirties, and mostly they have attended university or learned a skilled trade. The proportion of members who work in the creative professions is lower, but financial and engineering professions seemed to be represented more. The proportion of young families is higher than in Berlin and Hamburg. According to the pastors, there are usually about one hundred and thirty congregants, not counting up to forty children.

Nordstern-Kirche

When I interviewed Thomas, the founding pastor of Nordstern-Kirche in Frankfurt, in 2012, the church planting project had only recently been named, and it was yet to hold weekly services. In February 2012, a few months before we met, Thomas and his start team of fifteen people organized a launch event at a neighborhood café that drew fifty people. Based in the neighborhood of Bornheim, the work of church planting at the time consisted mostly of building relationships inside the neighborhood.

In addition, Thomas was leading an eight-week foundational course on the Christian faith. Nine people were participating on a weekly basis. Like the Alpha Course in the United Kingdom, these kinds of courses are in relatively high demand in Germany, even outside evangelical circles. The nine people had learned about the course through contacts with Thomas, his wife or members of the start team in the workplace or at kindergarten. For the most part they were between the ages of twenty-five and thirty-five and had a degree from a university. All of them were German.

The start team went through an unusual process in developing the plans for a new congregation in Frankfurt. A group of fifteen people wanted to join with Thomas in planting a church in a major German city, but they had not yet decided which one. For a while they were considering Bochum, a post-industrial city in the Ruhr Valley. When they settled on Frankfurt, all but a few, who for personal reasons could not make the move, began relocating there. The group was still discussing how to define itself as a community and what practical steps the church would take in the neighborhood. Would they open a café? Would they engage culturally? Or through vol-
unteering? Would they meet in small cell groups or aim to have a weekly church service first?

These questions were debated under the heading of a “philosophy of ministry” with reference to the Redeemer church planter manual (Keller and Thompson 2002).

Thomas’ denominational affiliation is with the Brethren, who in Germany are organized, together with the Baptists, in the Union of Evangelical Free Church Congregations (Bund Evangelisch-Freikirchlicher Gemeinden, EFG). Originally the EFG had no program to support church planting. When they found out that Thomas was preparing to start a new congregation and was considering to switch denominations if the EFG proved unable to support him, they created structures to accommodate and support him and other church planters hoping to do similar work in their congregation. The most important policy change was to allow newly founded churches to operate as autonomous entities that can handle their own finances. Otherwise they would have to be affiliated with an existing congregation, which would have effective veto powers over all decisions in the new church plant.

Soulfire

Soulfire in Cologne was also still in the early stages when I met Florian, the founding pastor. He was planting Soulfire as a daughter church of a large Calvary Chapel in Siegen. Siegen is a small city located about sixty miles away in a region with a higher-than-average density of free churches, the historical heritage of an eighteenth-century Pietist revival movement in the region. In this early stage, the life of the congregation consisted of bible study sessions and meetings for the start team to read through a church planting manual. Between twelve and fifteen people came to either meeting, and the meetings were usually held in Florian’s home. He lives with his wife and two children in a two-bedroom apartment centrally located within walking distance from the Cathedral. Additionally, Florian and members of the start team engage in weekly evangelistic actions in the downtown pedestrian shopping area. One is called Contact Person (Ansprechpartner) and consists of standing in a busy, narrow shopping street holding up a sign inviting passers-by to engage in conversation. The idea behind this and related actions is to
generate conversations, learn about people’s views, and make contacts in the city.

Soulfire had not settled on a meeting space yet when I visited, but their plan was to either meet in a cultural center used by local chapters of Attac, Occupy and Robin Wood as well as by artists, or to use the crypt of one of the many Catholic churches in the area. I was able to attend a bible study as well as one of the start team meetings. For the team meeting, the group had read through the chapter on discipleship and discussed how Soulfire should approach this topic. The main point of discussion was how to balance teaching structures on the one hand, and community building on the other. If there are too many predefined structures (such as classes), it runs the risk of undercutting more organic community building. But if there are only interpersonal relations, then spiritual learning and growth might end up being neglected. The group did not make any decisions on how to handle this issue, but they shared what opportunities for learning were important in their spiritual life thus far. Several mentioned watching or listening to sermons that were available online. Two women in the group especially liked Mark Driscoll’s sermons.

Florian is the first pastor I have introduced who did not attend the evangelical seminary in Giessen. In fact, he did not attend seminary or bible school at all. He is an autodidact. His training consisted of participating in Calvary Chapel’s evangelistic actions throughout Europe and in Brazil, where he met his wife. Later he became the leader of the youth ministry at Calvary Chapel in Siegen for three years before relocating to Cologne. During that time he started discussing the idea to plant a church. “Calvary Chapel is, in fact, a church planting movement. Not very intentional and not strategic at all. It is more organic and charismatic, as far as leadership is concerned,” he told me. “[I]t is a strong lay movement, and so new pastors and leaders and church planters emerge constantly.”

Amsterdam

In Amsterdam I attended to CtC church plants. The first was called Via Nova, a congregation of fifty to sixty white Dutch people, mostly in their twenties to mid-thirties. They meet in the
Vondelkerk, a beautiful secularized Catholic church building from the nineteenth century that is typically used as a concert venue, though it retains most of its original stained glass. There are no more pews, so volunteers set up rows of stairs in the sanctuary ahead of the late-afternoon Sunday services. Services, or “gatherings” (samenkomst), are much more calm and aesthetic (“high church”) than in any of the German congregations I describe above. When I visited, music was accompanied on the piano by a virtuoso player, and incense was burned during a meditative part of the service.

The second congregation is called Stroom. It meets in a small movie theater popular among students. When I attended there were about fifty participants, mostly in their thirties, not counting a dozen children. After the service, many of the congregation members gathered in the café adjoining the screening rooms.

Paris

In Paris I attended the service of a CtC congregation in the seventeenth arrondissement called Église protestante évangélique des Ternes. The church started in late 2007 and meets in a small church building that belongs to an Armenian Evangelical Church. The congregation is small; I counted thirty-five adults, mostly in their thirties and parts of young families. The ten children were dismissed for Sunday School. A member of the congregation told me afterward that typically the congregation consists of three types of people: “conservative, white, middle-class people” from the neighborhood; expatriates looking for an evangelical church; and people from the rest of Paris, many of whom are black.

Prague

TeCesta is a young church plant founded by Jan, a charismatic minister in his mid-forties. It is the only CtC church plant in the Czech Republic. Jan is widely known for having produced Bible 21, a widely-read translation of the Bible into modern Czech—a project that started in the mid-1990s and was completed in 2009, when a one-volume edition of the complete translation
became a bestseller. TaCesta is not his first foray into church planting. In the late 1980s, Jan became the head of a Pentecostal church in Prague affiliated with the Swedish Livets Ord church, which preaches a version of the gospel of prosperity. (Livets Ord is the subject of *The Globalisation of Charismatic Christianity: Spreading the Gospel of Prosperity*, an influential ethnography by Simon Coleman; see Coleman 2000.) After the Velvet Revolution, the church became known for spectacular and highly publicized evangelism. Jan also translated some books by the American megachurch pastor Joel Osteen and the Swedish founder of Livets Ord, Ulf Ekman, into Czech, and he studied in the Livets Ord seminary in Uppsala.

When I attended TaCesta (Czech for “the journey”), the contrast with what I must imagine Jan’s earlier church was like could hardly have been stronger. Meeting on a Sunday afternoon in a private room upstairs from a popular art nouveau-style café located in the center of Prague, the first thing I saw was a small group gathering around a buffet. People were helping themselves to food and ordering espresso or beer at the bar. To an outside observer, this gathering just looked like friends getting together for food and drinks. There were no outward signs that a worship service was scheduled to take place, nothing to lure in passers-by. Eventually people started taking seats around bistro tables, and the service began. Things continued in a low key, unfolding like a conversation in a circle of friends. When Jan got up to preach, he stood at a music stand, holding a half-liter glass of beer. When the service ended, people stayed, continued talking and having drinks as before.

“Theology-wise and culturally, I’m in a different place now,” Jan told me, referring to where he was in the years after the Velvet Revolution. “I try to learn from my mistakes and mistakes of others that I experienced. Maybe we are over-reacting to some excesses, in a way, but I hope it will take us on a journey. ... My ambition today is not to draw as many people to us as possible.”

**Re-Introduction, and a Brief Reflection**

Let me expand on my previous introduction of church planting from a different perspective by telling the story of the church plant that first made me aware of the phenomenon. In 2005 I was
living in Berlin, and there I met one of the founding pastors of Berlinprojekt, Matthias, at my parents’ home. Matthias was just a few years older than me (I was a recent college graduate), bright and charismatic, and, like me, noticeably underdressed for the occasion. (My parents at the time hosted regular salons, to which an acquaintance had taken Matthias along.) We bonded over our mutual interest in New York City where I was at the time still considering to move for graduate school. He had spent an intensive and formative time there a few years before. If anyone at the time could have gotten me interested in an evangelical church, it was someone like him. He spoke in a pensive but not overly formal manner about the plans for the church, which was just starting to hold services. He handed me a small flier inviting me to one of their trial services to be held in his apartment on one of the following Sundays.

So when the date arrived, I made my way to his Prenzlauer Berg address. When I got there, I found a typical one-bedroom Berlin Altbau apartment with hardwood floors and high ceilings. The spacious living room had a big, inviting couch and a large spread of fruit, baked goods and other items that signaled that this would be an opportunity to engage in a long drawn-out time of brunching and hanging out that, though not invented there, was perhaps perfected in Berlin, a city with (at the time) a low cost of living and a high unemployment rate. I was first greeted by a man in his mid-thirties, a successful journalist who did political reporting for a regional television station and who today regularly appears on Germany’s main evening news program. I had made his acquaintance before, also at my parents’ house. With him was a man I immediately recognized, an internationally renowned film director. While my awkward, star-struck manner in greeting him made it clear that I recognized who he was, he simply introduced himself with his first name. We shook hands and I failed at making small talk, so I took the first opportunity I could to talk to somebody less intimidating. The others were mostly younger than these two, twenty-somethings who looked like the young people brunching in this neighborhood’s sidewalk cafés.

The trial service, which for reasons that I now understood was being called a Sofagottesdienst (couch church service), slowly took its course with an introduction to the project by Matthias and his co-founding pastor, Philipp. While the gathering had many features typical of an evan-
gelical church service, including singing, prayer, and a sermon, it struck me at the time as being a refreshing new take on the idea of a church service, liberated from calcified institutional ways of doing things and genuinely inventive. In short, I walked away that Sunday with the impression of having seen an authentic expression of community, or at least something approaching the ideal of authenticity.

This story highlights some things about church planting that matter to my discussion of the phenomenon in the chapters to follow. In some regards, it is as old as the Christian church. Accounts of the early church indicate that often meetings were held in private homes. Differences of social status, like that between the film director and myself, are leveled by an ethos of fraternity. Sharing a common meal forms the basis of community. The letters of St. Paul and much subsequent research (Meeks 2003) indicate that the early Christian church spread in urban areas. But there are also aspects that are distinctive to the time and place of the events. Twenty years before these events, the neighborhood of Prenzlauer Berg was a working-class neighborhood in East Berlin. Ten years before, in the newly reunified city of Berlin, the area was beginning to attain the status of a “new urban frontier,” drawing first artists and students and later entrepreneurs and the newly rich into its now upgraded housing stock. The new inhabitants of the central Berlin neighborhoods of Mitte, Prenzlauer Berg and Kreuzberg that attended the Sofa-gottesdienst overwhelmingly worked in the so-called creative professions. Around the couch that Sunday, I talked to musicians, an architect, and a student of political science.

In telling this story, I have introduced the topic of this dissertation in personal terms. It only seems appropriate, then, to reflect briefly on my relationship to the topic at hand. As a sociologist of religion, I often hear the question, “Why do you study religion?” The assumption is I must have a personal investment of some sort in religious faith and its future to want to study it. This is very common, and in fact many sociologists of religion have this experience. While it is easy to evade this question by supplying a superficial answer (“religion is making a comeback, that’s why we should study it”), some sociologists have reacted with a mixture of bafflement, annoyance, and resentment at the suspicion this question often seems to entail. As targets of these suspicions, many sociologists of religion feel themselves marginalized. That is one of the reasons why
sociologists of religion lament that the wider discipline does not “take religion seriously.” Thus, one common retort is: Would you ask a rural sociologist why she studies rural society? Would you assume she’s a farmer? And would you ask a criminologist why he studies crime? Would you assume he must be a habitual criminal? “[I]t would not occur to anyone, in assessing the output of a sociologist of the family, to enquire whether he or she were married, or how they related to their father” (Hervieu-Léger 2000: 13).

While I share some of the frustration that motivates these kinds of retorts—I do not care to have to justify my scholarly interests every time they come up in conversation—I think the analogy with criminology and rural sociology can and should be taken to indicate something else. It is true: we do not, generally speaking, ask sociologists conducting research in many other fields about why they started taking an interest in what it is they study. We assume that things like crime, rural development or global migration have a self-evident, intrinsic interest. Therefore, the common assumption goes, scholars in these fields do not have to have any surplus investment. Scholars of religion (as well as of gender relations, sexualities and other “soft” topics), on the other hand, must have special reasons for studying something that no longer appears universally relevant.

When we make these assumptions, we forget the ways in which the objects of study in sociology and the human sciences more generally are not merely given; as artefacts of human culture, they are at least partially produced or constituted through the research process. Weber, borrowing from the neo-Kantian philosopher Heinrich Rickert, called this relation between a researcher and her object of study a “value-relation” (see Oakes 1990). All scholars in the human sciences construct their object of study in and through a value-relation, including criminologists and rural sociologists. The “object” of study is not an object at all, but rather the (intersubjective) product of a value-relation.

To take an example, criminologists studying “deviance” implicitly value conformity with the law, because it is only in relation to the value of conformity that the notion of deviance can make sense. Sociological research on agrarian change also only is meaningful in relation to values, whether a positive valuation of rural lifestyles threatened by increasing concentration in an in-
Sociologists of religion frequently express frustration at being questioned about their motivations (Smith 2014), perhaps because it is harder for them to disavow the value-relation that exists between them and their field of study. Sociology of religion was a neglected subfield because the wider discipline’s overwhelming secularist orientation kept it from accepting the “value-relevance” of religious phenomena (for historical sociology, see P. Gorski 2005). That does not mean, however, that the discipline of sociology was not invested in values at all. Critiques of Parsonsian sociology from the 1970s and, in turn, critiques of Parsons’ critics, make this clear. The former lamented that dominant sociology accorded value-relevance only to that which bolstered social stability, the latter that sociologists were turning into partisans of Great Society welfarism (Gouldner 1970, 1973). The discipline was better off for it when these value commitments were uncovered, and we should continue interrogating them, not just of scholars studying religion, but for all parts of social life.

When I relocated to New York from Berlin to begin graduate school, I had an interest in the sociology of religion, though I was not yet committed to the field. I began reading and attending academic events in the subdiscipline, and quickly was struck by the frequency at which comparisons between the United States and Europe were being made. This is famously true about the pre-sociological classic Alexis de Tocqueville, about whose Democracy in America I wrote one of my first papers in graduate school. As I mentioned above, Max Weber also dwelt on the differences between Europe and America, and even more recent work I encountered made much of the differences between the two. Depending on their outlook and commitments, scholars noted either with lament or with glee that Europe is much more secular than the U.S., with fewer believers, much less religious rhetoric in public, no notable conservative Christian mobilization for right-wing political movements, etc. The more often I heard this line repeated, the more it struck me as an oversimplification or just plain wrong. Of course, most statistical data make a pretty clear case that this divide does in fact exist, but I knew out of experience that this narrative about religious America and secular Europe blots out something. Having grown up in an evangelical home in Germany, I was intimately familiar with a lifeworld that calls into question the
easy contrasts I encountered everywhere in the literature. I am thinking particularly about revisions of secularization theory that seek to salvage the theory’s main claims by stating that they only apply in Europe, not universally (e.g., Gauchet [1997]; Davie [2006]). Now, I knew that it would be a logical fallacy—let alone a grave misunderstanding of what terms like secular, secularism and secularization mean—to hold up individual cases of active religiosity as somehow belying a general pattern of greater secularity in Europe. Nonetheless, as theorists such as Alfred Schütz, Jürgen Habermas and Henri Lefebvre have argued, it is in the lifeworld that understandings of social reality and the self are formed. Without understanding everyday lived experience, we do not know how to interpret the aggregate statistical data on church attendance, religious belief, or value preferences.

More than that, I took up study of these subjects out of a sense of care for them. If church planting ventures are where Christians dedicate much of their time, energy and resources, what does this say about the faith in which I grew up and the direction in which it was being taken? While I was initially impressed by the church plant I encountered in Berlin, I was also troubled by parts of it. If this was the direction Christians were taking, indeed the “cutting edge,” it seemed important to me to understand what kinds of engagements with the world and with faith it would lead to.

I mentioned Max Weber’s concept of value-relation before. Weber is often seen as an advocate of value neutrality, and indeed he felt researchers should seek to not become openly partisan in their pursuits. His position is sometimes caricatured, however, as suggesting that scholars’ subjective experiences and value commitments have no bearing on their research. Weber was keenly aware, however, of the relevance of values in the practice of scholarship, and he did not insist on bracketing personal experiences altogether, either. In fact, particularly in his studies on Protestantism, Weber mentions his own family several times.
Chapter Three

Framing a Mission Field

This chapter places my account of the contemporary church planting movement in a broader historical framework. Stepping back from the seeming novelty of this phenomenon and its affiliation with aspects of contemporary society, I look to some earlier instances of missionary engagement in Europe to answer the question of how and why some participants in the missionary movement came to regard Europe as a mission field, dedicating workers and resources to evangelistic work on the continent. This kind of work constitutes an early precursor to the contemporary phenomenon of church planting, and as such it provides a much needed reminder not to exaggerate its novelty—a constant temptation for sociologists, who often work in an ahistorical and “presentist” mode. The goal is not to imply that there is nothing new under the sun, but to tease out what is truly new about the phenomenon of church planting. This is a first step in elaborating my thesis that the church planting movement engages in religious place-making at the intersection of urban space and the spirit of silicon capitalism.

I address the question of how and why Europe became a mission field by engaging with the broader debate on global Christianity. This leads me to argue two things. First, the global Christianity literature gets the nature of the change wrong, at least as far as the changing position of the west in the Christian world is concerned. The religious historians writing in the global Christianity paradigm imply that a strong break has taken place between a western-centric (Christendom) past and a globalized (post-Christendom) present. While these historians are correct that something changed during the twentieth century—the emergence of Europe as a mission field being a case in point—these changes must be studied in context and in terms of specific cultural logics, not subsumed under overly broad claims at the highest historical and geographical scale. Second, the explanation offered up by the global Christianity paradigm to account for these
changes is not satisfactory. In basing its analysis either on accounts of changing demographics or shifting theological frameworks, the global Christianity literature does not account for the crucial role played by practices and mediations in reworking the understanding of Christianity in the west and around the world.

In the second part, I turn to a historical example of an actor engaged in reframing the position of Europe in the geography of Christianity: the European Christian Mission (ECM), an American-based mission society, during the interwar years. Let me briefly anticipate my argument in this section. I argue that the Mission framed Europe as a mission field by constructing the target population as occupying an interstitial space between Christendom and heathendom. We can understand the cultural logic behind this construction in terms of Homi Bhaba’s notion of liminality. As “baptized pagans,” a figure with a long history in revivalist currents of Protestantism, Europeans were a kind of hybrid, neither purely Christian nor purely non-Christian, and as such the mission in Europe was primarily about purification. I end by turning to a critic of Bhaba’s notion of liminality to question to what extent the cultural logic behind early framings can apply today.

There a number of reasons that justify studying the ECM as a historical precursor to the church planting phenomenon. First, the ECM, as an American organization engaged in Europe by both sending American missionaries and supporting indigenous workers, had (and continues to have) a transatlantic dimension. For almost all church planters I interviewed, the experience of transatlantic crossing was a formative part of their biography. Similarly, the CtC network is transatlantic. Many church plants maintain relationships to American congregations, who often send financial support and short-term mission teams to support the fledgling European churches. Additionally, the ECM has redefined itself in the present day as a church planting organization. Thus, there is a historical thread that connects transatlantic mission work of the early twentieth century with contemporary transnational church planting activity.

1. A similar critique of the global Christianity literature is made by contributors to Engelke and Robbins (2010).
After Christendom?

Since the 1980s, religious historians such as Dana Robert, Philip Jenkins and Andrew Walls have published accounts of the rise of “global Christianity.” This term describes the new reality created by the fact that “the center of gravity in the Christian world has shifted inexorably Southward, to Africa, Asia, and Latin America” (Jenkins 2002: 2) and away from Europe and North America. This account has been highly influential, and in fact, as the reception of the work of Philip Jenkins (2002, 2006, 2007) illustrates, it has come to shape the popular understanding of the current situation of Christianity. In the global Christianity paradigm, the present state of the Christian faith around the world is generally regarded as the product of two broad trends: the expansion of Christian belief and practice in the global south since the era of decolonization (postcoloniality), and its concomitant decline in Europe (secularization). I first raise some questions about the first part of this account—the postcolonial geography of Christianity—before addressing problems with its concept of secularization.

Global Christianity and the West

On the surface, the story of the rise of global Christianity could serve to explain the emergence of Europe as a mission field. Europe has simply become one destination among others for missionaries because it is no longer elevated over the rest of the world as a function of its imperial projects. Rather, in the Christian religioscape (McAlister 2005) of the postcolonial world, Europe has been reduced to just another place of Christian practice. As a result, the border between missionary-sending and missionary-receiving countries has been erased (Beuttler 2008).

Sociologists have raised several critical points in response to this narrative. Robert Wuthnow in particular has dismissed the global Christianity concept, calling it “a huge conceptual obsta-

2. Cf. Robert (2009), Jenkins (2002), and Walls (1996). Other scholars, particularly theologians, use the term “post-Christendom” (e.g., Shenk 1999; Costas 1982; Hanciles 2008), which I will treat as closely related to what Robert Wuthnow (2009: ch. 2) calls the “global Christianity paradigm.” Other evangelical authors to be counted in this paradigm include Lesslie Newbigin, Samuel Escobar, René Padilla, and John Stott.
cle” (Wuthnow 2009: 32) in light of the continued influence of Euro-American organizations, resources and media in the Christian religioscape. American megachurches, in particular, remain hugely influential (see also Priest, Wilson, and Johnson 2010). Sociologists studying religion and politics have argued that, like in other areas of economy and society, processes of globalization in the Christian faith do not lead to a “flattening” of the world, but can in fact reinforce western ideological hegemony (Brouwer, Gifford, and Rose 1996). These objections indicate that the idea of a break—Europe then, the globe now; Christendom then, post-Christendom now—needs to be interrogated, and not simply assumed.

Another critical point to be raised about the literature on global Christianity is that, in focusing on shifts since the 1960s and 1970s, it occludes prior histories and contexts of Europe being called into question as the self-evident normative center of Christianity. Based on one’s historical frame of reference, the idea of Europe as a mission field is more or less surprising. At least since the late eighteenth century, Europe has widely been regarded as the center of Christendom charged with converting heathendom, defined as most of the world outside its borders and represented as such on missionary maps at the time (see figure 3.1). The missionary movement has been western-centric since as far back as the sixteenth century, when first Portuguese and Spanish and then French Roman Catholic missionaries carried out missions throughout their respective empires (Neill 1971). In this context, projects to missionize Europeans seem at least counterintuitive.

The further we look back in history, however, the less this is the case. On the account of the so-called “axial age,” the great monotheistic religions have their roots in the broad Eurasian landmass, of which what we today call Europe is little more than a small outpost (Jaspers 1953). Similarly, if we take the long view of Christian history, like the British church historian Diarmaid MacCulloch’s account of “the first three-thousand years” of Christianity, then Christendom is a formation of the eastern Mediterranean world, again with much of what we today call Europe forming a provincial outpost populated by barbarians rather than a normative center (MacCulloch 2010). American sociologist Rodney Stark argues that, prior to Emperor Constantine making Christianity the official faith of the Roman Empire, there were very few Christians west of the Em-
pire (Stark 1996). The Christianization of Europe was not considered complete until a millennium later, when the faith reached Lithuania and Russia (Neill 1971, 1986).

Even if we go back only as far as the eighteenth century, many of the revival movements that later fueled the rise of the modern missionary movement initially had a domestic focus. Recall, for instance, what E. P. Thompson calls the “psychic terror” of the early English Methodists against the lower classes, turning rebellious rabble into “submissive industrial workers” (Thompson 1964: 368). Eric Hobsbawm notes that the rapid expansion of sectarian Protestantism during the Age of Revolution (1789–1848) “was almost entirely confined to the countries of developed capitalist civilization” (Hobsbawm 1962: 225), such as Britain, the United States, Germany, the Netherlands, and Norway. The Protestant missionary endeavor only became decisively directed outward afterwards, during the Age of Empire (Hobsbawm 1987: ch. 3; Ward 1992). Our conception of Christendom as overlapping with Europe (or Euro-America) was consolidated in this pe-
Period and through the colonial encounter (Comaroff and Comaroff 1991–1997; Veer 1996). Europe becoming a mission field may then just be seen as a return to the status quo ante. In any case, this brief historical overview should serve to unsettle the identity of Christendom. All along, this formation was more fragmented, contested and precarious than the global Christianity paradigm’s posit of Christendom as a bounded entity claims.

Constructing the Secular

A further weakness of the global Christianity paradigm is that it takes the decline of Christianity in Europe as an objective given. The “center of gravity” in the Christian world shifted away from Europe (note the mechanistic metaphor used by Jenkins and others) due, in large part, to Europe’s secularization. There are a number of problems with this explanation. First, secularization does not necessarily entail quantitative decline in belief and practice. Considering the empirical evidence, Casanova (1994) finds that the defensible part of secularization theory is not the idea of quantitative decline or even the notion of religion’s privatization, but rather its differentiation from other social spheres such as the state and the economic sphere. Historically, many Christian denominations, including evangelical ones, have tolerated, if not embraced, this kind of institutional autonomy (Woodberry and Shah 2005). Secularization alone would not spur them into action.

Second, even if we take the claim about quantitative decline at face value, social movements such as the missionary movement do not simply mobilize in response to structural conditions such as new demographic realities. These kinds of objective factors may be a necessary condition for successful mobilization, but they are not sufficient. Instead, movements seeking to mobilize people and resources are engaged in struggles to make meaning of the situation in which they seek to intervene (Benford and Snow 2000). To this end, they create what scholars of social movements call collective action frames.

“Frames” are interpretive packages that activists develop to mobilize potential adherents and constituents ... When successful, frames make a compelling case for the “injustice” of the condition and the likely effectiveness of collective “agency” in changing that condition. They also make clear the “identities” of the contenders,
distinguishing “us” from “them” and depicting antagonists as human decision makers rather than impersonal forces ... (Polletta and Jasper 2001: 291)

In the case of the missionary movement, we can substitute “sin” for “injustice.” Its frames must make an effective case for the sinfulness of the prevailing (secular) condition in the mission field. And although the biblical Great Commission speaks forcefully to the effectiveness of agency, the case must nonetheless be made for investing time and energy in one mission field rather than another. Finally, when it comes to distinguishing between the movement and its antagonists, the analogy between the missionary movement and social (protest) movements becomes somewhat more tenuous, since the source of sin is often ascribed to impersonal or superhuman forces (evil, Satan, the fallen condition of humanity). Nonetheless, even these are often localized in specific human practices, institutions, or artefacts.

In what follows, I outline how actors in the missionary movement sought to (re-) frame the situation in the Christian world starting in the early twentieth century through the print media. This early work of framing or interpreting the religious situation of Europe continues to matter to present-day phenomena such as the church planting movement because it continues to influence how the situation is read.

In December 1920, *Missions*, a periodical of the Northern Baptist Convention in the U.S., asked its readers to “Pray for Europe.” Based on surveying a variety of missions periodicals, this marks one of the earliest instance of Europe being written about in this manner in a periodical of this kind. Although there were some isolated American evangelistic efforts targeting Europe from the late nineteenth century onward, the birth of Europe as a missions field can be dated to the interwar years when Europe was recovering from the devastation of the First World War and the United States was beginning its ascent as a major world power. Some sociologists cite the land-

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3. There is one other way in which the analogy between social movements and religious movements may become tricky. Social movement scholars frequently assume that framing processes are strategic and thus intentional, whereas my understanding of framing includes processes of meaning-making driven by or derived from unconscious presuppositions or ideologies; see Goffman (1986) on “primary frameworks.”

4. My decision to focus on print media was influenced by the work of David Morgan on print ephemera in nineteenth-century evangelicalism (cf. Morgan 2011, 2006); see also Cohen and Boyer (2008).
mark book *La France, pays de missions?* (Godin and Daniel [1943]), written toward the end of the Second World War by two prominent French worker-priests, as evidence of Europe’s changing place in the world missionary enterprise (e.g. Davie [2007: 35]). Similarly, historians of evangelicals missions tend to focus on the period after 1945 (Carpenter and Shenk [1990]). In fact, this story started around two decades earlier than is often assumed.

Looking at *Missions’* call to pray for Europe more closely, the editors enumerate thirty-one separate prayers of intercession—one for each day of the first month of 1921—that readers should incorporate into their daily prayers. The list starts with general prayer requests before addressing the situation in individual European countries for most of the remainder of the month. The first item reads: “That America may appreciate her opportunity and accept her full share of responsibility for Europe.” What interests me about the items pertaining to individual countries is how American responsibility is understood. Given the historical context, it is not surprising that there are some references to communist and other illiberal regimes. In that regard, the implicit geopolitics are not much different from official American policy at the time. Item 18 reads, “For the restoration of peace and stable social order in Russia with free self-government.” Similarly, item 10 on the list refers to the Balkans, requesting “the establishment of stable government and social order.” For the most part, however, the concerns are of a different nature: “the establishment of full religious liberty” in Romania, “the strengthening of our Baptist forces” in Hungary, “a new national consciousness with truly Christian ideals” for Austria, or “[t]hat Spain and Portugal in the new era may be liberated from ecclesiastical bondage.” While the concern about the restriction of religious liberty in Romania might again be seen as an expression of Wilsonian concern about the rise of illiberal regimes at the time, the other items speak to a different framing of the European situation that has nothing to do with geopolitics. It is particularly striking that a missionary organization longs for the end of “ecclesiastical bondage.” Like in other periods, it would be too simple to reduce missionary activities to an underlying imperialist agenda (Porter [2005]; Stamatov [2010]). What cultural logics were at play in these framings of Europe by American missionary societies?
To address this question, I look more closely at one actor involved in staking out the European mission field in the interwar years. I chose the organization to study by consulting an authoritative reference work on missions agencies and perusing the entries on organizations whose missions field is classified as “Europe, general” (Goddard 1967). I decided to focus on the organization with the longest history and the highest number of workers in the field. Thus, although an organization called the American-European Fellowship was active from 1922 onward and published a periodical called The European Harvest Field (Goddard 1967: entry 52), it had only few workers and seems to have been short-lived. Among those listed, the longest-operating organizations with the biggest workforce—the Bible Christian Union and the Mission to Europe’s Millions—were both founded by a G. P. Raud and, at the time when the reference was compiled, had their headquarters in New York City.

Ganz Petrovich Raud, sailing on one of the last voyages of the Lusitania to immigrate to Brooklyn, N.Y., from his native Estonia, founded the Mission to Europe’s Unevangelized Millions in 1920 (for biographical details, see Hanks 1995: 42–50). The organization has survived under various names until the present day, though it had to go on partial hiatus during parts of the Second World War. Today the organization is known as the European Christian Mission (ECM). As it turns out, the ECM is now a promoter of church planting in Europe (ECM 2014), but during its early history, the organization followed the classical model of supporting the evangelistic work

5. I have found some of the data on these organizations listed in Goddard (1967) to be inaccurate, but these inaccuracies do not call my case selection into question. Following World War II, another mission society, Greater Europe Mission, was founded by a veteran of D-Day. It also exists to this day, and in fact, as I will elaborate in the following chapter, I encountered GEM while doing fieldwork among church planters.

6. An American missionary chose to stay in France during the war and as a result was held in an internment camp; see “Suffering because Faithful,” Europe’s Millions, November 1941, p. 10. The mission began working among European-descended immigrants in New York City; see, e.g., “Saved in a New York Hospital,” Europe’s Millions, November 1941, p. 9. Subsequently, the mission began counting as part of its mission field “the 96,000,000 non-Protestants in America,” including “11,000,000 non-Protestants” in Greater New York; see Europe’s Millions, December 1941, p. 5; “Opportunities for Fruitfulness,” Europe’s Millions, December 1941, p. 11.
of missionaries in the field. Some of these missionaries hailed from the U.S. and were trained at conservative bible institutes like Moody Bible Institute in Chicago or the ECM’s own American Bible Missionary College in Brooklyn. However, at least as of 1941 but likely earlier, “[t]he policy of the Mission is to use Europeans as far as possible because of the advantages they possess for service among their own people.” The ECM’s workers in the field mostly held evangelistic events in villages and cities, in some cases building a more permanent presence. The mission’s periodical, The European Christian (later known as Europe’s Millions) provides an early framing of Europe as a space in need of intervention by American evangelical missionaries. I digitized all the issues of the ECM’s periodicals that are preserved at Union Theological Seminary in New York—a fairly complete archive, albeit with a few unfortunate gaps—and coded articles and their accompanying illustrations for the frame or frames they employ in describing the situation in the field. I coded 101 articles from monthly periodicals published in the interwar years and another 137 articles published during and after the Second World War. For the purposes of my account here, the articles from the years 1929, 1930, 1934 and 1935 are of greater importance, though to the extent that there are continuities, I will also draw on later issues published in 1940–1943, 1945 and 1947. See appendix B for an overview of the archival data used for this chapter.

Articles published in the periodical fall into five categories: field reports, prayer appeals, fundraising appeals, sermons, and letters or other miscellany. In the interwar period, three out of five articles are purely field reports (i.e., they are not combined with a fundraising appeal), and my analysis focuses on these as they offer the most overt framings of the situation in the mission field. Not all have bylines, but those that do indicate that the reports were written by American missionaries sent by the ECM or by local ministers supported by the mission. One in three reports in this periods are from Poland (not counting Polish White Russia), followed by Raud’s home country of Estonia, Bulgaria, Germany, Austria, Czechoslovakia, Ukraine, Polish White Russia, and Russia. The regional focus of the mission did not widen until later in the thirties, when

7. “Missionaries in Europe,” Europe’s Millions, February 1941, p. 15
8. In addition, a monthly acknowledgment of donations to the mission appears in many issues. I did not code these or other small miscellany.
the number of reports from Spain, Portugal, and France increased. It is also worth noting that most issues of the monthly periodicals contain a page entitled “Jewish Section of the European Christian Mission” detailing evangelistic work undertaken among Jewish communities in Poland and neighboring countries. In 1933, this was spun off into a separate publication, a quarterly called *The European Jew*.

Before turning to the results of my analysis, it is worth recounting Raud’s story about the moment when he found confirmation for his plan to make Europe his mission field. His narrative gives an impression of the kind of faith he, the son of a Baptist minister who suffered from persecution in his home country, hoped to bring to the rest of Europe (Raud 1929). The narrative begins on New Year’s Eve 1903, with G. P. Raud, his father Pertel, and his brother Wil in the middle of a ten-day evangelistic trip through rural Estonia. Despite severe weather conditions, which Raud describes in detail for added dramatic effect, they made their way to a village on the Russian border. They held a well-attended meeting, and after Raud’s father and brother had had their turn at preaching, the host of the meeting announced that Russian plain-clothes police had come to arrest the evangelists. “We went on with the meeting, however, realizing that the audience was deeply interested in the gospel message and many were under conviction of sin” (Raud 1929: 8). In the middle of his sermon on the final judgment as portrayed in the book of Revelations, the police enter the meeting room and wait for Raud to finish so they can handcuff him. In this moment of tension comes a dramatic twist—the moment of conviction (cf. Harding 1987).

But God intervened. His presence and majesty were felt in the room more and more plainly. Several persons here and there under terrible conviction groaned to God for mercy. The Holy Spirit worked in the heart of the leader of the police. He, too, began to feel the burden of his sins. God spoke to him. Then and there he turned and accepted Christ as his Saviour. The two policemen who were with him deserted him and fled, fearing that the same disease which had evidently seized their chief might take a hold of them.

The evangelistic meeting was able to continue and turned into an all-night prayer meeting “for the many unsaved” in the area and the larger Eastern European region. On the following New Year’s Eve 1904, the regional focus of the European Christian Mission for the first decades. The focus would be on the Jewish communities in Poland and neighboring countries.
Year’s Day, Raud reports having felt more strongly than ever that he was to found an organization—in his words, “to bring about a work”—to reach these regions evangelistically. In many issues of the ECM’s periodicals, this all-night New Year’s prayer meeting is cited as the founding moment of the organization. Although the ECM’s formal beginnings lie in the interwar years, Raud frequently dated the organization to the year 1904. Born in the midst of drama and upheaval, the founding narrative suggests that organization’s mission was from its beginnings in stark contrast to the routinized and conventionalized forms of faith that were predominant in Eastern Europe and the other regions the mission would eventually include in its field of mission. The Christian faith as understood G. P. Raud is rooted in individual experience and capable of radically transforming biographies in an instant. The ECM understood its role as that of an emissary prophet (Weber 1972).

In terms of their content, many of the field reports during the interwar years follow a similar pattern. Often the missionary or group of missionaries travel to a town or village from a larger urban center such as Prague or Tallin to hold an evangelistic meeting. A hall in which to hold the meeting has been arranged for, and the meeting is well attended, filling the hall and in some cases even exceeding its seating capacity. During the meeting, the evangelist speaks about the gospel and leads participants in the singing of hymns. Usually some of the locals in attendance come forward to repent of their ways, to request a bible or tract, or at the very least to express their interest in learning more. Often the meeting goes on for several hours longer than planned because attendees do not want to leave. The work of framing in these reports is performed less by these descriptions of events than by the seemingly incidental, such as the rendering of setting, context, and the use of metaphor.

My analysis yielded two dominant frames that recur in reports published during interwar years and thereafter: the cultural distance frame and the ritualized faith frame. I will unpack what these frames entail below. As in the case of the early example from Missions cited above, the political situation played a role in how the mission field was viewed, but a comparatively small
one. One in five reports mentions some kind of religious persecution, whether at the hands of state authorities, the Orthodox or Roman Catholic churches, or community members who disapproved of the presence of the missionaries. Reports refer to the existence of “good government” in countries like Czechoslovakia, Bulgaria or Poland. In the first two cases, this term refers to the guarantee of religious liberty (non-establishment or non-favoritism and no Soviet-style “aggressive atheism”), while in the latter case, the author refers to successful poverty reduction. Not surprisingly, the absence of good government in Soviet Russia is lamented. During the war, the political dynamics are often subsumed under theological rhetoric. The editorial of an early 1943 issue of *Europe’s Millions* states: “The tragic happenings on the continent of Europe in our day would never have taken place if Europe had had the gospel in preceding generations. Although secular histories of Europe do not deal with the subject of evangelization of that continent, yet a reading of their pages leaves the thoughtful Christian burdened for nations evidently long neglected and living without the message of salvation.”

**Cultural Distance**

On a leaflet inserted in several 1929 issues of *The European Christian*, the field of the European Christian Mission is described as comprising East, Southeast and Central Europe. “The total population is 250,000,000 people who belong almost exclusively to the white race.” The sociologist and theologian H. Richard Niebuhr identified the “love of the distant” as a motivation for missionary work (Niebuhr 1963). In mission fields in China, India, Southern Africa and South America, missionaries traversed multiple boundaries of difference, of which race was certainly

11. “Russia—Poor Russia!,” *The European Christian*, April 1930, pp. 3–4. The mission initially supported missionaries in Russia but eventually had to sever its ties with them.
13. Similarly, the “missionary styles” discussed by Cavalcanti (2005)—the acculturation and the diffusion style—suggest that a motivation for missionary activity is to transport a message from a *here* to a (distant) *there*. 

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not the least. The mission field was distant in several respects: geographically, culturally, even historically (since the regions frequently were regarded as backwards and in need of civilizing or modernizing). While American and European missionaries sailing for India or China could easily be understood to be driven by a love of the distant, Europe as mission field lacked many of these markers of distance. Nonetheless, reports in ECM publications managed to produce a sense of cultural distance.

In a rare departure from the template described above, the American male author of a report in the September 1929 issue of *The European Christian* describes some differences in everyday life he observed when he first began his mission work in Prague. The reverend writes an amusing account of shopping for a pair of shoes. The layout of stores and the interactions with shopkeepers are so different from the American norm that he feels estranged. He writes that he was “reminded of medieval times” by the Czech manner of running a store. As noted, this is an unusual report in that it deals with everyday life rather than an evangelistic event. It is typical, however, insofar as it invokes remoteness. In this case, the remoteness is historical or temporal, but authors frequently also dwell on the geographical and cultural distances they must traverse in their work in the field.

Nearly half of all reports from the interwar issues detail the remoteness of the setting in some way. They mention long roads traveled by horsedrawn carriage or automobile; they describe landscapes and pastoral villages; they allude to the simple peasant lifestyle of the target population. In some cases, a greater portion of the report describes the rural setting than the people that live there.

In nearly two-thirds of these cases, the report also remarks on the poverty, material need or squalor of the population. In nearly all cases where women are prominently mentioned in the report, the report also discusses the remoteness of the setting and/or the poverty of conditions. Together, these aspects constitute what I call the *cultural distance frame*. This frame foregrounds the distance between the American readership of the periodical and the Europeans that appear in

the reports. Quantitatively, it is the most prevalent frame in the ECM’s periodical during the interwar years, and it continues to feature prominently in issues published during and after World War II as well. Qualitatively, the frame casts the population as exotic, feminized, and (slightly) “other.”

The cultural distance frame often goes hand in hand with a frequently used metaphorical topos that includes bucolic images like hunger (“hungry hearts,” “spiritual hunger”), seeds (“the seed of the word of God”), ground (“God is preparing the ground for the sowing of the seed”), field, harvest (“harvest of souls”), and the storehouse.

In addition to the written reports, the cultural distance frame is further advanced by the use of folkloristic photographs. These images highlight the “othering” effects of the cultural distance frame. Theorists of cultural processes of othering, such as Edward Said, Sara Ahmed or Homi Bhabha, have demonstrated how these processes typically serve to consolidate the cultural identity of the West over and against its others. The framing of Europe as culturally distant in ECM reports suggests that their ideas can also help shed light on cultural processes and encounters within the West. I will return to this point in the following section.

Ritualized Faith and Fetishism

The August 1929 issue of The European Christian contains a report by a male missionary based in Tolkovo, Poland, about a funeral he held in a nearby village. The missionary reports having had some misgivings about holding the funeral in the village, fearing opposition from the “many unbelievers” there. After the believers of the village gathered in a home, he instructed one of the men to inform the police about the service, presumably to prevent persecution on the pretext of unauthorized assembly. A crowd of curious onlookers assembled outside the home where the believers had gathered. Finally the man came back with word that the police had permitted their funeral service to proceed.

Since it was a pleasant day, we opened the windows so that those outside could hear also, for only a small percentage of the people could enter the house. We had a

prayer, sang a few hymns, and then I read Luke 16:19–31. I remarked to the onlookers that I supposed they wondered why we had so simple a service without candles and crucifixes and with no prayers for the dead. ...

All listened with quietness. We closed the meeting with prayer. Then we started to walk to the cemetery which was over half a mile from the village. On the way we sang hymns. Before the body was lowered into the grave I read many Scriptures and commented on them. ...

Very many [of the onlookers] remarked that they liked the funeral service of the Christians.

This account highlights another frame that figures prominently in the ECM periodicals. I will refer to this frame as the ritualized faith frame because it casts aspects of local religious or traditional practice as ritualized and therefore spiritually dead. The missionary in this episode regards the onlookers from the village as “unbelievers” not although, but because they are accustomed to burials with candles, crucifixes, and prayers for the dead. Other observers of the episode would have seen a clash of two different Christian understandings of burial customs, the Roman Catholic and the evangelical. When regarded through the ritualized faith frame, however, it is a story of unbelievers marveling at the (truly) Christian burial practice which is distinguished by a set of absences and presences. In place of candles, crucifixes and prayers for the dead—aspects of merely ritualized faith—this practice involves prayer, gospel reading, and hymn singing.

Another report brings further aspects of this frame to the fore. A female missionary reports visiting a home in White Russian Poland where Christ’s name is now magnified but where one year ago Satan reigned supreme ...

... [J]ust a short time ago she had been bowing down to worship the ikon that had been in her home for years. At all times the table had upon it a bottle of vodka and a box of cigarettes. Our eyes were drawn to the places where these objects had been. In the corner where formerly the ikon hung we saw now a Scripture text telling of salvation for mankind through the blood of Jesus Christ. And on the table were the

17. Although the ECM defined itself as an interdenominational evangelical mission and included ministers from a variety of Protestant denominations (both Reformed and non-Reformed) among its board of directors and advisory council, the ritualized faith frame reflects a tendency that is strongly defined in Calvinism: “Reformed worship was characterized by a particularly single-minded focus on the text of the Bible as preached, read, and sung, and by a zeal to eliminate all unscriptural elements from the liturgy” (Benedict 2002, quoted in Keane 2007: 63).

Bibles belonging to the various members of the family and also some gospel hymn books.

Here the Orthodox practice of icon worship is put on an equal plane with the worldly practices of consuming alcohol and smoking cigarettes, all evidence of Satan’s reign. Again, the report draws on absences and presences to emphasize the features of genuine faith. Not all investment in materiality is condemned outright, as the substitution of the icon by the scripture passage indicates. But only certain sensational forms (Meyer 2008) are authorized within the ECM’s understanding of the Christian faith, namely those that direct the faithful’s attention to the true locus of God, the biblical text. Within the ritualized faith frame, the presence of other (unauthorized) sensational forms is a sign of something amiss. In other words, unauthorized objects or practices are cast as fetishes (Keane 2007).

More than one in three reports make reference to some form of “ritualism” or “superstition” among the target population. There are references to Orthodox ikon worship, as in the report from White Russian Poland referenced just above, and to Roman Catholic veneration of saints, among other “customs of this world.” Protestantism is not exempt from the charge of ritualism either. In one report from Czechoslovakia, a young woman who grew up in a believer in a Brethren household becomes a Christian upon finding that she, too, has had an overly ritualistic understanding of the Christian faith. Another report from Czechoslovakia contains this passage on the “sad” history of the Czech lands:

[The Czechs’] history is sad because of the oppression which they had to go through. For hundreds of years they were under the rule of the Hapsburgs and were really ruled from Rome. At the time of the Reformation when some gospel light began to shine in their land, the Roman Catholics did all they could to put out that light. Books and tracts of evangelical nature were burned.

Even Germany, land of Luther, is not exempt—even before the rise of National Socialism: “Germany is considered a Protestant country, but the gospel is much needed there.”

A recurring illustration used alongside such articles shows women kneeling in front of a crucifix. Implicitly, readers are instructed to read these images depicting outward expressions of piety as signifying an absence of true inner religious conviction. In some cases, the ECM’s condemnation of unauthorized sensational forms escalated. Reports a missionary from Southeast Poland:

Wherever we go we are received with hearty welcome. Here people are hungry to hear the Word of God. Sometimes we have to face very unpleasant situations. One believer cut down with his axe a wayside crucifix of wood with a small statue of St. Nicholas near its base. Now he is in prison. We had much trouble, for the Catholics had good reason to be angry with us.

The author of this report appears contrite, but given the context, it is likely he disapproves of the means employed in this act of iconoclasm, not with the negative valuation of the artefact that it expresses.

Much as the cultural distance frame frequently draws on the metaphors of planting and harvesting, the ritualized faith frame is also strongly associated with the recurring metaphors of darkness (“spiritual darkness”) and light (“blessed gospel light”). One in ten reports also highlights the ignorance of the local communities where ECM works, often as a result of illiteracy. This ignorance can lead to the observance of “worldly customs” or other superstitions, or it can be the cause of spiritual darkness.

**The Liminal Figure of the Baptized Pagan and Beyond**

Taken together, the cultural distance frame and the ritualized faith frame render Europeans as “baptized pagans.” As the theologian Stefan Paas (2012b) points out, variants of this term have been in use since the seventeenth century by evangelists and revivalists to blur the line between “internal” and “external” missions. “Pagan” was a term typically (since medieval times) reserved for unbelievers living outside the Christian territories of Europe, referring not just to their lack of belief but also their cultural inferiority. According to Paas (2012b), the term “baptized pagan” and its cognates were first applied to members of the Roma minority in Europe when they decided to

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join the church through baptism, and later to colonial subjects that did the same. When Puritans, Pietists and other revivalist movements began applying the term to Europeans, they explicitly sought to question the assumed categorical difference between Christian Europeans and heathen non-Europeans. The Puritan preacher Thomas Watson, who was active in the mid-seventeenth century, wrote in one of his sermons, “And are there not many among us, who are no better than baptized heathen, who need to seek the first principles of the oracles of God? It is sad, that after the sun of the gospel has shined so long in our horizon, that the veil should still be upon their heart” (quoted in Paas 2012b: 58n46). The figure of the baptized pagan, separated by a veil from the gospel light, served as a way to negotiate the need for continued Christianization in Europe.

I have argued that the figure is implicit in the ECM publications, but G. P. Raud also invokes it explicitly in a later publication. During World War II, Raud published a compendium called Inside Facts on Europe where he also writes about the presence of “baptized heathens” in Russia (Raud 1946: 187). In a section of the same volume called “Should We Call Europe Christian?” he states that Europe’s adoption of the Christian faith under Emperor Constantine “sometimes meant little more than a substitution of numerous ‘saints’ for their idols” (Raud 1946: 13).

To understand the significance of the figure of the baptized pagan in the framing of Europe as a mission field, it is useful to turn to the idea of liminality developed by Bhabha (1994). Liminality refers to the gaps between categorical distinctions that reveal their historicity. In their liminal areas, cultural differences are revealed as being produced rather than being timeless essences.

The ECM reports produce the figure of the baptized pagan by framing Europe as culturally distant and as a site of ritualized (or fetishized) faith. In this manner, the European continent is recast as an interstitial space between the Christian and the non-Christian world. Its people and their customs and culture are a hybrid—both Christian and pagan—which missionaries must set out to purify. The notion of a liminal or interstitial space bridging the Christian and the non-Christian world unsettles the division of the world into light areas (Christendom) and dark areas (heathendom), suggesting there are also “gray” areas. However, since an interstitial space still

depends on a dialectic of the Christian world and heathendom, it does not negate the distinction altogether, but ultimately upholds it. Thus, although in framing Europe as a mission field, ECM used a cultural logic of hybridization, in so doing it did not cancel out the distinction between Christendom and heathendom made in the missionary movement altogether.

Critics of Bhaba’s notion of liminality have argued that this concept has become less useful to illuminate cultural dynamics in the present. Han (2005) argues that, because it only allows for conflictual and contradictory hybrids constituted through a dialectical process, it fails to account for the playful “hyphenated” cultural forms proliferating today that are not pulled in one direction or the other. These are precisely the kinds of cultural forms that contemporary evangelism often seeks to deploy in its public engagements. Lesslie Newbigin’s influential concept of the “missional church” (Laing 2012; see) refers to a way of living as a church that does not seek to purify the surrounding culture or sees it only as a source of negativity, but that recognizes itself as a part of it, becomes engaged with it, and even affirms it (within certain limits). This concept has been influential across a wide spectrum of contemporary evangelicalism, from the emergent church to the New Calvinists and many others. It is frequently invoked in writings on church planting, and many church plants understand their role in terms of being a “missional community.”

Jan, the church planter in Prague, phrased his understanding of church like this:

I don’t think of church as a closed set any longer. More like a set defined by its center, which is not me, it is Christ. And it doesn’t really bother me so much how far you are from that center as it bothers me if you are moving toward the center, if your face is turned toward that center. Because you can be very close and ... organized and have all the outward appearance, and basically be further from Christ today than you were yesterday, and you are on a journey away from Christ. So it is more a liquid kind of church, I would say. My ambition is not to discipline people for how they live, even if it is sin in my eyes. I don’t feel like I have authority in their lives to control their behavior—until they ask for that. So I see my task as bringing them the gospel, bringing the word, and praying for them, and to believe that the word will do its work and God will operate in them. If they trust me enough to ask for advice, then I feel like I have an open door to say what I see in the bible, in my view. So it is much more open. Much more liberal, you could say, in a cultural way, though theologically I would still count myself evangelical—or post-evangelical or whatever the box (laughs).
As an unbounded set and a “liquid” entity, the church in this understanding does not exist in tension vis-à-vis the world. The relationship between the Earthly City and the City of God is not primarily one of negativity, so it does not elicit a negative (secularist) response.

Although we can still find the figure of the baptized pagan deployed in these engagements—church planters frequently rail against the nominal Christianity of many Europeans—it is no longer as central in framing Europe as a mission field. Many evangelicals rather try to make their everyday lives their mission field rather than confining the missionary enterprise to delimited parts of the world. In the words of some advocates of this view, such as the South African–Australian theologian Alan Hirsch, missiology should shape ecclesiology. Churches should be constructed in such a way that makes no distinction between mission and worship. The Anglican church’s motto of a “mission-shaped church,” mentioned above in chapter 2, also points in this direction. In chapter 5, we will see that the church planting movement sees the network of “global cities” as its main field of activity. Unlike the ECM missionaries in the first half of the twentieth century, they are not out to purify the cultures of remote localities. Rather, they are seeking to engage with the culture of urban spaces.
Chapter Four

Varieties of Religious Organization and Their Directions

The space that homogenizes thus has nothing homogeneous about it.

—Henri Lefebvre, The Production of Space

In this chapter, I give an account of the church planting movement’s anatomy based on my research on the Redeemer City to City (CtC) network. My aim here is to understand the movement’s social organization and the ways in which its activities are sustained. Émile Benveniste (1973:518) pointed out that “religion” has two possible etymologies: from ligare, Latin for “to bind,” and from legere, Latin for “to gather together” (see also Derrida 1998). The question of religion’s social organization, then, gets to the heart of what religion is about—or at least what its twin etymological roots suggest it is about. How does the church planting movement gather people together and bind them in meaningful and lasting relationships? How is coordinated action and a shared horizon of understanding possible within the loose assemblage of individual and institutional actors that make up the movement? To illuminate these questions, I pay attention to the organization of the movement rather than what church planters do or the reasons they give for their actions. These questions are the subject of the two chapters that follow. My concern here is also separate from the question whether church planting is “objectively” successful, that is, what kind of real social impact it has. I will turn to that question in the closing chapter.

This chapter has two sections. In the first, I introduce three major actors involved in the network and the numerous ways in which these actors relate to one another and the wider network. In the second section, I turn to the political sociology of church planting, asking how power and social control work in the loosely organized movement.
As I already indicated in chapter 2, the network is the main organizational form in the church planting movement. It was introduced by neo-Pentecostal churches like Calvary Chapel and Vineyard Christian Fellowship in the 1980s when these churches were “re-inventing” aspects of evangelicalism for a postmodern cultural context (Miller 1997). The concept of the network is the (tentative) starting point for my analysis of the social organization of church planting. “In the most basic sense, a network is any collection of objects in which some pairs of these objects are connected by links” (Easley and Kleinberg 2010: 2). A network can be visualized as a graph in which the “objects” are represented as nodes (or vertices) and the “links” as edges. The description of a network entails enumerating the nodes that are part of the network as well as the edges that connect them. Additionally, networks as a whole can be described as having a topology. In some networks, the distribution of edges is highly uneven, such that a few nodes have a high degree of centrality while others have few connections. The central nodes are then in a position to, for instance, effectively circulate messages or coordinate behavior in a way that average nodes do not. In other networks, the distribution is roughly equal, so that on average all nodes have roughly equal probability of being heard.

Social network analysis as performed in sociology has typically been interested in networks composed of individuals, such as Mark Granovetter’s male job seekers in Newton, Massachusetts. The appeal of network analysis was to furnish a language to talk about social groups without having to resort to higher-level sociological concepts like class, institution, organization and the like. Instead, the social could be imagined to be composed of individuals in incidental, temporary and (usually) unforced connections or interactions with one another. As such, network analysis provides conceptual tools that are compatible with what Charles Taylor has called the modern social imaginary of buffered selves (Taylor 2007). The language of network analysis allows us to imagine group life unburdened by what Durkheim called social facts and without a moral order.1

1. That is seemingly the appeal of network analysis to those seeking to recast the social sciences as a (positivistic) network science (Christakis 2013).
According to Bruno Latour’s influential actor–network theory (Latour 2005), any actor (or “actant”) can be considered an object or node in a network, regardless of what kind of an entity that actor is. Even non-sentient objects (e. g., laboratory equipment) and non-individual objects can enter into a network with other actors. In this regard, Latour’s very interesting work is a radicalization of social network analysis that questions its privileging of individual, purposive action. For the purposes of my account of the anatomy of the CPM, it is useful to adopt Latour’s view, though I do not embrace all of Latour’s ontology and method.

In conducting fieldwork on the CtC network, I started with a single “node,” Berlinprojekt, a newly-founded congregation located in the east of Berlin. I had been observing the congregation almost since the time of its inception in 2005, and when the more formal part of my research began in 2010, I conducted semi-structured interviews with two members of the pastoral staff. On the basis of these interviews and additional material I collected over the course of my research, I mapped the linkages of the Berlinprojekt with other individuals and organizations. In some cases the linkages consisted of funding relationships between the Berlinprojekt and another church; in others, there were interpersonal ties between the church leadership and other figures in the wider movement; in yet other cases, the ties were between the church and other networks, organizations, or denominations. I took note of every actor that I came across and added them as a node to a graph, filling in edges as I became aware of them in the course of interviews, informal conversations during fieldwork, or from other materials. As I spoke with individuals involved in other church planting projects connected with Berlinprojekt—either as “sister” or “daughter” churches, through shared mentorship relationships or other kinds of linkages—I continued this process. This mapping outward from a single node provided me with a view on the wider network involved in sustaining the church planting movement as well as individual and institutional participants in the movement. Of course the mapping could have been continued almost indefinitely. It is in the nature of networks that they have undefined boundaries. However, even the section of the network I was able to map in this way gives an impression of its

2. For further details on my research methodology, consult appendix A.
larger topology, the range of actors involved in its operation, and the myriad ways these actors relate to one another.

A variety of different actors are involved in this network, confirming the view that “religious supply” is not purveyed by church congregations only, but by a broad spectrum of church, parachurch and non-church organizations. One beneficial side-effect of studying a network is that it de-centers the congregation, the usual object of analysis in sociological studies of religion (Levitt et al. 2010; Bender et al. 2012). In the United States, evangelicalism has been described as being made up of a transdenominational network of actors (Smith 1998). Over the course of my research, I found this to be true of conservative Protestants on the other side of the Atlantic as well. Denominations, congregations, theological seminaries, mission societies, and formal and informal associations between different ecclesiastical bodies are all involved in the network undergirding church planting.

The organizations and individuals involved are scattered geographically and, in the case of organizations, have their origins in different historical periods, from the Reformations to various revival movements (e.g., Pietist or Pentecostal) to charismatic movements to the very recent past. The network connects nodes through time and space. It brings together (or, in Latour’s words, it assembles) a variety of sometimes contradictory moments in the Protestant Christian tradition. Within the network there are generational relationships and synecdochal relationships. Generational relationships are described using kinship metaphors; thus, churches are said to be “mother,” “daughter” or “sister” churches. Synecdochal relationships are described either in anatomical terms, a common trope in Christian language usage, or using organic language, as befits a planting movement. Taken together, these kinds of links give duration to the work of the network (through the idea of generational succession), and they offer a way to understand the work as contributing to a larger-scale effort at cultural transformation (individual efforts are part of a larger whole). The network is a means of scaling up from individual local church plants, which are almost by definition place-based (see chapter 5), to higher scales: the city, the region, the country, the continent, and ultimately the planet.

Figure 4.1 shows a section of the CtC network that I graphed using the method described
above. It is based on interviews conducted and materials collected in Germany. Altogether, the graph includes forty-one nodes and seventy-one edges. Nodes include individual pastors that I interviewed along with their church plants, staff members of various organized groups, denominations, mission societies, a theological seminary, and an American church that provides funding to several plants. In terms of its topology, the distribution of edges is fairly even, though of course some nodes are more connected than others. The ones that stand out in terms of their centrality are the organizational entities representing the network in New York and in Europe, a denomination, and an evangelical seminary. Edges represent a variety of different relationships, such as mentorship, funding, training, membership, attendance, and internships. No edge weights are applied, meaning that all links are treated as formally equivalent.

In the following, I unpack some of the links that make up the part of the CtC church planting network that I researched in greater detail. I focus on the nodes that have higher-than-average centrality. This will give an impression of the variety of actors that are involved in the CPM as well as the qualitative differences in how these actors relate to one another (or fail to relate to one another) in their effort to build and sustain a movement together.

The Network Organizations

Not surprisingly, the Redeemer City to City and the City to City Europe organizations are highly connected in the network. This is slightly confusing, because these entities, which have physical locations and a staff, also lend their name to the wider web of relations that constitute the network. One explanation for this is that, as a social form, the network has an “inherent recursivity” (Riles 2001: 172). “The network has an uncanny ability to stand for itself ... and for the relations that it describes” (Knox, Savage, and Harvey 2006: 132). Thus, like an algorithmic procedure that operates by calling itself, the operation of a network depends on its self-understanding and

3. I opted not to include actors from other countries where I conducted research because I was unable to trace connections in as much detail there as I was in Germany due to shorter research stays.
In its self-description as a network, CtC seems to already furnish me, the social analyst, with the sociological category through which to understand its organization. This is an instance of what Scott Lash (1994) terms one of modernity’s “doubles.” Taking cues from Riles (2001), I understand my task to be to defamiliarize and interrogate this category rather than to simply employ it analytically. For that reason, I am only using the category as the starting point of this analysis, not as its conclusion. In the following chapter I will return to this theme of reflexivity.

4. In most interviews I conducted with church planters, respondents used the word “network” repeatedly.
As I mentioned in chapter 2, CtC has offices in Midtown Manhattan in New York. As a “leadership development organization,” it understands its primary role to be the provision of workshops and opportunities for training and professional development. I visited the CtC offices to interview Miriam, a project manager on staff for three years at the time, about the organization’s work as it pertains to Europe. The CtC office has a staff of about one dozen people, including several assistants to the regional directors, communications and event staff, and fundraising staff who maintain a constituent relations management (CRM) database. The regional directors spend much of their time in their respective fields meeting with current or prospective planters, advising and assessing them.

When I entered the offices, I immediately took note of pictures of several familiar faces on the walls—pastors I had interviewed over the course of several years prior to my meeting at the CtC office. I also saw a few long, slim posters alongside these photographs that sought to explain church planting. (They had been created for a fundraising event a few years prior.) One with the picture of a red flower rising from the bottom edge asked “How does a church plant grow?” It provided a number of answers: “By seeking the common good of the neighborhood,” “By partnering the church with the community,” “Through leadership,” “Through fellowship,” “Through evangelism.” Next to it, a red-rimmed poster outlined the hope for the CPM: “Little by little a movement begins of Gospel-Centered Churches springing up all over a city.” Another showed a succession of silhouettes of a city skyline. In the first, the skyline was filled in completely black, showing only skyscrapers. In the next, a gap had opened up in the skyline filled by a red church building. The following showed beams or spokes coming out of the red church building connecting it to the skyscrapers. In the final image, the cityscape has been replaced entirely by red church buildings. On the opposite wall was a poster with the outlines of a flame on it. “What is a church planter?” it read. A second poster next to it contained a list of answers topped by “An entrepreneur, a social gatherer, crazy, a risk taker.” These wall decorations are telling about the role of the CtC organization in the wider network. The individual faces of church planters on the walls serve as a way to visualize the work of the network through interpersonal ties with individuals, which Miriam referred to as “relational,” while the posters define the network’s overall
“I like working for a nonprofit,” Miriam told me, “especially a smaller one like this one. Some of the bigger ones can feel like corporations. Which is fine, but I kind of like the more entrepreneurial feel to this.” With a background in international relations, Miriam initially worked in marketing for a tech company in the northeast. While she was still working there, she became involved in a local church plant. Starting to work for CtC seemed a perfect fit her interests. Because the staff is relatively small, CtC workers perform a wide variety of tasks. In her position as project manager at the time, Miriam spent much of her time taking care of the logistics, marketing, and invitations for donor and training events both in Europe and in New York. As the assistant to the director for Europe and the Middle East, she was in regular contact with planters around Europe. “Relating to international church planters is my favorite part of the job, for sure,” she told me.

Relating is the activity that informs all parts of the work of the organization. Because of this, its work is not routinized but retains a high level of fluidity. When marketing a conference—at the time of the interview, CtC was in the early stages of planning its European church planting conference held in Prague in 2013—the way to get the word out is through the existing connections in the CtC network.

Our primary channel is the network itself. ... It’s primarily a relational network, a network of friends. Friends who ask their friends to come. That’s kind of how we function anyway. We don’t want to be the ones to decide who to invite. I wouldn’t know whom to invite.

For this purpose, most cities with a CtC presence have designated “network leaders,” around twenty-five at the time of the interview, who relate to others on the behalf of the network. They know how to be strategic about inviting people to the big conferences, and they frequently collaborate to put together smaller, more local events in cooperation with regional partners, frequently other networks.

Miriam contrasted the relational nature of CtC’s work with the way other organizations operate.
We’re not a denomination, we’re not a seminary, we’re not a church. We are an entity that tries to come alongside people that already want to do this, who want to plant churches and who are already part of another network. We never want to be the primary network that people are affiliated with. We always try to consult with any denominational leaders or people that we know within certain denominations. We always try to consult with them about how to approach a city, what is a city like, what are the needs here. … It’s so relational, there’s not a lot of structures in place.

She contrasts relating to or “coming alongside” others with institutional structures, which suggest far greater rigidity. Later in the interview she emphasized, “It’s not a membership organization, it’s a group of friends.” The greater flexibility of CtC’s network organization allows the organization to mostly stay above the fray of “the political stuff that goes on” with institutional players like denominations or mission societies. It helps that there is not very much overlap between the work of CtC and other institutional players due to CtC’s exclusive focus on urban ministry. However, to the extent that there is overlap, there has been some friction. For instance, both the Presbyterian Church in America’s domestic and foreign missionary societies, the Mission to North America (MNA) and the Mission to the World (MTW), have sought to plant urban churches. “I think they think we’re trying to push our own agenda there and not necessarily want to work with them,” Miriam recalled. However, she was unable to recount any specific instances of conflict, only successful cooperation.

In Miriam’s estimation, CtC can avoid many conflicts because of its relational basis.

In my experience, working with all these church planters from different backgrounds, different denominations, some of them not even affiliated with a denomination, they identify a lot with what Tim Keller says. They don’t necessarily agree with every last thing he believes. But I think with his approach to ministry, his approach to theology, they find a lot to identify with and that’s helpful to them. It’s not enough to where it causes a rift.

Here Miriam hints at the adaptability of CtC’s organizational form. Although Tim Keller and Redeemer Presbyterian Church value orthodoxy (Bartholomew [2000]), CtC does not want to operate with a strict set of rules determining who is in and who is out. CtC hesitated to even have a statement of faith on its website to avoid the impression of being closed off or exclusionary. (Ultimately they opted to include one, based on the Evangelical Alliance’s, after all.) Rather, they focus on five core values, outside of which everything else is considered a “secondary issue.”
These five values are “gospel centeredness,” “urban focus,” “contextualization,” “holistic ministry,” and “indigenous leadership.” Pastors and churches that seek an affiliation with CtC must share these values. For instance, overseas churches planted and led by North American missionaries on a decontextualized American model would not be eligible, even if they were properly “gospel-centered,” because they violate the values of contextualization and indigenous leadership. Examples of “secondary issues” include infant baptism and women’s ordination—issues that historically have been causes for numerous schisms. In the CtC network, however, “[t]hose aren’t important enough to cause that kind of conflict—or they shouldn’t cause that kind of conflict.” In this context it is worth relating an episode from my interview with Adam, a pastor of a church plant I interviewed in Amsterdam. During the City to City Europe conference in Berlin in 2011, churches were asked to produce short introductory videos that were shown during a plenary session. His church’s video briefly showed an infant being baptized. Several German participants at the conference who were Baptists were shocked by this, Baptists and members of the Evangelical-Free church being opposed to the practice of infant baptism. They had not realized that there were non-Baptists in the network, even though Tim Keller is a Presbyterian who, like most Reformed Christians, accepts infant baptism.

CtC not only provides training to church planters, but also seed funding and connections with (mostly North American) donors. This is important to planters in the early stages, because often they do not have any funding sources to hire venues, pay staff, or compensate musicians before they start having a committed membership that supports the church through tithes. In some countries (e.g., the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, or Germany) planters may have denominations and regional church planting networks they can rely on for initial support. But

5. Donors include individuals, foundations, or congregations. Donor congregations are frequently part of the PCA (as in the case of First Presbyterian Church in Chattanooga, Tenn., who support Berlinprojekt), but not exclusively. Other evangelical denominations, such as the Evangelical Presbyterian Church and the Evangelical Covenant Order, and their congregations are also among the donors. Individual online donations are also important. CtC also has a “church partnership program” that matches donor congregations with a church plant. The church plant gets receives funds, which partially are intended for investment in further planting projects, and the donor church in exchange receives leadership training from CtC.
especially planters in “post-Catholic” and “post-Orthodox” contexts (e.g., Spain, Greece, Italy) may have more difficulty raising initial funds.

In its role as fundraiser and conduit for funding, some limits to CtC’s relational and adaptive mode of operation come to the fore. Thus, although CtC, unlike the PCA and other evangelical denominations, has no objections to female ordination, it currently trains no female pastors for fear that donors would withdraw their funding. Although CtC as a “group of friends” rather than a “membership organization” makes do without many of the trappings of more formal organizations, it is not immune to the tendency toward routinization that Max Weber saw at play in all modern organizations.

The European network organization, City to City Europe (CtCE), is a somewhat more diffuse entity. As a “sister organization” of Redeemer City to City, CtCE was established to decentralize the activities of CtC. Its executive team consists of a senior staff member from the New York CtC office, an Amsterdam-based “facilitator,” and five ministers from church plants in five different countries. Starting in 2015, CtC plans to devolve some of its training programs to the European level, so pastors will no longer have to travel to New York for the five-week International Intensive. Instead they will go through a CtCE training program. In the meantime, CtCE’s has mostly made its presence in the European evangelical landscape felt through its multi-day conferences on urban ministry which in recent years have drawn over five hundred participants. As mentioned above, attendees to these conferences are mostly invited through interpersonal connections. Few, if any, marketing materials for the conferences are circulated in the evangelical press or at seminaries. Conferences offer an opportunity to learn from one another but also serve a more fundamental community-building function. Pastors often take their leadership teams with them to bigger conferences, offering an opportunity to reflect on the planting process. And of course conferences make it possible to forge or strengthen ties between teams in different cities and countries. At the conferences, participants learn from one another and from the keynote speakers, but they also participate in church services, sing hymns together, pray together, take

6. Continuing this trend to decentralize, City to City Deutschland was launched in 2014, sharing offices with Berlinprojekt.
communion together—in short, engage in shared rituals. One does not have to be a Durkheimian to recognize the importance of these kinds of opportunities to create and maintain communal ties.

Association of Evangelical-Free Congregations

After the CtC network organizations, the Association of Evangelical-Free Churches (Bund Freier evangelischer Gemeinden, BFeG) one of Germany’s largest free church denominations, plays a very important role in translating, diffusing and sustaining the practice of church planting in the section of the movement I am focusing on here. Although the Association has practiced church planting since the 1970s, a turning point in this work came in 2006 when the Association started an initiative called “100 Congregations in 10 Years.” The aim is to establish one hundred new congregations by 2016. For reference, at the start of the church planting initiative, the denomination counted less than five hundred churches which counted a total membership of about forty thousand. Not all church plants that result from this initiative are part of the CtC network, though three of the five churches that I studied in greater depth in Germany did join up with the BFeG.

I interviewed Eberhard, the head of the denomination’s internal mission, to learn about the Association’s church planting work and its interactions with other organizations and networks. Eberhard is an American who moved to Germany from Wisconsin in the mid-1980s to work for an evangelical mission society. In 2006 he completed a Doctor of Ministry degree from Fuller Theological Seminary with a dissertation on strategies for church planting in Germany. Eberhard has an ethnic German background and speaks German fluently. He had only taken over as head of the BFeG internal mission a few years before. I visited him in his office in Witten, where the denomination has its headquarters.

At the time of the interview in mid-2012, the count of newly-founded churches was up to fifty-seven, and there were another twenty to thirty initiatives underway. By the end of 2014 the number was up to sixty-seven, though three had already folded again (BFeG 2015). It seems
unlikely the denomination will hit its target by 2016. Nonetheless, it is telling that they set it at all, further underlining that church planting has become the “default mode” for evangelism.

In fact, the history of BFeG’s evangelism work is instructive. In 1955, the denomination started a “tent mission” with three to four tents. The tent mission would pitch the tents at the request of local congregations, either to host evangelistic events by the site of the church or to establish a temporary presence where there was no church congregation. Local congregations made less and less use of the tents, and eventually they no longer were worth the cost of maintenance anymore, so in 2008 the tent mission was finally abandoned. All denominations in the Association of Evangelical Free Churches (Vereinigung Evangelischer Freikirchen, VEF) except the Methodists have abandoned their tent missions. The internal mission was founded in the 1960s following the realization that it was not enough for the denomination to evangelize and then leave people behind. The internal mission was a way to establish a longer-term presence.

A few years before the tent mission was finally phased out, the BFeG leadership reconsidered its long-term vision for the future. It was decided then to put church planting on the agenda for the entire denomination, not just its internal mission. The denomination made it possible for new congregations to be given a legal status as “church-in-formation,” which gives them certain rights and privileges they would not be able to have as simple registered associations. To attain the status of church-in-formation, a church planting initiative must file an application and fulfill a number of standards: it must have a minimal number of people on its start team, it has to develop a charter, it needs the approval of other local congregations in the denomination, and it has to carry out public-facing work (rather than just a private bible study or closed-off house church). Church plants are asked to avoid long-term rental agreements and instead rent spaces on an as-needed basis. None of the new church plants meet in church buildings. “We try to navigate spaces that are public-facing and accepted by the population,” Eberhard told me. The cultural centers or movie theaters used by the church plants are believed to be more palatable to target populations than church buildings would be. Thus, these church plants seem to be making a virtue of what Frédéric Dejean (2012) has called the “spatial precarity” of newly founded churches.
In the newer church plants, pastors use a relational approach where previously they relied on being able to work mostly from the pulpit. (In the evangelical literature, this is known as a “missional” approach.) Newer church plants are often pastored by a team of two pastors whose personalities complement one another (more on the understanding of the pastors’ roles and work in chapter 6). There is also, according to Eberhard, a higher degree of strategic thinking than previously went into the founding of new churches. Partially this was born of a need. The denomination generally commits thirty percent of its budget to church planting, but due to the economic crisis that began in 2008, donations dried up, and consequently the denomination had to cut back on spending. Some of the new churches were planted without any funds from the denomination. These churches had to get very good at presenting themselves and producing marketing materials. This was especially important to find American supporters, frequently through the CtC network.

Another big change is that the denomination no longer tries to have one big, usually suburban congregation per city, and instead encourages the creation of several more place-based congregations in a single city. In a city like Berlin, for instance, “we will constantly found new churches.” Eberhard cited a recently founded church in Berlin-Wedding that mostly draws the second and third generation of immigrants from the Arab-speaking world. In general, newer church plants are often fueled by “love for a certain place or group of people.” This is a departure from the pattern described by Henkel (2014), who found that newly founded churches in western European cities often have to find space through the commercial real estate market on the periphery, leading to a suburbanization of the religious geography.

In its church planting work, the denomination cooperates with various other organizations. Eberhard himself is no the steering committee of the City Mentoring Program (CMP), a national church planting network that overlaps in large parts with the CtC network in Germany. More than half of the pastors that go through the CMP became planters for the Evangelical-Free church. “We are the best positioned free church when it comes to church planting. We are innovative, we have been living this for many years, and we are interesting to people interested in planting churches.” Other denominations, including the Brethren and the Seventh Day Adventists, have
become interested in church planting, too, but they are some distance behind the curve.

The denomination faces several challenges. First, the denomination never was able to gain a foothold in East Germany following reunification. Only six churches were started there during the 1990s (on secularization in East Germany, see Martin 2010: part 2; Wohlrab-Sahr, Karstein, and Schmidt-Lux 2009; Pollack 2003: ch. 4). Second, Eberhard said that many older churches in the denomination have failed to recognize that they have become irrelevant in their context. When a new initiative comes along, they may become defensive and territorial. Finally, there can be some incompatibility between the way a denomination operates and the logic of networks, which are more flexible and porous. As an example, it is worth recalling an episode from the early days of Frankfurt City Church, when a minister with a Presbyterian background baptized a child. “The denomination had to take him aside and say, you may be building this network, but this congregation is part of the FeG, and we do not do this. So he had to stop doing this.”

Giessen School of Theology

The majority of pastors in Germany I spoke with had graduated from the same seminary, the Giessen School of Theology (Freie Theologische Hochschule, FTH). Begun in the 1970s by the Greater Europe Mission, an American mission society founded soon after World War II ended, the seminary is now one of the largest accredited theological schools in Germany operating outside the public university system. It has over one hundred students pursuing undergraduate degrees in evangelical theology, and around a dozen pursuing master’s degrees. The pastors I interviewed that attended the FTH prior to its public accreditation in 2008 when it was still called an Akademie rather than a Hochschule.

The founding pastors of Berlinprojekt, Matthias and Philipp, both attended the FTH at the same time. They graduated in 2002, and the idea to plant a new church was born around the end of their studies. Martin, the founding pastor of Hamburgprojekt; Ulli and Dae-sung, the founding pastors of Frankfurt City Church; Thomas, the founding pastor of Nordstern in Frankfurt; and Soo-young, a Berlinprojekt pastoral staff member who joined shortly after the church was
founded, also attended the FTH. The founders of another urban church plant in Potsdam, not far from Berlin, also graduated from there. All these planters finished their studies within a few years of one another. In interviews, they conveyed that nothing in the curriculum at the time set them on the course to pursue church planting. Much rather, there was a general “impulse” to try something new.

Some reported reading Rick Warren’s *The Purpose Driven Church* during their studies, a 1995 bestseller in which the California megachurch pastor outlined how to achieve “growth without compromising your message and mission,” as the book’s subtitle puts it. While several said they ultimately found the book too specifically geared toward an American suburban context, it nonetheless got them interested in new ways of building a church and engaging with the public. Others came into contact with the ideas of the emerging church movement and other attempts to rethink what church should be and how it should engage.

In 2005, the school hired Ronald, a lecturer in practical theology whose teaching focus is on church planting. Ronald is in his fifties, and he grew up in Germany a child of American missionaries working with the Greater Europe Mission. He trained in theology in the United States, was ordained a minister in the PCA, and in the 1980s he was exposed to the idea of church planting which was then gaining prominence within his denomination. He became a church planter in Toronto, where he was based before moving back to Germany. Ronald heads a church planting network, the City Mentoring Program (CMP), that trains and mentors church planters throughout Germany, many of whom are also affiliated with CtC. With the presence of Ronald, the FTH has turned into a recruiting ground of sorts for church planting projects in Germany. Although planters and those seeking to get into church planting do not have to be affiliated with the school, knowing that somebody received their training there can serve as social capital facilitating access to the networks. Individuals tied to the seminary may also learn to trust each other even though they may come from different denominations that differ in theological outlook.

7. See Moessner (1992) on the return to the field of the children of missionaries.
Power and Movement

Having given an account of the organization of (a section of) the church planting movement, in this section I will turn to the political sociology of the movement. How does the network manage to maintain some level of coherence and even engage in collective (or “connective”; see Bennett and Segerberg 2013) action?

The network as I described it in the previous section does not have a “root.” In the technical sense of the word, a root is a node without a parent. None of the nodes in the network are parent-less. Even the City to City organization avoids being the primary partner of churches, preferring instead to “come alongside” other partners, such as local networks or denominations, when supporting a church plant. Berlinprojekt, which as a “flagship” church of the CtC network is the church plant most closely linked to CtC in New York, nonetheless is part of a German denomination, and on certain questions, the church would have to defer to the denomination, not the network organization. Thus, the shape of the network does not resemble a tree with a root, stem, and branches, like a classical organizational diagram where it is clear who is (at least formally) in command. For that reason I have argued that it would be wrong to see church planting as a mere expression of an “Americanization” of the religious landscape (Boy 2012)—a project of “exporting the American gospel,” as one group of scholars has put it (Brouwer, Gifford, and Rose 1996). The plants grown by the church planting movement are of a different nature. In the suggestive term proposed by French philosopher Gilles Deleuze, the topology of the network is rhizomatic. Rhizomes are plants that do not grow from a central parent-less node, but in more confluent and multifarious ways. At the same time, it would be a fallacy to assume that, simply because there is no clear “command center,” the overall movement works without any control or coherence.

A common trope in CtC and other church planting networks is the idea that churches within a network share a common “DNA.” Tim Keller has used this term, and he has alternately also called this a “philosophy of ministry” (Keller and Thompson 2002) or, more recently, the “middleware” (Keller 2012) of a church plant. DNA refers to the manner in which doctrinal principles are ar-
ticulated in contextualized ways in individual church plants without ultimately compromising them. When church plants talk about being “gospel-based,” that is the idea they are referring to. Despite all they do to contextualize the Christian message, there are certain limits to contextualization. This idea of a shared DNA is key to understanding how the individual parts of the church planting network manage to stay coordinated without resorting to centralized authority.

Ronald, the FTH lecturer who also oversees the CMP network, distinguished DNA from a “model.” While many ministers assume they can replicate a model by following a how-to guide step-by-step in the process of planting a church, he emphasized that the church planters he works with do not try to do so. DNA is less tangible than that. It does not provide a definitive picture, modeled on an existing church, of what a church plant should look like. That would turn the church plant into a direct offshoot. Then the structure of the church planting movement would once again resemble the root-and-branch structure, in which each new growth can ultimately be traced back to a single other part of the overall movement. DNA simply states, in Ronald’s words, “what are the basic factors that will make a church plant successful in any culture, with any social group within that culture.” Matthias of Berlinprojekt recalled that his co-founding pastor Philipp and he purposefully stayed away from much of the literature on church planting in the early phase of starting the church. “We didn’t do it, because we had the feeling that lots there is already put into a certain form, lots is already predefined. [The books only tell you] How do you proceed when you follow a model.” DNA is not a model, nor is it the complete absence of forms or definitions.

The media theorist Alex Galloway (2004) has addressed the question “how control exists after decentralization.” He seeks to counter the fallacy that decentralization, rhizomatic structures or horizontalism indicate an absence of power relations. He proposes that the “protocol,” the specifications that allow computer networks to operate, provides a conceptual model to understand how even in organizational settings where each actor has a high degree of autonomy, power relations can remain in effect. If this is a somewhat abstract model, the idea of a DNA or middleware that guides the work of church plants makes it more concrete. This is not just an abstract body of ideas that are taken from a manual. Rather, it is developed by ministers and their core
teams in dialog with texts and case studies from similar contexts. In their early phase, church planters spend intense time in study with the members of their core group (or start teams), the group of people that often go on to take on leadership positions in the church plant when it starts holding public meetings. I provided a brief glimpse at this kind of discussion at the young Cologne church plant Soulfire in chapter 2. At Hamburgprojekt, these early meetings were called the “DNA course.” The anthropologist James Bielo (2009) studied evangelical bible study groups, which these meetings closely resemble. He argued that participation in these groups is a practice that contributes to the formation of an evangelical identity. Further, bible study groups function as integrating institutions because they typically strive toward building consensus among participants. While there is serious lay intellectual activity in bible studies, ultimately there is a correct interpretation that must be arrived at, and that is the interpretation that accords with conservative theology. This kind of careful deliberative practice is one of the ways that the protocol of the wider network becomes embodied in the functioning of individual church plants.

Additionally, the discussion in the previous section introduced some further ways in which institutionalization occurs within different parts of the network. At a risk of appearing overly functionalist, a few of these are worth highlighting again. Network organizations provide training to pastors and church leadership teams. Aside from equipping participants with practical tools, these courses offer an intensive experience of belonging to a wider movement, and they expose church planters to ideas that go beyond the context of their own work. While ultimately they develop their church plant with reference to their own context and with a high degree of autonomy, the wider movement subsequently serves as a frame of reference for these local efforts. Network organizations also run regular conferences. Again, they allow participants, both pastors and lay leaders, to feel part of a larger whole. They also provide a space for shared ritual practice. Denominations also provide training and opportunities for networking to church planters. These programs have a different content from those offered by network organizations, because they are based on a distinct denominational tradition. Within this tradition exist ecclesiological and liturgical concepts, among others. However, the denominations that are active in church planting are willing to accord planters a high degree of autonomy. The Evangelical-
Free denomination in Germany is a case in point. Thus, denominational programs also spread the network protocol. Finally, theological seminaries graduate cohorts of ministers that have shared understandings of what the church should be and how it should engage in public. These understandings develop through informal contacts, but through the curriculum. New curricula specifically about church planting are another dimension of its institutionalization.

What we have learned about the organization of the church planting movement in this chapter? The church planting movement describes itself as a network. This is a helpful term to understand many of its organizational dynamics as well as its overall anatomy. There is no command center for the church planting movement, but rather a wide array of different actors connected through a variety of bonds. This form of organization affords the movement a high degree of flexibility. Although actors may hold different views, for instance on certain theological questions, participants in the network need not be burdened by the obligations of certain ecclesiological traditions. At the same time, we should not take the movement’s self-understanding entirely at face value. We cannot assume that, as a network, the movement is a mere “group of friends,” as one of the participants put it to me. Through a variety of mechanisms, the network implements a “protocol” that ensures a level of control despite the absence of a clear command center. As a result, the movement is capable of attaining a level of strategic coherence.

8. Church planters can also choose (or threaten) the “exit” option and opt to join a different denomination if theirs is being too restrictive.
Chapter Five

The Cultural Politics of Church Planting

What would remain of the Church if there were no churches?

—Henri Lefebvre, The Production of Space

Christian missiologists use the term “inculturation” to refer to the process of contextualizing the Christian faith tradition in a geographic area. According to Pedro Arrupe, a former Superior General of the Jesuit order,

Inculturation is the incarnation of Christian life and message in a concrete cultural area in such a way that this experience not only comes to express itself with elements proper to the culture in question (which would be only a superficial adaptation) but becomes an inspiring, normative, and unifying principle that transforms and re-creates the culture, giving rise to a “new creation.” (Quoted in J. F. Gorski 2006: 61)

Olivier Roy, an influential sociologist of global religious movements, has proposed that we understand such movements in terms of the inversion of this term, “exculturation” (Roy 2008). This term has an important place in his argument on the rise of (neo-)fundamentalisms in several religious traditions. Exculturation, he argues, is a result of the deterritorialization of religious traditions. Territorial religions—both in the sense of being firmly rooted in a certain delimited part of the world and of having a monopoly on religious life in a region—integrate group life and guarantee social cohesion in their territory. According to Roy, globalization dissolves the territorial rootedness of religions and erodes their integrating function. A deterritorialized religious tradition is reduced to easily translatable binaries such as good versus evil or halal versus haram; it no longer forms part of a larger semantic system serving as a fount of shared meanings for a
community. As a simpleminded set of rules that makes no allowances for nuance, ambiguity, or transgression, deterritorialized religions turn into rigid doctrines. Holy ignorance takes over as the wisdom of tradition recedes.

I will argue that, at least in the case of the church-planting movement (CPM), the global dynamics of evangelicalism are best understood not in terms of Roy’s concept of (absolute) deterritorialization, but as a relative deterritorialization followed by reterritorialization. Roy’s account suggests that globalized religion is placeless, and he seeks to understand this “displacement” through a juxtaposition with the stable, bounded religiosity of the nation-state. As the territoriality of the nation-state erodes, Roy argues, so does the territoriality of Islam, Christianity, and other religions.

Scholarship associated with the so-called spatial turn suggests that Roy’s line of argument has at least three deficiencies (Brenner 1999; Lefebvre 1991; Certeau 1984). First, he sees territoriality as either present or absent. His framework cannot account for the reconfiguration of territoriality on different scales. Second, Roy takes global flows and territoriality as being in inverse proportion to one another, such that an increase of one leads to a decrease of the other. Roy does not allow for the possibility that various levels mutually constitute or reinforce one another (see Wilford 2012). Finally, he brackets various forms of fixity, embodiment and localization that global flows are premised upon. However, global flows are not free-floating; they presuppose a social space in which they can circulate.

The spatial turn and the postsecular turn have in common that they proclaim the continued relevance of something previously thought to become irrelevant, namely place and religion respectively. Globalization did not kill geography, and secularization has not killed faith. These two survivals are, in fact, related, as religion seems to flourish in the late-modern metropolis (Molendijk, Beaumont, and Jedan 2010; Becker et al. 2013; AlSayyad and Massoumi 2010). Thus,

1. Elsewhere, Roy uses the term “postculturalist society” to refer to this near-anomic situation (Roy 2007; xiii).
2. The conceptual pair deterritorialization/reterritorialization as well as the distinction between absolute and relative deterritorialization comes from Deleuze and Guattari (1983, 1987).
in what follows, I elaborate my argument about the importance of urban space to the practice of church planters. In this chapter, I seek to understand processes of religious reterritorialization and place-making in the context of the CPM, addressing in particular the question of how space and place matter to the CPM. To use a trope found in the work of Paul Gilroy (1993), I am trying to understand the tensions between the roots and the routes of Christianity in contemporary Europe.

I will first argue that Timothy Keller, a prominent minister based in New York and “one of the most widely respected evangelical intellectuals in the United States” (Paulson 2014), functions as a spokesperson for the CPM and unpack some of his fundamental conceptual contributions to the movement. Keller’s strategic vision for urban church planting centers around a conception of urban space as projected space. Moving from conceived space to perceived space, I analyze the ways in which Keller’s strategic vision plays out in the work of church planters in the sites I studied. Church planters develop a set of spatial practices to make evangelical ideas about public engagement with the city a reality. Like all translations of theory into practice, this process is messy and highly dependent on local conditions. Finally, I argue that parts of the CPM approach urban space differently. Rejecting the conception of urban space qua projected space, some planters instead set out to create safe spaces. This rejection stems from the lived experience of the hostility of urban space.

The Urban Theory of Tim Keller

The urban theory of Tim Keller is one lens through which to understand the cultural content of the CPM. I focus on Keller not to imply that he is the chief agent behind church planting—my portrayal in chapter 4 of the complex organizational form of the movement should make this clear—but because he functions as the spokesperson (Latour 1988) for the CPM. In the course of my interviews with church planters, no other individual was named more often as an influence than Tim Keller. Similarly, few organizations were named as often as his church, Redeemer Presbyterian Church in New York, or its church-planting branch, Redeemer City to City. Several
pastors I spoke with had stints in New York interning with Redeemer Presbyterian Church or attending a CtC training program, including the then six-week International Intensive course, a year-long or even a two-year program. Others attended CtCE’s regional conferences. This is not surprising since my research focused on the City to City network of church plants in Europe, but even efforts further removed from the immediate influence of City to City regard Tim Keller as the go-to reference. As I mentioned in the introduction, another church planting network that is active in Europe (albeit primarily in the UK) is Acts 29. This network is affiliated with the Seattle megachurch Mars Hill Church. Interviewees also frequently mentioned Mars Hill’s former head pastor, the recently fallen-from-grace Mark Driscoll (Paulson 2014), as an influence. However, he was generally mentioned as an influence with regard to theological questions rather than practical missiological concerns.

The idea that Tim Keller is the authoritative source on the subject of urban church planting came up repeatedly in interviews. Asked about what influences were important in her work, a pastoral staff member at Berlinprojekt said:

Our congregation—in terms of theology, we’re strongly informed by the theology of Tim Keller. The idea of church planting in the metropolis originated with his congregation, Redeemer. He very much put his stamp on that. The lecture [on church planting] during my studies was also strongly informed by his work.

Similarly, other pastors used Keller’s name to denote a body of ideas, not just about the correct way to plant a church, but also about urbanism, postmodern culture, and how to live life as a Christian in such a context. The terms most often used in this context were that Keller provides a “theological basis” and spells out the “DNA” of sound churches.

Additionally, planters agreed that Keller’s work fills a void in Europe. Martin, the lead pastor of Hamburgprojekt, recalled that he often pored over Keller’s work with the pastors he was interning with prior to starting his church, adding that they hardly studied any German writers. With a few exceptions—and even those only with qualifications—“there aren’t any” German writers worth engaging with, he said. In fact, the only German theologian to be brought up more than once by planters in Germany was not a contemporary thinker at all, but Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the renowned Protestant German theologian martyred in 1945 in resistance to the Nazi
Matthias, one of the founding pastors of Berlinprojekt, interned at Tim Keller’s church before beginning work in Berlin. He referred to Bonhoeffer as “a German-language Tim Keller,” thus anointing Keller, not Bonhoeffer, the more outstanding of the two theologians.

Referring to the American theological literature available in Europe, Thomas, the founding pastor of the Nordstern Church in Frankfurt, noted that

Tim Keller is the one who works best, and I think that is due to the fact that he works in the most European city. New York is simply much more like here than Seattle or Dallas or something. It’s more like in Europe: more liberal, more open to the world and so on. That’s why Tim Keller is the one we find most helpful in Europe.

What specifically do European church plants get from Keller’s work? In addition to formulating a theological basis, these comments suggest that Keller offers church planters a way to make sense of the urban situation they are entering and engaging with.

Before unpacking what this entails, I will offer some background to Keller and his work (Hooper 2009; Stafford 2009; Luo 2006; Lewine 1998). Keller is an ordained minister in the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA), one of several conservative Presbyterian denominations in the United States that tend to be evangelical in orientation. Unlike the Presbyterian Church (USA), the U.S.’s largest Presbyterian denomination that takes more liberal theological positions, the PCA does not ordain women and does not allow openly LGBTQ people to be ordained and serve as ministers. In contrast to some other evangelical denominations, the PCA places a high value on doctrinal orthodoxy, in particular on Calvinist teachings about the sovereignty of God and the wickedness of the human condition. In addition to being a pastor, Keller is also an academic. He has a doctoral degree (doctor of ministry) from Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia, and he was a faculty member at the Seminary for about five years in the 1980s teaching courses in practical theology. Today, Keller still strikes a scholarly pose. In promotional videos posted on several websites affiliated with Redeemer Presbyterian Church, he wears a tweed jacket and speaks in a pensive voice about questions of theological and cultural concern. Keller is regarded as one of the leading voices in his denomination, and his works of apologetics, such as *The Reason for God* (2007), are bestsellers in evangelical circles and beyond. He is frequently referred to as a “lead-
ing intellectual” among evangelicals—a group that, according to Mark Noll (1994), has a dearth of such figures (but see Worthen 2014). Much of Keller’s standing derives from the success and prominence of his Manhattan congregation, the multisite Redeemer Presbyterian Church that attracts over 5,000 members to its services in one location in lower Manhattan, two on the West Side, and two on the East Side (including the main service in the Hunter College auditorium). Redeemer rents offices off Herald Square in Midtown Manhattan, and the church owns a building on West 83rd Street on the Upper West Side, completed in 2012. The building on West 83rd Street has a 900-seat auditorium and several classrooms.

Prior to going to New York in 1989, when Keller was a faculty member at Westminster Theological Seminary, he came under the influence of Harvie Conn, an urban missiologist. In 1987, as plans for a new church in New York City were taking shape within the PCA’s Mission to North America (MNA), the denomination’s internal mission branch, and two years before Keller began his work in New York, Conn published *A Clarified Vision for Urban Mission* (Conn 1987), a book that argues against a number of widespread myths among Christian missionaries, including the notion of inevitable secularization and religious privatization in urban environments. Specifically, Conn argues that secularization and the city should not be conflated because such conflation erases the agency churches can have in urban environments. Conn contends that the degree of secularization of cities cannot be considered in isolation from the presence and activity of churches. While it may be true that urban environments are often more secular than others, this need not necessarily be the case. “Everywhere the picture seems to be the same: not too many people or too much secularism, but too few churches” (Conn 1987: 105). Conn notably made this argument at a time when sociologists were also revising, if not altogether abandoning, the account of secularization that sees it as going hand in hand with modernization (Gorski and Altınoğlu 2008). Also, his argument that low religious vitality in cities was not a question of demand (“too many people or too much secularism”) but rather one of supply (“too few churches”).

4. One prominent example of a theological conflation of secularization and urbanization is Harvey Cox’s 1965 classic, *The Secular City* (Cox 1965). The cover of the original edition reads “A celebration of its liberties and an invitation to its discipline.”
dovetailed with the arguments of rational choice sociologists whose influence in the sociology of religion was at the time on the rise (Warner 1993). Throughout, Conn’s book in fact shows the influence of sociological and anthropological thought. He places these disciplines in what he calls a “trialog” with theology. I will have more to say about the role of the disciplines in Keller’s conception of urban space below.

The notion that the church had to be active in the city if it wanted to have any relevance lay behind the idea of planting a new church in New York City that would be a flagship church of the PCA (Conn and Ortiz 2001: 249). In the second half of the 1980s, the MNA assembled a group of stakeholders, including members of parachurch organizations like Campus Crusade for Christ, to prepare the venture (see Bartholomew 2000: ch. 3; Keller and Thompson 2002: ch. 1). The idea was to found an evangelical church that would appeal to “the Manhattan professional community” (Bartholomew 2000: 62). The perception among the founding members was that there existed no evangelical congregation that could do so. In their estimation, existing churches were either mainline congregations lacking the theological commitments valued by evangelicals (what they call a focus on the gospel that is the mark of “historic” or “orthodox” Christianity), or, if they were evangelical, their cultural style was off-putting to all but a small (and non-elite) segment of New York’s population. Planting a church for urban professionals, then, was conceived as a task of contextualizing evangelical Christianity for a specific social milieu. All decisions about the new church were made with this in mind, including the naming (Redeemer Presbyterian Church was believed to sound dignified).

Although Keller did not initially see himself in the role of church planter—he accompanied the process of church planting in New York as a consultant rather than a pastor-in-waiting—eventually he was convinced to pastor the newly founded church by other members of the launch team. Before relocating his family from suburban Philadelphia to New York, Keller took weekly

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5. Kathy Keller, Tim Keller’s wife, was a co-founder, having been involved in the church from the start. However, as she outlines in an essay called “Jesus, Justice and Gender Roles: The Case for Gender Roles in Ministry,” she subscribes to a “complementarian” view of gender roles which holds that women should serve in ways different from men. As a result of her subordination, her contribution is written out of most accounts. Most recently, she worked for the church in
trips to meet with a small group of individuals to discuss the vision for the church. These first trips were in a sense brief field research stints in New York. Like all kinds of empirical research, Keller’s urban ethnography worked—and continues to work—on the basis of a theoretical framework.

A short publication of Keller’s from around this time gives some insight into how he likely framed the endeavor of planting the Manhattan church at the time. In a review of a book on the pedagogical approach of a New York-based seminary (Keller 1989), Keller argues that evangelistic work in a pluralistic urban context is often based on two seemingly irreconcilable epistemologies. One, which Keller calls “God–world–church,” sees the church as being called into action through God’s actions manifest in the world. This view, which confers higher epistemic value to (secular) knowledge of the world, is associated with the liberal World Council of Churches (WCC). The WCC in the 1960s and 1970s called on churches to support struggles for justice and liberation as a way of doing God’s work, a level of activism that conservative American Christians frequently objected to (Wuthnow 1990: ch. 8). According to this epistemology, discerning the will and work of God is primarily a matter of sociological analysis. The other epistemology, “God–church–world,” sees the church as a mediator between the work of God and the world. God works in the world through the church. The church is the bearer of the timeless truths of the Christian gospel and seeks to actualize them in the world. On this view, higher epistemic value is accorded to scriptural and theological knowledge. While Keller as a theological conservative is more sympathetic to the latter epistemological stance, he sees the two as complements: “Scripture is normative, but our involvement and study of the world is necessary in the very interpretation of Scripture” (Keller 1989: 52).

With this view that scripture is the ultimate locus of truth but that the work of interpretation is nonetheless required, Keller seems to bridge literalist and liberal theological positions. Creating this bridge requires Keller to work with the conflicting epistemologies he outlines, which leads him to engage with other disciplines. Of course, using the knowledge produced by other communications.
disciplines can be problematic, not only because different epistemologies are involved. In an interview, Eberhard, the head of the Evangelical-Free Church of Germany’s internal mission, told me that the danger newly founded churches face is that they only do sociology and not enough theology: “Sociology will never be able to replace theology. You may be able to gather a certain group of people, but they will realign you more than you will be able to realign them.” This is another way of phrasing Keller’s critique of liberal theology, and it points at the disciplinary differences that church planters need to straddle.

Generally in the world of church planting, the close connection between theoretical reflection and praxis is striking. This connection finds expression in the acute interest planters take in social scientific disciplines, as the example of Harvie Conn’s book discussed above already suggested. Taber (2000), who argues that missiology should learn from the social sciences how to think about the postmodern culture of the West, is another example. He does not simply take a utilitarian approach to the social sciences, but sees the disciplines in an interaction with each other and the wider context in which they operate. He observes that “the fallout of the decline of modernity has been disarray in both missiology and the social sciences” (Taber 2000: 25). The same processes that eroded old certainties in anthropology and sociology also overturned the status quo in theology of missions. He warns against merely appropriating findings from the social sciences uncritically, encouraging instead that theologians engage with the ontologies and epistemologies underlying the social sciences instead.

Culture has at some times been almost reified and assigned a quasi-omnipotence in shaping human persons and groups. This led missiology, when it became informed by anthropology, to have an exaggerated respect and even awe for the immovable nature of the cultural “rock” standing before missionaries. This was in some ways an improvement over the cavalier cultural iconoclasm that characterized some missionaries at their worst, but it undermined the sense that the gospel could and ought to change certain aspects of any culture. (Taber 2000: 57)

In the course of interviews I repeatedly noticed the planters’ interest in the social sciences, as my role as a sociologist and sociology’s ability to shine a light on the work of the church planters often became a topic of discussion. In a research memo about an interview I conducted with a minister in Hamburg I wrote:
I noticed a certain fascination with my questions, for instance when I asked him about the populations of the various neighborhoods he pointed out to me. He seemed pleased to use his sociological vocabulary—concepts like milieu, postmodernity, Erlebnisgesellschaft—in the course of our interview, and I increasingly got the sense that he was observing me at least as much as I was observing him, taking a keen interest in how I conducted my interview with him as if he was an outside observer.

Organizers of church planting conferences, including City to City Europe, have often invited sociologists or urban planners to speak. A Redeemer church planting conference in New York featured Saskia Sassen, the renowned sociologist and theorist of the “global city” based at Columbia University, as a keynote speaker. It is also noteworthy that the first sociologist to study Redeemer Presbyterian Church was initially, like the church’s founder, a student of Harvie Conn’s (Bartholomew 2000: v).

Returning to Keller, his stance outlined above opens him up to the broader culture, allowing him to learn from other disciplines and contextualize his message, while on the other hand the existence of a firm, timeless truth is never in question for him. In the preceding chapter I noted how the sociological (or anthropological) category of the network was central to the self-description and self-understanding of the church planting movement. Here I want to note that this engagement with sociological thought among church planters goes even further. Keller, as the movement’s spokesperson, turns to the discipline of sociology as he develops his conception of urban space.

The bulk of Keller’s urban theory is expounded in two texts. The Church Planter Manual was published in 2002 (Keller and Thompson 2002) with J. Allen Thompson of the Mission to North America credited as a co-author. It is a loose compilation of materials that were in use even before the manual was published in ring-bound form. Planters in Germany that I spoke to often read the Manual in German translation, which is called “Handbook on Urban Church Planting” and appears with a preface by Stephen Beck (Keller and Thompson 2012). As of 2012, Keller’s new book, Center Church (Keller 2012), is considered a replacement for the Manual. It is used in CtC trainings and incorporates updated versions of the material from the Manual. Center Church has been translated into Dutch, and translations into other European languages are planned.

6. In my interview with her, Miriam noted that the Dutch were often the first to translate Re-
Unlike the ring-bound, self-published *Manual, Center Church* is a bound book distributed by Zondervan, the major American evangelical publishing house. This is another indicator that church planting has gone mainstream in evangelical circles over the course of the past decade. Both books are a mix between a theological treatise and a practical, step-by-step guide to founding an urban church. I am interested in these books primarily insofar as they expound a theory of the urban. Keller enters the role of urban theorist quite explicitly in his writings, confirming James Bielo’s finding that, to many contemporary evangelicals, “place is a central value and resource” (Bielo 2013: 1). Over the course of the decade that separates the two titles, the content and emphasis has changed somewhat, but here I am less interested in what has changed over time than what remains constant in Keller’s understanding of and approach to the city formulated in these works.

The *Church Planter Manual* describes a three-stage process of successful church planting: preparation, launch, and “changing the fabric of the city.” The focus of the *Manual* is not exclusively on urban ministry, though that is clearly its emphasis. Thus, when the authors talk about “getting to know the context” in the course of the preparation stage (Keller and Thompson 2002: ch. 2), the implication is an urban context. The authors derive many of their examples and case studies from the history of Redeemer Presbyterian Church in New York and other urban church plants in American cities, including Baltimore, Seattle and San Diego. At the heart of their depiction of the city is a theological version of the sociological view (associated with Georg Simmel and Louis Wirth, among others) that the city is defined by heterogeneity and density. Cities “reflect the Future City where there will be people of ‘every tongue, tribe, people, and nation.’ … The city focuses the gifts, capacities and talents of people, the deep potentialities in the human heart”

7. On Amazon.com, where the book is available in hardcover, as an ebook, and as an audio book, *Center Church* ranks highly in the categories “Pastoral Resources” and “Ministry & Evangelism” (January 2015).

8. The *Manual* is also quite clearly written for an American audience, whereas *Center Church* is much more international in its orientation, frequently providing international examples and qualifying statements for the American context.
The authors emphasize that the city is a place Christians should love and value as such. The city is among the most exalted parts of God’s creation. As biblical evidence for this, the authors highlight the point that in the apocalyptic vision laid out in the book of Revelation, the restored paradise of the Garden of Eden is called the “New Jerusalem.”

The telos of the world and God’s desired vision for it is urban. At the same time, there is a duality at the heart of the city. All the qualities that make cities great can also turn them into sites of grave sin. Cities are places of refuge for all kinds of people, but they can also become a refuge from God. Cities are gathering places for human excellence, but they can also be a place of pathology and hubris. Finally, cities can be the sites of temples where God is worshiped, but they are also frequently sites of idolatry. Keller and Thompson (2002) refer to Augustine’s classical distinction between the City of God and the City of Man. Its duality makes the city a strategically important site for ministry, since its great potentialities must be redeemed if they are to benefit the Christian community (City of God) rather than earthly ends (City of Man). Overall, the approach to the city is a variation on the Calvinist theme of creation, fall, and redemption. The city is God’s creation which has fallen into sin and which the church is called to redeem through Christ.

In addition to being diverse and offering opportunities to draw large groups of people, cities are also sites of concentrated cultural capital. As such they have an outsized influence in the broader culture. This further raises their strategic value for evangelicals hoping not just to plant churches that grow, but that also contribute to “spiritual renewal dynamics” and cultural transformation in the city and beyond. The authors draw an analogy between evangelicals and gay people to make this point: “Homosexuals, while only 2% of the population, are nonetheless highly influential. Why? They live almost exclusively in the largest urban areas, where they work in places that control social discourse” (Keller and Thompson 2002: 48). Evangelicals, in contrast, “are totally non-urban,” hence they lack comparable cultural influence. In light of Redeemer Presbyterian Church’s success story in New York, this circumstance provides reason enough for evangelicals to focus on urban ministry.

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9. Compare this to the attitudes toward the city among American Christians described by Orsi (1999).
gelicals to invest in urban ministry, in the view of Keller and Thompson.

Because of the high cost involved in urban ministry—more expensive rents, higher costs of living, higher wages for staff—it is important to focus the work carefully. Strategic thinking is required. For this reason, Keller and Thompson go into detail on how to pick a neighborhood to work in and how to conduct quantitative (demographic) and qualitative (ethnographic) research to develop profiles of the group or groups living there. Quantitative research on the basis of United States Census information can provide a socioeconomic and demographic profile of an area, give an indication of whether a neighborhood is growing, and throw some light on basic indicators like “crime, housing, transportation and schools” (Keller and Thompson 2002: 58). Ethnography, including “networking” (building rapport) and interviewing, is a way not just to gather facts about a place, but to get a feel for what makes it distinctive. “Walking our target neighborhoods, observing buildings and objects of art, talking to individuals will give us insights not available in any demographic package. In addition, this knowledge will impact our attitudes and change the ways we relate, listen and speak. There is no substitute for ethnographic understanding” (Keller and Thompson 2002: 77). This strong emphasis on ethnography speaks to the importance of place and culture in the strategic approach to urban space in church planting. Because the city is above all a cultural concept, the authors understand inequalities and unevenness in urban space in cultural terms. Cities are so culturally varied that there can be no one-size-fits-all approach for church planting. Rather than inculturation, the term introduced in the beginning of this chapter, Keller and Thompson talk about “contextualization” as the process of making the Christian message (the gospel) relevant to a cultural group. Contextualization is about developing a model or a “philosophy of ministry” for a specific setting. They outline a number of different church planting models, stressing that which model works best depends on a great number of contextual variables.

To summarize so far, Keller views cities as cultural entities defined by density and heterogeneity. As such, they have qualities that are godly and qualities that are sinful. The responsibility of Christians is to engage with urban cultures to seize the opportunities they present to amplify the godly qualities that already exist in cities. Redeeming the city means developing po-
tentials that already exist in urban spaces rather than seeking to impose an externally conceived order on them. These potentials are unevenly distributed in urban space—cultural capital is concentrated in some places and not others, and evangelists are a good “fit” for some areas but not others—so, as a matter of good stewardship, engagement must be strategic to result in the highest possible return on investment. Strategy development requires a combination of social-cultural research and theological contextualization.

Keller’s Center Church, which is explicitly and exclusively about urban ministry, starts from similar premises. He repeats the biblical justification for engaging in cities (Keller 2012: 3678), and further states that increasingly urban engagement is becoming inevitable in an urban age in which soon seventy percent of the world’s population will live in cities. This raises the stakes of urban ministry even further. Center Church treats with scholarly treatments of the urban more extensively and more intensively than the Manual. There are frequent references to Saskia Sassen’s concept of “global cities” as the primary site where church planting should take place. “These networked cities are quickly becoming more economically and culturally powerful than their own national governments. Governments are increasingly losing control of the flow of capital and information and have far less influence than the multinational corporations and international financial, social, and technological networks based in global cities” (Keller 2012: 4292). Where Sassen’s use of the term has a critical intent, in Keller’s theorizing of the city it is taken to describe an opportunity structure.

In general, Keller either draws on work that provides a triumphalist account of the city, or, if it is critical, he ignores the original critical intent. Thus, he invokes Jane Jacobs for being in praise of urban diversity, not for her battling against the structural forces undermining it. Keller frequently draws on Edward Glaeser, author of The Triumph of the City. Among other things, Glaeser provides him with the insight that “the city creates productivity advantages” (quoted in Keller 2012: 3759), a finding that he takes at face value although Sassen, among others, would remind him that this surplus of productivity is contingent on the “expulsions” that happen in

11. References to Keller (2012) are to locations in the Kindle ebook version.
12. For a deconstruction of the notion of an “urban age,” see Brenner and Schmid (2014).
the city.

The concentration of power and capital in cities as such is not problematic, only that it extends the cultural influence of the wrong groups. In Keller’s urban theory, global cities are cultural entities produced by structures standing outside of time. “[I]n most ways, our cities are still today as they have always been,” he writes (Keller 2012: 3680–3694). If they make the right strategic choices, evangelicals will be able to use these structures to advance the redemption of the city. Counterculturalists who rail against these structures are misguided (Keller 2012: 5893).

What follows from this view of the city for church planters? Their task is to strengthen that which is biblical about cities so that they can be redeemed. For this purpose, church planters must engage with urban culture and pursue cultural influence. They should not pursue it at all costs; their approach should be “balanced,” Keller stresses. However, the only way to change the conversation is by accumulating cultural capital. Cities, especially global cities, are strategic places because they have large concentrations of cultural capital, particularly at their center. Church planters should thus seek out these centers, because they hold the most opportunity for a redemption of the city.

In my reconstruction, the logic of this argument sounds a lot like the logic followed by profit-seeking entities. Keller (2012) emphasizes that the approach of churches should be “balanced,” so his actual prescriptions, to the extent that he makes them, are neither as explicit or as strong as I have portrayed them. In addition, Keller states that churches should also be involved in poverty and justice ministries, so there are other considerations that flow into where to engage, not just the presence of cultural capital. Nonetheless, the overall tendency in his theoretical and practical approach to urban space is to see it in terms of what Liepitz (1994) called “projected space,” that is, space from which value can be derived. Of course, the value to be derived is not monetary. Keller is not saying church planters should try to make a literal profit by founding churches. They should, however, seek to maximize symbolic and cultural capital. For that reason they map out and invest in projected spaces.
Michel de Certeau famously noted that urban strategies—the conceptions of space that underlie the structure of a city—are frequently subverted by urban tactics—the ways in which people actually move through the city, finding unexpected shortcuts or unforeseen uses for places (Certeau 1984). Following this distinction, we can ask to what extent the tactics of church planters follow or subvert the strategy formulated by Tim Keller.

In a study on the religious ecology of gentrification in Brooklyn, Cimino (2011) found that church plants, including a Ctc church plant in Williamsburg called Resurrection Presbyterian Church, are highly compatible with the process of gentrification because they provide “lifestyle enclaves” for the newly arrived upwardly-mobile population. According to Bielo (2013: 1–2), who conducted research mainly in medium-sized cities in the Midwest, found that church planters’ “main strategy for restoring a sense of place has been to start new congregations in mixed-income and disinvested urban neighborhoods.” In this, “they are unavoidably implicated in gentrification processes” (Bielo 2011a: 20). This finding fits the Keller strategy of targeting projected spaces rather well. However, within the church planting world, there are beginnings of a critical discussion about the relationship between church plants and gentrification (Bielo 2011a; Mitchell 2014). If church planters are reflective about how what they do contributes to urban inequalities, they might deviate from the strategy of targeting projected spaces.

The church plants introduced in chapter all consciously opted to locate in major cities. They considered place and urban space to be an important ingredient in their venture. The details of their reasons for selecting a specific site differed, however. Even church plants within the same city chose quite different approaches. The Nordstern-Kirche decided to focus on a specific neighborhood with the hopes of attracting urban professionals living in the vicinity, while Frankfurt City Church chose a central location that people from various neighborhoods and from outside the city limits could easily get to. Despite their differences, in both cases the influence of Keller’s conception of the city is noticeable. The city is primarily a space of opportunity, and places in the city are vantage points from which to participate in the city’s culture with the aim of influencing
In both these cases, site selection follows an “attractional” logic.

In the cases of the Berlinprojekt and the Hamburgprojekt, the congregations started out being neighborhood-based and later moved to a bigger, more central venue. They then began planting daughter churches, starting with Kreuzbergprojekt in Berlin, that were more closely tied to a particular neighborhood. Hamburgprojekt has followed suit with its Schanzenprojekt and Wilhelmsburgprojekt. In interviews, pastors sometimes made comparisons, some of which I also found in written matter by church planting insiders, between site selection processes for church plants and strategies for locating businesses. The first comparison, brought up by Florian, the pastor of a nascent church plant I interviewed in Cologne, was between Walmart and Starbucks. The comparison was meant to highlight two contrasting strategies, having a suburban presence with a big parking lot in order to be reachable by car for a far-flung customer base (Walmart) versus having a ubiquitous urban presence to be easily reachable by local pedestrians (Starbucks). In this comparisons, the newer church plants are the Starbucks. They aim to be, if not in walking distance, then at least located on the routes urban dwellers travel in their early routine. This model covers both the more central approach exemplified by Frankfurt City Church and the Berlinprojekt and Hamburgprojekt churches in their more “mature” stages as well as more neighborhood-based plants, like the Nordstern church in Frankfurt. The second comparison contrasted Starbucks with local coffeeshops. In this case, the contrast was about the corporate branding of Starbucks establishment compared to the more unique and eclectic aesthetic found in local coffeeshops. This time, church plants did not place themselves on the Starbucks side of the equation. Their aim is not to reproduce the same experience over and over in their quest for maximum cover of the urban landscape. Instead, they seek to connect with what makes certain localities unique. Keller’s insistence that ethnographic understanding is an irreplaceable ingredient in the church planting process dovetails with this aim. The local cultural understanding provided by ethnographic research is important to find aesthetic forms that are a cultural fit in a certain place.

In the course of our conversation, Florian showed me statistical material he had collected about Cologne to familiarize himself with the context of his church planting venture. Among
these materials were the so-called Sinus Milieu Studies, a popular market research tool to differentiate target groups. He had a map that showed the proportion of “experimentalists” and other creative milieux in different parts of the city. Other pastors also worked with maps, though not always with maps based on data.

In the course of my research, I asked to pastors to draw their own maps of their cities, highlighting places in the city they found inspiring or relevant to their work in some ways. Martin, the founding pastor of Hamburgprojekt, drew his with great detail (see figure 5.1). As he drew, he talked about the ways different places in the city, including the soccer stadiums and the red-light district, inspire him. He talked about their significance to various publics in the city. He also talked at length about the feel of different parts of the city, exhibiting a great understanding of the urban ecology of his adopted hometown. Thus, he talked about the declining significance of certain social movements, and he identified emerging hip areas congregation members were moving out to (some of which in the following years became target areas for daughter churches). In other words, Martin engaged in a kind of “folk ethnography,” to use a concept coined by the American sociologist Elijah Anderson, a practice to create “a cognitive and cultural base on which denizens are able to construct behavior in public” (Anderson 2004: 29). As part of this folk ethnographic practice, Martin moved to Hamburg a full year before he started offering church services. He spent this time doing what people in the neighborhood he wanted to plant the church in do: going to shows, attending the theater, watching movies, going to art openings, or hanging out in bars. He reads the magazines they read and shops in the same stores.

Elaborating on how he conceives of his church’s relation to the wider public, he first rejected a view that he characterized as widespread among other evangelical ministries. “If you say, all that is evil, you degrade the things you do on a day to day basis.” He does not want to degrade the everyday activities people engage in, nor does he want to reject the city—a concept that to him denotes more than the people living there, but a way of life. His church should not be aloof from the city, “only sucking it out” like a parasite.

Martin: I don’t believe that at all. ... Your work in itself [an sich], that what you do in itself, is valued by God. In our professional life, we tease out the potential that in-
heres in raw materials. ... A graphic designer creates beauty out of colors and shapes, his raw materials. ... [We want to] bring together different occupational groups—doctors, artists—and get them to talk about what it means to be in this profession and to realize potentials, realize your own potential, to get ahead, to make the world better, more beautiful, and at the same time be a Christian. ... They have to contextualize what it means by themselves. For doctors, for example, what does it mean to have medical, maybe even Christian ethics? What are my limits? Where can I influence things, that we don’t reduce the number of beds in hospitals even further, that we don’t have to work even faster, and so on. ...

me: In other words, what they do in their everyday lives is not just a means to an end.

Martin: No, not a means to an end, but a value in itself. The work in itself has a value. For instance, a sociologist. That has a value to God. To figure out things. That doesn’t exist in a vacuum.

Martin’s approach to the city is not other-worldly. He puts a strong emphasis on valorizing quotidian activities. All he can hope to accomplish, he said, is to get people to ask about what their activities can mean to God, how they can be a form of service or praise. He does not come to the city like a prophet from the wilderness, asking the city dwellers to abandon their ways. The
tension between the City of God and the City of Man is quite minimal.

These examples from my field research display some of the characteristics of what could be called the “center church” type of church plant. It targets the city specifically to reach groups with cultural influence. This goal influences site selection, which follows an “attractional” logic, as well as the overall orientation toward the wider public. The activities of the church, and especially of the pastor, seek to avoid too great a distance, not just spatially but also culturally, between the church community and urban publics. The church seeks to be spatially and normatively central in the life of the city. This attractional approach is very close to what rational choice sociologists studying religion would expect from successful religious entrepreneurs competing for souls in the religious economy. They should act like salespeople, honing their religious supply to what the customers want.

In addition to this “center church” type of church plant, I also encountered other orientations toward the city among some church planters. They are based on a perception of the city not as an assortment of opportunities to be pursued, but as a hostile space that at least in some regards must be guarded against. These orientations have not been formulated in a systematic way comparable to Keller’s formulation of the center church approach, and they seldom appear in a “pure” form. Most church plants are attractional to a certain degree, otherwise they would be perceived as an exclusive club that has no interest in carrying out the Great Commission. Nonetheless, these orientations appear often enough, taking priority over the attractional logic and having enough coherence that I will suggest they amount to a separate type, which I will call the “safe space” model of church plants. Church planters following the “safe space” conception seek to make a form of Christian community possible that they perceive their environment to pose a threat to. This is particularly salient for immigrant religious communities, whose come under scrutiny by the state (Vásquez and Knott 2014). In this case, religious place-making can be a crucial part of ensuring the livelihood of the embattled migrant community. The religious community then provides a safe space in which members of the migrant community can flourish despite being marginalized and rendered invisible by the state. However, the stakes need not be this high. Even without the threat of state sanctions hanging over their heads, some members of
religious communities feel the need to establish a safe space. Some church planters and members of church plants see themselves as figurative members of a diaspora—as “resident aliens,” as one popular theological book put it (Hauerwas and Williamson 1989).

The concept of safe spaces has been used in social movements since the 1970s (Polletta 1999). Safe spaces and cognate terms such as “free spaces” or “autonomous zones” refer to the capacity built up in movements to withstand the overpowering influence of hegemonic structures. More recently, the term has entered into more popular circulation after American college campuses began creating safe spaces for survivors of assault and other traumatic experiences (Shulevitz 2015). Participants in the CPM used the term or one of its cognates before this popularization, though, showing a level of engagement with activist discourses. This engagement is more widespread among participants in the emergent church than the New Calvinist parts of the CPM. It is not unusual to come across references to Hakim Bey’s Temporary Autonomous Zones, a pivotal text in anarchist circles, in emergent church blogs and other writings (cf. Hobson 2010). It is worth noting that these writers chose a term from the jargon of social movements rather than a theological term like refuge or sanctuary. This is indicative of a closeness between safe space-type church plants and a certain countercultural orientation, as Keller (2012) also suggests (although he uses very different terms, he does recognize that one way that Christians can engage with the world is in a countercultural mode, which he evaluates negatively for various reasons, not least of which is that counterculturalism comes too close to anticapitalist rhetoric).

Although it is not of theological provenance, the notion of safe spaces is partially elaborated in theological terms. The most notable aspect of this is the embrace of an (invented) Anabaptist tradition among some younger evangelicals. I call it an invented tradition because for the most part the younger evangelicals embracing it do not have an attachment to the communities in which it is practiced (on invented traditions, see Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983). As generations of radical scholars who took an interest in Anabaptism noted, this radical offshoot of the Protestant reformation did not take the route of Luther and other “mainline” reformers, making their peace with earthly powers (e.g., Engels 1966; Bloch 1921). Instead, they remained at a distance from secular powers, refusing to recognize their authority as legitimate. This is embodied in communities
that trace their lineage to the so-called radical reformation, such as the Amish or the Hutterites. These groups, who became radical pacifists after the sixteenth century, establish communities that seek to minimize their interactions with secular power. Contemporary theologians that are popular among church planters have worked with this heritage. John Howard Yoder, an American Mennonite theologian, is a point of reference for some church planters, again mostly in the emerging church, as is his follower, the influential American theologian Stanley Hauerwas. Among Europeans, Stuart Murray, author of *The Naked Anabaptist* (Murray 2010), is a source for these kinds of ideas.

How does the concept of safe spaces and the invented Anabaptist tradition it is often associated with inform the practice of church planters? It has a few practical consequences. First, those church plants who follow this model—among the cases I studied, I found it embodied most clearly in the Amsterdam and Prague church plants—tend to put far less of an emphasis on quantitative growth. The fixation on church growth is seen as a fetishization that distracts from other goals of a qualitative nature, such as making genuine community and spiritual experience possible among members of the congregation. Rapidly growing churches and churches with very large congregations have difficulty in this regard, which is why some of them have established small groups, also known as “cell groups.” The founding pastor of Via Nova in Amsterdam told me that, in his view, the model the European churches should follow is not the model of mass evangelism many celebrate as having led to the conversion of hundreds of thousands of people in China. Much rather, the Christian communities of the Middle East, where Christians have survived in the minority for centuries, should provide a model for European Christians today.

The second thing that sets these church plants apart is that they seek to build relationships and virtues in common among those who are already a part of the church plant. Attracting new people comes second. This is a practical consequence that follows from the previous point. In practice, this means that church services tend to provide more time and space for people to mingle and talk beforehand and afterward. There is less of an emphasis on not being off-putting to potential newcomers. While I was not able to observe this in the churches I visited, conversations with attendees at services suggested that it is more likely in these services that questions
of personal ethics and proper conduct are broached than in “attractional” churches.

In this chapter I have discussed the cultural orientations and public engagements of evangelicals through church planting. The work of Tim Keller is in many ways reflective of the current mainstream, which is to regard the city as a mostly nonthreatening place of opportunity, a lively marketplace in the religious economy. Church plants should engage urban publics with an eye to reaching groups with high levels of social and cultural capital so as to increase the returns on investment. In practice, this results in church plants that embrace an “attractional” logic. This guides how they use urban space, prioritizing neighborhoods that are already elevated or gentrifying. It also shapes how they engage with public culture, reducing the tensions between the internal culture of the church plant and the culture of social groups the church plant seeks to attract. In some cases, however, church plants perceive urban space differently, not just as a (neutral) marketplace for spiritual or cultural products, but as a hostile space. As a result, these churches and their pastors do not enter urban space (primarily) in the role of a salesperson. Instead, classical pastoral qualities may be more important. Instead of diminishing the distinctiveness of the group from wider society, these church plants may find it more important to affirm what makes them distinct. While this potentially makes them less attractive to outsiders, it facilitates the maintenance of a safe space in which life can be lived in accordance with Christian ideals with a degree of isolation from the pressures of the broader culture.

I have named these two spatial tactics the “center church” and the “safe space” types. By naming them as distinct types, I do not mean to suggest that they exist in their purest form, nor that they always appear in isolation. It may be worth considering whether these two types are in a kind of dialectical relationship with one another. In other words, although they appear as in some ways opposite, they may also be interdependent. A church plant taking the center church approach to the extreme would turn into a purely opportunistic participant in the marketplace. Tim Keller warns against this, emphasizing the need for a strong theological basis. But in practice, by downplaying the tension between the City of God and the City of Man, church planters can more easily align their supply with the demand, which in an extreme situation could lead to a “secularization” of their church. Critics claim this is already happening in the case of the
emerging church movement. A church plant taking the safe space model to the extreme risks becoming isolated and stagnant, ultimately failing to renew itself and running the risk of dying out. Attracting at least a modest number of new members would then be a demographic necessity. In the first scenario of a center church-type plant secularizing itself into irrelevance, a dose of the more closed safe space model would help affirm what makes the church distinctive. In the second scenario, a safe space-type plant becoming stagnant and dying out, a slight move toward the more porous center church model could enable a modest level of growth.
Chapter Six

The Pastor as Entrepreneur

In the imaginations of those who write about the phenomenon of church planting, planters are often associated with another kind of founder: Silicon Valley entrepreneurs. According to the sociologist Tony Carnes, New York has become “a Silicon Valley of church planting.” “You can come here, try new ideas, fail and start again,” he told a reporter (Leland 2011), echoing the Silicon Valley mantra “fail early, fail fast.” In a recent Guardian article on church plants in the Bay Area, the reporter noted that frequently the plants “behav[e] just like any other start-up in the nation’s technology hub” (Gaus 2015). In 2011, another reporter writing about church plants in San Francisco also likened them to the technology start-ups headquartered in the region (James 2011), and a string of others reporting on church plants in other parts of North America also emphasize the “entrepreneurialism” of the pastors of newly founded congregations (O’Leary 2012; Rice 2009; Laidlaw 2008; Glod 2001).

In this chapter I will make the case that this association is warranted not just by the superficial similarities of what church planters and tech entrepreneurs do, but by the very way the church planter role is defined by church planting networks and the pastors themselves. Planters model their role and their behavior, at least in parts, in those terms. This finds expression in a number of aspects of the church planting movement my research has illuminated. First, in the assessment process, when church planting networks determine whether or not to provide support and training to a minister interested in church planting. Second, in the course of interviews, church planters themselves frequently reflected on the characteristics needed to be a successful church planter. Overwhelmingly, they drew analogies with business entrepreneurs. Third, the conduct of church planters and the division of labor within the congregation once it begins operating showed the influence of an entrepreneurial model.
My argument is that, like in other fields and economic sectors, the role and work of pastors has undergone deestructuring and informalization as demands for flexibility and adaptability have increased. These new forms of labor and self-understanding are in marked contrast to those found in non-voluntary religious organizations like the German Volkskirchen, where pastors go through formal university training and work within a bureaucratically organized division of labor from day one. Thus, the church planter is an entrepreneurial pastor. As such, he (they are almost always male) is more compatible with both voluntary religiosity and the conditions of late capitalism than the classical pastoral role.

CHURCH PLANTER CHARACTERISTICS AND ASSESSMENT

A big part of the insider literature on church planting is concerned with the characteristics a church planter should have. Part of that is having a “call” to plant a church. The church planter manual Lauch starts with this anecdote by one of the authors:

I (Nelson) know how it feels to want to start a church. Like you, I’ve been there, wrestling with the fear, the indescribable excitement and the sheer awe that God may have actually called me to such a task. In the year 2000, God began to stir this desire in my heart—the desire to start a church from scratch. Church planting, in general, was not a new idea for me, but the concept of me personally planting a church caught me off guard. ...

The next few weeks were a whirlwind. God was working in my life and I knew it. I just wasn’t sure what He was doing. I prayed, studied the Bible, read a few books on church planting and wrote furiously in my journal—all “in secret.” I didn’t say a word about starting a church to my wife, Kelley. It wasn’t that I was afraid to tell her, we have a great marriage and communicate well—I just needed to make sure that this call was truly from God before I said anything about it. In our marriage and ministry together, we had already moved from the East Coast to the West Coast, and I knew enough not to propose moving back across the country until I knew that God was the one behind the idea. (Searcy and Thomas 2006: 21–23)

1. An influential critical approach to the study of entrepreneurialism builds on Michel Foucault’s work on neoliberalism and governmentality (Foucault 2008), in which he describes homo oeconomicus, the form of subjectivity created under neoliberalism, as an “entrepreneurial self.” I do not engage with this work here in detail but rather bring it up as evidence that entrepreneurialism is seen as a feature of contemporary society.
Determining whether one truly has a call is an incremental process of looking for signs—confirmation from peers, encouragement from strangers, “coincidences” paving the way—and probing the strength of one’s conviction, desire, and drive. According to Tim Keller, there are three elements to a call: ability, affinity, and opportunity. Only an individual who at once has the endowments and experience (ability), desire and maturity (affinity), facing a situation of unmet need and the presence of “sharers” of the burden (opportunity) truly has a call (Keller and Thompson 2002: 65).

Undoubtedly this kind of drive is needed for young pastors, usually in their late twenties to early thirties, to take on a task as big as starting a church, frequently at the same time as parenting young children and relocating to a new city. Eric, a pastor of the Hamburgprojekt, described this as “a constant walking around in too big shoes.”

Of course there is support available from denominations, networks, mother churches and partner congregations. Planters can receive training, mentorship, and even seed funding. These organizations want to make sure their investment is not misplaced, however, and because church plants in the early stages depend on the relationships and leadership of the pastor or pastors, they try to make sure that the planter has what it takes. There are more or less formalized processes to do so. In many cases, even in the CtC network where the planting process has been institutionalized and rationalized to a large degree, determining the fitness of a candidate is done in an informal conversational setting. When a pastor expresses an interest in planting a church affiliated with the CtC network, local pastors, network leaders or the regional director will meet that pastor to get an impression of the kind of person he is. In addition, CtC will frequently consult other stakeholders, especially the denomination the church intends to become a part of, if any. Despite the seeming informality of the process, there are some formalized criteria to help determine fit and aptitude.

The Church Planter Manual, previously discussed in chapter 5, lists eighteen characteristics a church planter should have, and another eight the church planter spouse should have (Keller and Thompson 2002: 69–70). Some networks require church planters to be married, and wives are
frequently assessed along with their husbands. This list of characteristics can be used in a formal multi-day assessment process, but it can also inform more informal interpersonal assessments as outlined above. Church planters are assessed for three sets of characteristics: personal, ministerial, and interpersonal. The interpersonal characteristics are worth looking at in more detail because they give a sense of the personality type networks look for. According to the Manual, character is more important than skill.

- **Flexibility**: welcomes new possibilities, coping effectively with ambiguity, change and stress.
- **Likability**: is friendly, pleasant and attractive to others.
- **Emotional stability**: maintains emotional balance, is patient and sincere, not moody but able to laugh at himself.
- **Sensitivity**: is other-centered, demonstrating love, patience and kindness in all his relationships; is sensitive to the hurts and struggles of others; values those who are not valued by society and denies himself for their sake.
- **Dynamism**: has an inviting, energetic personality which calls people to follow him.

Thus, in addition to being people of faith with an active spiritual life and a functional relationship or family (personal characteristics), and in addition to being good preachers with good management, leadership and training skills (ministerial characteristics), church planters must have a personality characterized by extroversion and a degree of aggressiveness. It is also worth noting that church planters should have sensitivity, which runs somewhat counter to the characteristics of dynamism and flexibility.

The successor publication to the manual, *Center Church*, does not address the issue of assessment, it only mentions that CtC performs assessments of prospective planters. There is a brief discussion of the demands prospective planters face, however. In Keller’s view, “church planters need to create ministry, not replicate it” (Keller 2012: 285). For that reason, the focus of the training is not on doctrine or specific forms of ministry, but on an overall theological vision. This is the most rewarding for “those entrepreneurial leaders who neither want to reengineer doctrine

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2. The founding pastors of Berlinprojekt were both not married when they started, and Matthias told me he and Philipp were reprimanded for this at a conference by Mark Driscoll, the firebrand former pastor of Mars Hill Church.
nor be given a template to implement but who want to create new and beautiful ministry expres-
sions” (Keller 2012: 304). Another influential guide for assessments is a list of thirteen “knockout factors” for successful church planters by Charles Ridley, which stresses a similar set of character traits.

In the CtC office in New York, Miriam described the typical planter like this:

Someone young, in their twenties or thirties, maybe forties, who is entrepreneurial, creative—basically it’s sort of the profile of someone who wants to start a new business. They have a strong understanding of their city, a strong theological back-
ground, whatever that looks like. ... We try to make sure that they have that basic biblical gospel understanding. They’re evangelistic, they’re relational, they talk to people. They don’t necessarily fit one certain personality type, although with the Myers-Briggs personality types ... I would say a lot of them tend to be extroverted. ... But that’s descriptive, not prescriptive. They don’t have to be.

The qualifier that this list is descriptive rather than prescriptive speaks to the informal way in which assessment is often treated in CtC.

Most of the founders of the churches I focused on did not go through a formal assessment process. One exception was Thomas, who was assessed in the course of his participation in the City Mentoring Program (CMP). It took place over the course of a weekend, during which time assessors took a “pretty intense” look to see whether the pastors really are prepared for the task ahead.

They look for a particular type of person. You have to have certain spiritual character-
istics, character traits, personality traits, leadership capabilities, those are the kinds of things you need. Not one hundred percent of everything, but you need a certain type. You need the type of person who in normal life probably would have founded a company and is crazy enough to do something like that. That is one part of it, and the other part is that the person needs to have some spiritual substance. He really has to – it isn’t just a matter of applying certain church principles, it has to come out of a deep passion. There has to be a theology there. He has to be able to carry along people in matters of faith. Yeah, that is what they look for.

Ronald, who founded the CMP, called the type of person they look for a “pioneer.” The more formalized process developed by CMP that Thomas went through is increasingly becoming the norm in Germany. The Evangelical-Free Church and other denominations have adopted the model for their church planting efforts. Thus, the assessment of (inter-) personal characteristics is becoming increasingly institutionalized to ensure that the right type of pastor is supported.
Mattijs, a young Dutch minister who was going through a CtC training program in New York when I spoke to him, was recruited by a different church planting network that sent him and his spouse to an assessment center in Tennessee. Participants in the assessment center came from all over the United States, and many of them were planning to plant churches in small-town environments. The organization behind the assessment center, Stadia, takes a very aggressive approach to church planting. They try to start a hundred new churches per year. (Mattijs, who plans to plant a church in Amsterdam, was recruited by a smaller New York-based organization who cooperated with Stadia for purposes of the assessment.) The assessment consisted of three components: a “huge questionnaire,” a talk with a psychologist (as a couple), and a series of tests conducted in groups.

Assessors used the psychometric DISC test and discussed the implications of the test’s outcome with the ministers and their spouses. DISC assessments, like the related Myers-Briggs test, are often used in career coaching or personnel consulting to determine strengths and weaknesses in leadership and other forms of organizational behavior. Strong prospective planters usually score highly in the “D” (for dominance) category. Candidates at the Stadia assessment center that did not score highly in this category were given various kinds of counsel. Some were told to partner up with another pastor with a more “dominant” personality type and to fill a role more suitable for their personality, e.g., teaching. Others were told to wait a few years and reapply. Presumably some were told they should reconsider their calling, though Mattijs did not know for sure.

Here is how Mattijs described the third component, the group tests:

Mattijs: This is what they did. There was a group of thirty people, fifteen plus the wives, and then they made three groups out of it, and they gave us separate projects to work on. They said, You guys are going to write a profile of a specific neighborhood that you are going to work in. You have an hour, one and a half hours for that, and afterward you are going to present it to the group. Then they put us in this area, and then they were just watching us, like, three or four of these guys, looking how it developed, who took the lead, what roles everyone took. Then we reflected on that a little bit.

JB: Were most people pretty socially competent and participate in this? Or were there some where you thought, wow, how are they ever going to be able to do this?
Mattijs: Honestly, yes, I thought there were these people. ... One of the things also we did was set up – make groups among yourselves and set up a church service or a mission ... And then, like, most women, who were there just because of their husbands – they have a role, too, but it wasn’t the main thing – they said, Let’s set up a children’s program. Three or four women worked on that, and they were very heavily assessed on that. They introduced the children’s program, and these assessors were there, and they said, This is not good, and this is not good, you have to change that. It was a mess. From one point of view, I thought the assessment center shouldn’t be too harsh on these women, because they weren’t even there to be assessed. But on the other hand, I feel that, if you can’t even deal with critique... you gotta have, sort of...

JB: Thick skin.

Mattijs: Yeah. There was one couple in particular that couldn’t really deal with that, and I thought it is pretty essential that you be able to. But I did cooperate with them, and it was fun to work together with them.

The Stadia assessment center is a very rationalized example of such a process. None of the other church planters I spoke with went through a process comparable in its complexity and comprehensiveness, though several others referenced the DISC assessment and emphasized the desirability of a high “D” or “D-I” score for church planters. However, in terms of what the assessors evaluate, it is not very different from the criteria listed by Keller or the CMP assessment: leadership skills, dominance, extroversion, and the frequent comparisons between what church planters do and what, in “normal life,” entrepreneurs do.

PLANTERS’ SELF-UNDERSTANDING

The conception of the entrepreneurial pastor not only affects the institutionalized processes of the church planting movement. It also is part of the self-understanding of pastors in church plants.

I asked Matthias of Berlinprojekt about how the pastoral role in a church plant such as his own contrasts with the quasi-established Protestant church’s.

When a church planter is recruited ... at least one of the planters ... has to be the dominant–initiator type. Those are precisely the two character traits that define entrepreneurs. If on top of that the spiritual vision, character and education are a fit, then that’s a great package. That’s what one looks for. But the difference in the understanding of a free church is that free churches are, in fact, grassroots organizations, a bottom-up and organic movement. The aspects that you mention [credentials and career paths] are different in the Landeskirche, due to the culture of profes-
sionalization. ... We remain a grassroots organization, and that is how the church is organized. We do not have a closed hierarchical pattern. ...

The old model of the Landeskirche no longer works. The old model assumes that people come to church, but they simply don’t do that. That means you have to follow the people, show initiative and stay persistent. Those are precisely the characteristics that are required. Something has to happen, and where the people stand, where they live, networks have to develop around them, something has to grow around them. You can’t always assume that they will simply come.

The entrepreneurial pastoral role is defined in juxtaposition to the pastorate as practiced in the territorial church. The “culture of professionalization” in the Landeskirchen has made many pastors complacent and incapable of responding to the changed religious landscape. The free churches, which defy such professionalization, are more flexible, giving enterprising pastors more room to maneuver. In that sense, there is an affinity between religious voluntarism and the entrepreneurial pastor.

In chapter 2 I mentioned Ken, the Greater Europe Mission staff member who remarked that he has seen a marked increase in interest in church planting in Germany within the last decade. As a follow up, I asked him why interest was suddenly there. Was it that there was a success story they heard about? Had they been reading Tim Keller and realizing this was a legitimate path to take in ministry?

Yeah, I think the influences like Tim Keller and hearing some stories from other countries, this and that. And just for some reason, this generation now is wired differently than the last, willing to take the risks to go for it. You know, the whole German mentality you have to look at, too. They want everything in order and structured, and that kind of mentality has worked against church planting for a long time, because they were just never ready to step out and do it and take the risks necessary. Now the younger generation is a lot more ready to take risks in general in Germany, and I think that helps the cause of church planting.

Ken’s explanation for the acceptance of the practice of church planting is a cultural one. He indicates that the entrepreneurial undertaking of starting a new church dovetails to a certain extent with the culture of what the late Ulrich Beck called “risk society.”

Thomas’s explanation for the dearth of German influences on the church planting movement also focused on cultural patterns. In his estimation, it has to do with the lack of a culture of leadership:
We are a country that has a lot of difficulties in the matter of leadership. That has to do with the time of our grandparents, with the war, when leadership broke down badly. There was strong leadership, but it was completely led astray. That whole generation was branded and was always skeptical towards strong leaders. The following generation, the generation of ’68 [Achtundsechziger], they had an even bigger problem with leadership. All forms of authority, anything that smelled of it, was faulty. In our congregations in Germany you will find very few charismatic, strong, inspiring and lucid leaders in spiritual matters. [You won’t find any] people that are one generation older than us, that are fifty years old and successful pastors with congregations of fifteen hundred members and that you would say really influence their city, their denomination ...

Keller is a leader that displays such qualities. According to Thomas’s account, no figure like him could have emerged in Germany because of the country’s history and anti-leadership culture, which stifles personalities with a high degree of dominance and initiative. He suggests, however, that a generational change is underway. A new generation of leaders in German churches is shrugging off the antiauthoritarian legacy of the sixties and embracing strong leadership.

Entrepreneurialism in Action

A culture of entrepreneurialism influences how denominations and networks recruit and train ministers, and it also carries over into the self-understanding of pastors practicing church planting. More than that, this culture also shapes the conduct of these ministers and the everyday life of their congregations.

The main aspect I want to focus on here is the division of labor within congregations. Many church plants have more than one pastor. In some cases, churches hire additional staff after a year or two to meet the needs of a growing congregation. Very often, however, churches are planted by a team of pastors. Typically one of these pastors will be the entrepreneurial type, while the other pastor will have other qualities. The idea is that the two pastors will support each other in the draining work of planting the church, and that the two personality types will complement one another.

Ronald from the City Mentoring Program articulated this model of co-pastoring as follows:

We feel that the best situation is if you actually have two pastors at the head, in the lead, with one of them being this pioneer and the outward looking guy, who spends
fifty percent of his time out there with people, making all kinds of contacts, holding the starter groups with non-Christians, and then having the second guy be the quieter, less aggressive. He has a different personality profile. He is the more inward looking guy, he is the more “I will pastor the people you’ve gathered” kind of person. That combination is a winning combination.

This “winning combination” is modeled by the two pastors at Berlinprojekt. Matthias is the entrepreneurial pastor who is actively pursuing new relationships to the wider public. In this role, he has appeared on television, been interviewed by major newspapers and researchers, and appeared on panels with pastors from the major Protestant and Catholic churches in the region. His work is extroverted. Philipp’s role in the church is more subdued. His sermons have a quieter, more sensitive tone to them. His role is to organize the neighborhood-based bible study groups (the “sofa groups”) and, more generally, to take on more of the tasks classically associated with “pastoring.” Where Matthias’ work is oriented outward, Philipp’s is oriented inward, toward the needs of the congregation and its individual members.

Several other church plants have followed this model, and Eberhard from the Evangelical-Free denomination’s internal mission told me that working in teams is one of the strengths of the recent push for church planting. It is one of the aspects that makes recent church planting efforts more strategic than the isolated efforts in previous years, he said. It is easy to see why he thinks that is the case. The division of labor makes it possible to give congregation members what they need (community, counseling, pastoral care, etc.) and still pursue strategic external ends. If a single minister tried to do both, there would likely be a tradeoff.

My interview with Thomas provided some insight into the kinds of tradeoffs that might be avoided. He went into “regular” employment as a youth minister before pursuing church planting. He ultimately found his old position too circumscribed, which helped his decision to want to plant a new church. Whenever he tried to do something innovative outside his area of youth ministry, he experienced pushback. He told me he did not want to end up demoralized like the pastors he sometimes met at regional meetings.

They are all full of self-pity, crying on the inside, like “Oh! Everything is so terrible. My congregation is so dumb. I used to have ideas and goals, I thought this was a great job, but now I can only complain constantly. I’m really only doing this because
I didn’t learn to do anything else and I have to keep feeding my family.” Now, I admit that’s an exaggeration, but... (sighs).

Participants in church planting try to enable ministers with “ideas and goals” to put them into practice. Their entrepreneurialism is not only encouraged, but actively sought out. For that reason, these entrepreneurial pastors are freed from having to engage in the day-to-day reproductive labor of the church.
Chapter Seven

Conclusion: Church Planting and the Religious Landscape of the European Metropolis

“I think I’ve made a new theological discovery…”
“What is it?”
“If you hold your hands upside down, you get the opposite of what you pray for!”

—Charles Schulz, There’s No One Like You, Snoopy

A frequently quoted line attributed to the famous missiologist C. Peter Wagner touts church planting as “the single most effective evangelistic methodology under heaven.” In contrast, the authors of Launch: Starting a New Church from Scratch, a church planting manual given to participants of a 2010 conference in New York organized by the Redeemer City to City and Acts 29 networks, have this to say about the prospects of church plants: “Among evangelical Christians, the statistics for new church failure are overwhelming. It’s the dirty little secret among church types. Jehovah’s Witnesses have a better success rate than we do” (Searcy and Thomas 2006: 19). These contrasting assessments speak directly to a question that inevitably comes up when discussing the phenomenon of church planting: Can starting new churches really have a lasting impact on patterns of religious belief and practice? Can they conceivably advance the goal, formulated for the Roman Catholic church by former Pope Benedict XVI, to reawaken Christianity in Europe?

The two theories introduced at the outset of this dissertation (see chapter 1) suggest two ways to answer this question. The rational choice theory of Stark, Bainbridge and Finke is very optimistic about the ability of individual entrepreneurs to change the trajectory of religious history. If the religious economy allows for competition, then the supply side (religious firms and

1. With thanks to Pierre Bourdieu for finding this perfect epigraph.
entrepreneurs) will have an incentive to attract consumers. If these incentives are present, there will be greater religious vitality, while their absence (in the absence of competition) leads to languor. The existence of church plants in many European countries suggests that their religious economies do allow at least some degree of competition. They may not be entirely “free markets,” but the decline of the historic churches may have created enough of an opening for new firms to gain a foothold. Rodney Stark has argued that American missionaries in Europe are infusing competition into the religious economies and that “the impact of religious competition will be as effective in Europe as it has been in America” (Stark 2001: 120). The fact that church planting has been adopted as an indigenous practice could serve to strengthen his argument. Competition does not need to be brought in by outsiders; instead, a broad array of European religious actors are remaking the religious economy from the inside. If these entrepreneurs are prying the window of opportunity ever more widely open, then the fully liberalized religious economy may be just around the corner. Then Europe’s and America’s religious landscapes might converge, rendering current discussions about the exceptionality of Europe moot.

The revisionist secularization account of David Martin also admits the possibility that there may be revitalizing tendencies on the European continent. However, he sees a greater number of forces potentially working against the aims of the church planters than the rational choice theorists (whom Martin interestingly does not engage in his work) do. In the estimation of Rodney Stark, the tattered state of religious observance in Europe began with the Constantianian establishment of the Christian church in the fourth century CE (Stark 2001; Stark and Iannaccone 1994). At that point, the system of monopolization in Europe’s religious economies was founded, fating the continent to centuries of lackluster religiosity. Like Greeley (2003), Stark argues that Europe did not de-Christianize as a result of a process of secularization, but that it was never truly Christianized in the first place. The religious monopoly holders in the aftermath of Emperor Constantine’s conversion simply had no incentive to go very far in their missionization of the Europeans, so it never went below the surface level. David Martin’s analysis would not deny this point altogether. He too sees the heritage of religious pluralism as an important factor, and he sees the “welfare view of religion” as a recipe for religious torpor (Martin 2005). However,
Martin’s historical contest between the “trajectory of 1776” and the “trajectory of 1789,” is not just a contest between an open and a closed religious economy. Martin’s work recognizes other mechanisms aside from market mechanisms as being in play in the shaping of the religious landscape. Thus, while Europe’s religious economy may be liberalizing—and the successes of the church planters could be taken to indicate this—there could still be other factors playing against revival. Martin suggests that cultural factors could play a decisive role. These are completely absent in the framework of the rational choice theorists. Chaves and Gorski (2001) also suggest that additional context needs to be taken into consideration in assessing the link between religious pluralism and religious vitality. What is it that a supply-side analysis misses?

**Competing in a Religious Economy?**

Are the supply-side sociologists correct to perceive of religious innovation in terms of market dynamics? In this section I will review my findings from the previous chapters to assess how well their framework fits the practice of church planting. In my overview of the phenomenon of church planting in Chapter 2, I noted that the practice in its present form was popularized by American and, to a lesser extent, British evangelicals. The United States is, of course, the textbook example of a religious free market, and the Anglosphere more broadly tends to have liberalized religious economies. The origin of church planting as an innovation in Christian evangelism thus fits the economic model quite well. The economic model expects the religious economies with higher degrees of competition to yield more innovation. In fact, many influential developments in evangelism in the last century had their origin in the Anglosphere, for example the evangelistic “crusade” as popularized by Billy Graham, or the Alpha Course popularized by the British minister Nicky Gumble.

Some aspects of the dispersion of church planting could also be accounted for by market dynamics. The urban focus of church planting can be interpreted as a response to the higher degree of religious competition in urban environments, as Finke and Stark (1988) have argued. The concentration of European Ctc church plants in the United Kingdom and the Netherlands also
conforms to the predictions of the supply side model. The Netherlands can be seen regarded, according to Martin (1978), as a continental outpost of the Anglosphere, thus we can expect its religious economy to be more inclined toward innovation than other continental national religious economies. The recent growth of the CtC network in Europe paints a different picture, however. Growth in the Netherlands has stalled and in the United Kingdom appears it appears to have slowed, whereas the network is adding congregations in countries whose religious landscape has historically been dominated by the Roman Catholic church, such as Ireland, Belgium, and Italy. The Acts 29 network is also expanding into Italy rather than a presumably more liberal northern European country. Upon closer inspection, the British and Dutch cases do not weigh as unambiguously in favor of the supply-side arguments. In Britain, the Anglican church has been behind much of the momentum that church planting has gotten in the past decade. It was no upstart competitor, but the old monopoly holder that brought innovation. In the Netherlands the denominations backing church planting efforts likewise are historic Calvinist churches. The riposte from supply siders would be that these old incumbents have been pushed by competitors to innovate in the ways they have done, but there is no clear evidence that they were.

In general, the strong presence of CtC in Europe runs somewhat counter to what we would expect on the basis of supply side arguments. Surely countries in Latin America and sub-Saharan Africa have shown themselves more hospitable to religious innovation in recent years than most countries in western Europe. Nonetheless, there are more CtC church plants in France than in Brazil. This pattern cannot be accounted for solely on the basis of market dynamics.

Both the origin and the dispersion of church planting partially fit what the supply-side theory would expect. What about the organization and practice of church planting? Organizationally, church planters show themselves to be very flexible. In chapter 4, I detailed how different actors that constitute the CtC network downplay some of their historical and doctrinal differences. One way to interpret this is through the lens of economic action. As religious institutions guarding a certain interpretation of the Christian faith, these actors might be hesitant to compromise what they stand for, but as participants in a religious economy, it is rational to set aside differences and to focus on delivering a product to market. In the words of Warner (1993: 1064–1068), the
organizations are “structurally adaptable.” There are certain limits to this adaptability, as in the
case of the minister who was reprimanded by the Free-Evangelical Church for baptizing an infant
in a church plant associated with their denomination.

Much of the practice of church planting also fits an economic theory. In chapter I noted that
the role of the pastor is modeled after that of an entrepreneur. As a result, many of the actions of
the entrepreneurial pastor conform with the model of *homo economicus* that underlies the rational
choice theory. The entrepreneurial pastor is extroverted and aggressive. He engages the public,
that is, the potential customers of his religious firm, with a message that is tailored to their
preferences. In order to determine what their preferences are, he uses market research, both
figuratively and literally, such as the Sinus Milieu Studies, which were developed for marketing
purposes.

In terms of their presence in the city, an economic theory also goes a far way in explain-
ing what church plants do. Much of Tim Keller’s conception of the city, which I summarized
in chapter portrays it as a neutral marketplace of ideas in which churches have to compete
in strategically sound ways. Most church plants fashion their tactics in accordance with this
market-driven strategy. They choose sites and venues that present a low barrier of access for
potential customers. By locating either in a central location or in a specific neighborhood, they
cater to customers who are sure to appreciate the convenience of not having to travel far to their
church service.

Not all church planters perceive the city as a marketplace of ideas which they can enter into
as one among countless salespeople peddling their wares. In two of my research sites, I found
a different perception of space to predominate among church planters. In Amsterdam and in
Prague, the planters affiliated with the CtC network also founded churches for urban profession-
als in their twenties to forties. They also had websites and Facebook pages to advertise their
existence. They also repurposed spaces in their respective cities for their church services. Thus,

2. I will confine this discussion to these two sites, even though I also base my conclusions in part
on occasional observations in other church plants I visited, especially a Berlinprojekt daughter
church also located in Berlin. Unfortunately I was unable to spend as much time in these other
sites, so I was not able to learn as much about them outside of my observations.
in many ways they were comparable to the church plants in other locations. However, when they talked about their relationship to the broader public, they expressed a level of skepticism about being able to attract people. Broader society was something to be guarded against to ensure the survival of the church, not something to engage with in hopes of growing it. They did not view going to market to be worthwhile. It could even be harmful, because it could further undermine the possibility of forming a community. Instead, these church plants view themselves as safe spaces, making community possible in the midst of a hostile environment. The environment is seen as hostile not because there are barriers in the religious economy preventing the church planters from competing. Rather, the problem is that one of the competitors, secularism, is dominating the market. The market itself is part of the problem. The supply-side model of Stark and Finke and others assumes that only competition between religious firms is relevant (that is one of the criticisms of Chaves and Gorski [2001]), but the experience of some church plants suggests that other competitors also matter.

**ASSESSING THE PLURALISM–VITALITY LINK**

How well does the orthodox economic model of religious mobilization fit the successes and failures of church planting? Among church planting insiders, the most optimistic assessment states that church planting leads to growth by increasing religious supply. This is in line with the expectations of the supply-side theory, which sees religious demand as a relative constant, but holds that changes in supply are what determine levels of religious participation. These insiders further hope that church plants become self-sustaining and self-reproducing after a few years, causing growth of religious supply to become exponential rather than just linear. This is Tim Keller’s ambition, and it is the view of many others (especially American) church planting strategists (e.g., Garrison [2004]). This expectation also fits the supply-side model, which holds that new potentials for growth will be unleashed as the religious economy becomes increasingly more competitive.

Not all evangelicals take such an optimistic view of the potentials of church planting (e.g.,
They may acknowledge that there is growth in new church plants, but point out that the growth of individual congregations does not grow the Christian pie as long as their growth is just transfer growth—that is, if the new members of new churches are drawn from existing church congregations. In the U.S., this is referred to as the “migration of the saints,” while in German evangelical circles, the expression “stealing sheep” (Schäfchen stehlen) is used. If religious demand was indeed constant, as the supply-side theory suggests, then new adherents should be coming out of the woodwork when religious supply is increased. If growth in church plants is mostly a chimerical reflection of the migration of the saints, however, then this element of the supply-side theory has to be questioned.

Unfortunately I do not have hard data to quantify to what extent church plant growth reflects the migration of the saints as opposed to previously unchurched individuals joining a church. I know of no quantitative study that has studied this rigorously and systematically. On the basis of my research on the practices of church planting, however, it is undeniable this migration is happening. Without some mobility of individuals already dedicated to sustaining the life of the Christian church, it would be impossible to get a church plant off the ground. Thus, the members of the “start teams” of church plants usually already are committed members of a congregation which they move from when they join the new church plant. Members of the start team of Nordstern-Kirche in Frankfurt decided to join a new church plant before it was even decided where the church would be founded. When they finally selected a city and a neighborhood, they began looking for apartments and jobs that would allow them to become part of the community. As unusual as that specific case is, the mobility of the start team is not. Some may have only recently located to the city and not joined an existing congregation yet. Based on my observations, new arrivals play an important role in the growth of church plants at all stages. Members of the start team are also frequently locals who leave their local church congregations to support the budding efforts of the church plant. In some cases, they come with their congregation’s encouragement and blessing. In other cases, the decision to defect from an existing congregation becomes a source of conflict.

Florian of the young church plant Soulfire in Cologne told me about an ongoing conflictual
We had a situation with a young woman that was part of our bible study group from the beginning. We neglected to really follow up with her about what her home congregation is in Cologne. She knew Calvary Chapel in Siegen [the mother church]. Finally it turned out that she was an active part of a relatively young house church here in Cologne, where she is not just a visitor but really active. She told us that as if to say, sooner or later, Okay, bye-bye, I’ll be going here now. I never was quite happy, I want to go where they have what I like, what I know from Siegen. We are just in the middle of... I met with her pastor, we are trying to somehow pick it apart, because in the end we—her pastors, my wife, and I—we think it is not good behavior on her part to just call it quits.

In this case Florian was mostly worried about the bad behavior of the individual. However, he worried about it specifically because he did not want to create the impression that his congregation was out to “steal sheep.” This frequently leads to resentment within the broader Christian community. When the mother church opened in Siegen in the late 1980s, it drew young members from many existing free churches, and resentment about the impact this had on the church landscape exist until today.

The woman at the center of the conflict had a choice between different churches. Thus, in the language of rational choice, we can say that she faced a competitive religious economy. However, her choices had repercussions beyond mere market dynamics. She did not signal consumer choice, but a lack of commitment to her church. The pastors of the “competing” churches hurried to clarify that they did not want to compete with one another. In their estimation, competition would have had a corrosive effect, not a vitalizing one. If they are right and competition causes more harm than good to religious communities, then it is likely that the correlation between religious pluralism and religious vitality is a negative one. The secularization theorists would be proven correct after all, at least in this regard.

Not all my informants saw competition as corrosive, however. Thomas of Nordstern-Kirche even took the view that the dying of existing congregations need not be a negative.

In our denomination we make a great effort to save sickly and dying congregations. Sometimes we should just stop it. We should develop a more positive view of the fact that some congregations die. We should even help them. We should have somebody in our denomination in charge of phasing out congregations. We need a cash for clunkers program! Quickly let them die, release the people that are caught up in
these dead structures, because the people don’t just disappear. Then support church planting, and put to rest this strange notion that congregations must not die. I would even say it is a good thing when congregations die. We should let many congregations die a faster death than they would do naturally. ... I am phrasing this provocatively. If you look what our denomination invests in terms of money, personnel, and attention in the care of flagging, sick, dying congregations, and compare that to the amount going to church planting... (sighs). I would be happy if that could be brought up to par. I could finance three, four church plants. Every now and then I say that. There are now a few people that listen to me, but that... That says quite a lot about the church landscape.

In Thomas’s view, his denomination should (organizationally) euthanize failing congregations. As a result, the remaining members would then be “released” (freigesetzt) from dead or dying structures and would be able to bring life to something new. In other words, Thomas envisions a process of creative destruction sweeping through the religious landscape. Such as process may be integral to the workings of a free market. It is unclear, however, whether in the case of the religious economy the creative side would outweigh the destructive side of this process. If church plants behave too much like the rational agents of the supply-side theory, they run the risk of sowing resentments and diminishing the remaining prestige of religious communities.

**Summing Up**

So far in this conclusion, I have discussed the practices and successes of church planters through the lens of rational choice theory. The supply-side theory fits the practice of church planting quite well. In the previous chapters, I studied church planting in terms of its organization, its place in the city, and its definition of pastoral work. In each of these three areas, the actions of church planters are close to what the supply-side theory describes. The organizational form is marked by a high degree of adaptability. Historical denominational differences are sidelined to facilitate cooperation among a variety of denominations, institutions, churches and parachurch organizations. The dominant conception of the city regards it as a marketplace of ideas in which church planters compete on an even footing with others. Church planters use market research tools to work out a cultural fit between their message and their target audience. The pastoral role is defined in entrepreneurial terms, and church planting networks sometimes draw on psycho-
metric testing to ensure they support planters with an extroverted and aggressive personality type.

The hopes church planters formulate closely match the predictions supply-side theory makes: increased religious supply increases religious participation. They match so closely, in fact, that one can speculate whether ideas about church planting and church growth on the one hand and the economic theory of religion on the other hand are mutually inspired. Claims of Stark and Finke (2000) regarding a positive correlation between religious pluralism and religious vitality are for the most part empirically unfounded, however (Chaves and Gorski 2001), and my research does not suggest there to be a direct link. If anything, it suggests that religious demand is not constant, and that competition can have corrosive effects on religious communities.

There are some other ways in which the economic model falls short. In my research, I encountered some church plants, admittedly a minority, that approached the city in a more cautious and guarded way. In chapter 5 I argued that this approach constitutes a distinct type of church plant, which I called the safe space type. This type is more concerned with fostering a sustainable community than with engaging externally in the marketplace of ideas. These church plants perceive the need to create a safe space because they are in competition with secular culture, which as many scholars have argued in recent years (Asad 2003; Taylor 2007; Connolly 1999), is not just a neutral absence of religion, but a competitor in its own right. The supply-side model ignores non-religious competitors. Here David Martin’s approach is more convincing. His more flexible conception of the relationship between religion and modern society does not reduce everything to abstract market relations, but instead he also recognizes the importance of cultural, political and social factors in shaping the religious landscape. He argues for the long-term importance of the political and social history, which makes itself felt in everyday rhythms and in the built environment of cities. These constitute a boundary of the seemingly infinite flexibility of market relations in the religious economy.
Notes on Methods

The practice of ethnography has changed greatly since the nineteenth century when it was used by anthropologists studying distant cultures. When I claim to be conducting ethnography in a series of European cities, what I mean by that is very different from what these pioneering anthropologists had in mind. Of course, I, too, wanted to understand a culture, but that culture was in no sense as remote as the cultures studied by nineteenth-century anthropologists. In this methodological note, I will detail not just how I conducted ethnographic research in the course of this study, but also attempt explain the ways in which my use of this method is a modification of prevailing understandings of ethnographic research.

To start out my research process in 2010, I attended a church service of the Berlinprojekt, a highly visible and by all accounts successful church plant then meeting in a movie theatre off Rosa Luxemburg Square in Berlin’s Mitte district. Berlin seemed like a good starting point for a number of reasons. The city is sometimes referred to in the sociological literature as the “capital of secularity,” so studying a religious phenomenon here was appealing as a counterpoint to this narrative. Second, as a (partially) postsocialist city, Berlin was an opportunity to study church planting in a location where a particularly aggressive form of state-sponsored atheism was promoted in the living memory of many of its residents. Third, focusing on Germany seemed like good decision from a research design perspective. Germany has a fair amount of regional variation between majority-Protestant, majority-Catholic and postsocialist areas, and as such it is a microcosm of some of the varied cultural patterns that exist in Europe. Finally, I also chose the site for pragmatic reasons. I speak the language, I have local contacts, and I already had

1. I also borrow from the historian’s toolbox in chapter 3, where I draw on archival materials. In that chapter, I explain my methods in greater detail, so I will not expand on them here.
a certain level of rapport with members of the congregation of Berlinprojekt. All this made it easier to begin research.

Following the church service, I arranged to meet a founding pastor and another member of the pastoral staff for separate interviews. Meeting them in their offices, I conducted semi-structured interviews with them lasting between ninety minutes and two hours. In semi-structured interviews, the interviewer comes into the interview with an interview schedule (a prepared list of questions) but also asks questions that come up in conversation rather. In later interviews, I largely stuck to the format of the semi-structured interview, though of course as I went along, I built up contextual knowledge, so I knew more follow-up questions to ask, leading me to increasingly deviate from the interview schedule, as permitted in the process of semi-structured interviewing. Over the course of the conversation, I asked about my interviewees’ backgrounds, the practicalities of church planting, the relationships of the church plant with other churches and organizations, and the relationship between the church plant and the broader public. Because I wanted to find out what went into planting a new church in very concrete terms, I tried to lead my interviewees to dwell on the everyday aspects of church planting rather than framing the process primarily in theological terms. Thus, while it is important and necessary to learn that church planters felt called by God to serve by starting a new church, I wanted to ensure that I would be able to get a sense of the material practices, organizational work and cultural engagements that went into bringing this about. Often I emphasized this in introducing myself and my role by saying that, as a sociologist of religion, I am interested in “crude” questions of how religion happens.

At the outset of most interviews, I provided my interviewees with a set of colored pencils and large sheets of paper. Before starting to ask prepared questions, I tasked them with drawing two “maps,” broadly conceived. This mapping exercise is a research tool inspired by the tradition of action research in a number of social scientific fields. For the first map, I asked interviewees to visualize what they see as the crucial stations in their biographies. At this point I already had my recording device running. The idea behind this exercise was not just to have interviewees create a graphical representation of their life course, but also to have them narrate the process. This
provided an opportunity for me to get a broader narrative than I would have gotten in a response to questions on my interview schedule about my interviewees’ socio-demographic background. It also provided an opportunity to highlight specific localities and social contacts that were important in making my interviewees aware of the phenomenon of church planting in the first place. For the second map I asked interviewees to draw their city, meaning the city in which they were active as church planters. As before, I emphasized that it was not important for the map to be a realistic representation of the urban area, but that I rather wanted it to highlight the areas that had subjective relevance to the church planter and importance in the life of the church plant’s congregation. Interviewees frequently thought out loud about this process of mapping their city, and the transcripts of their narratives turned out to be very rich documents of how the work of church planting proceeds from the planning stage to the launch phase to becoming a part of the everyday lives of those who become a part of the church. Interviewees talked about their views of culture and urban space in ways that I did not foresee and would not have thought to ask about in a standard interview setting. Again, the mapping exercise was less about the outcome than about the process of thinking and talking about specific localities and their subjective and/or cultural relevance. As Henri Lefebvre noted, everyday life tends to be talked and thought about in spatial categories, so the process of mapping is a good way of getting at some of the taken-for-granted aspects of interviewees’ quotidian activities.

Interviews were also a good opportunity to learn about the connections that make individual church planting projects part of a bigger movement. In publications on church planting by insiders, it is often taken for granted that church plants add up to a whole that is greater than its individual parts, but again I wanted to understand the material, everyday practices as well as the organizational work that goes into scaling up these individual place-based efforts. I ended almost every interview writing down names, telephone numbers and email addresses of other individuals connected to the work of the church planters in some way.

Even though church planters frequently used the language of networks to discuss the broader movement, it was not until late in the research process that I realized the importance of network talk and practices of networking in the world of church planting. The ethnographic research
process frequently starts with selecting a basic object of analysis. In the classical case, the object of analysis is a field site, that is, a locality whose culture the ethnographer wants to understand. In other cases, ethnographers study groups that share some quality of “groupness”—a profession, social stigmata, participation in a ritual activity, etc. These objects are clearly bounded in some (geographic or symbolic) way. My initial understanding of my object of study was that I was studying the church planting movement. Because the CPM is not a movement in the sense of that social movements organizing and mobilizing to engage in contentious social struggles are, it lacks a natural (bounded) site analogous to the protest to study it. I could study individual congregations, their members, small groups, social activities, and pastors; I could repeat this in other sites by visiting congregations in different cities, observing their activities and talking to the people there; I could read the books the pastors read, browse the websites they browsed, and watch the videos they watched. All these research activities were important in that they allowed me to gain insight into the categories, frameworks, tools and rhetorics that inform the practices of religious place-making that go under the name of church planting. It was difficult, however, to know to what extent these insights allowed me to generalize about a wider movement. There are so many competing models and so many variations in how they are translated to local contexts, in what sense could I understand what I had researched to add up to some kind of social entity?

Eventually I came to find that the church planting network, both as a manner of self-description and as a social form, was the entity I had been studying. This raised further methodological questions: How does one describe a network? To what extent is the self-understanding or self-description of a network analytically useful, to what extent does it shroud or mystify social relations? How can we understand the workings of social power and control in this decentered web of relations? I found some guidance in other ethnographies of networks, particularly Annelise Riles’ The Network Inside Out (Riles 2001).

Another problem I became aware of after starting the research process was that of depth. In the classical case, ethnographers embed themselves in the locality or group they are studying for an extended amount of time, writing field notes on all aspects of the local culture or of group life. They have long-standing relationships with “informants,” hang out with them in a
variety of different settings, and talk to them informally on a regular basis. This was difficult in my case for a number of reasons. The first is that, as mentioned above, I did not have a clearly delimited group or locality where I could embed myself. I could attend church services and other church activities, but this only gave me a glimpse of one moment in the process of church planting. To understand the overall process, it was important to conduct more formal interviews and collect materials that I often did not analyze until after leaving the field. Again, this is a departure from the classical ways of conducting ethnography. An article by Hubert Knoblauch (2005) on what he calls “focused ethnography” was helpful in thinking through how to conduct research under these conditions. He notes that the practice of focused ethnography, which is distinguished by shorter field visits with greater “data intensity,” arose in response to features of contemporary social life: “The pluralisation of life-worlds and the enormous specialisation of professional activities demands ever detailed descriptions of people’s ways of life and their increasingly specialised and fragmented activities.” Knoblauch lists a number of ways in which focused ethnography differs from “conventional” ethnography. The most important contrast for the purpose of my research process regards the subject matter of the ethnographic approach. While conventional ethnography studies social fields, focused ethnography studies communicative activities. “Whereas classical ethnography turned towards social groups, social institutions and social events, focused ethnographies are more concerned with actions, interactions and social situations” (Knoblauch 2005). More recently, Wall (2015) has built on this work and argued that focused ethnography is particularly suited to “exploring culture in emerging settings of interest.” These contributions suggest that there is a (justifiable) trade-off between the relative depthlessness of a focused ethnographic approach, and the ability to gain insights into emerging and fragmented cultural contexts. To achieve greater “data intensity” I supplemented interviews and field notes with analysis of additional data, which I was able in part to gather using computational methods such as web scraping.

The second reason why my research has less depth than classical or conventional ethnographic studies is that I set out to study multiple church plants. As a result, my research design had to be multisited. Multisited ethnography is by now a fairly established practice. In anthro-
pology it was first formulated in the 1980s, and it was practiced even before then (see Marcus 1995). Often this approach is used to study migration processes from the sending to the receiving end, or commodity chains from the mines to the marketplace. More generally, it is particularly well-suited for those studying transnational processes such as Wallerstein’s world-system or Appadurai’s various “scapes.” In the case of my study of church planting, I was able to follow the linkages between the New York-based Redeemer City to City organization and affiliated church plants in several European cities. Because of the complex web of relationships that constitute the church planting network, however, there were many other linkages to follow, too, adding numerous other sites of study. Contributors to Coleman and Hellermann’s volume *Multi-Sited Ethnography* (2009) note that multisited approaches often result in an experimental research process, not least because there is a greater possibility of unforeseen challenges arising. Because of the more experimental process required by a multi-sited study, I worked with several parallel frameworks.
### Appendix B

#### Overview of Archival Material

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Appendix C

Overview of Interviews

MAIN INTERVIEWEES

All names of individuals listed here are pseudonyms. Although many of the pastors and I spoke with were happy to have me use their real names, I opted to use pseudonyms throughout to protect the identities of those associated with their churches.

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<td>Fidon Mwombeki</td>
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<td>Claudia Währisch-Oblau</td>
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*Pseudonym.*
Bibliography


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