

WESLEY THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

SING UNTO THE LORD

THE STORY OF THE REVITALIZATION OF AN OLD
UNITED METHODIST CHURCH THROUGH THE
INTRODUCTION OF
GOSPEL MUSIC MINISTRY

A PROJECT THESIS SUBMITTED IN
CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

BY

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To all the people to whom Odense United Methodist Church somehow is church –
Thank you for being a clear message of Gods love.

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“I want you to write the story about your church!” These are the words of Dr. Lewis A. Parks who, at the end of the project seminar, lost his patience with me. For that I am grateful. Here is the story of the United Methodist Church in Odense.

“Life is definitely more fun, when you have gospel music in your life!” These are the words of Claus Dragsbæk, a singer in the gospel choir Nardus and one of the nine singers I have interviewed for this project. I do agree with him. I have gained valuable knowledge spending time with each and every one of the singers who talked to me. Thanks to Britta, Claus, Vickie, Alice, Anne, Bo, Debbie, Ditte and Pernille.

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Thank you for being part of this journey, too.

“Sing lustily and with good courage. Beware of singing as if your where half dead, or half asleep, but lift up your voice with strength. Be no more afraid of your voice now, nor ashamed of its being heard, than when you sung the songs of Satan.”

From John Wesley’s *Select Hymns*, 1761.

(*The United Methodist Hymnal*. Nashville. The United Methodist Publishing House. 1989. vii)

ABSTRACT

How will the introduction of Gospel Choirs revitalize the United Methodist Church of Odense and provide a model for church renewal?

Through the story of The UMC-Odense, where gospel music has been a catalyst for change, the author explores the basis for growth through interviews with singers, the choir leader, a study of the early Methodist movement's use of contrafactum music and through a study of the characteristics of the first congregation as described in Acts 2.

Finally, the author draws 8 claims that have proven fruitful in the inclusion of gospel music ministry in an old United Methodist church.

INTRODUCTION:

Gospel choirs give renewal to the church. That seems to be the conception in many churches from different denominations throughout the entire country of Denmark. Gospel music is as popular as ever and choirs are formed in every part of the country. Churches are hosting workshops and festivals, where both skilled and unskilled singers gather for a weekend with a well-known instructor to sing and give a concert. Often the churches are packed with people, which is unusual in Denmark. This happens almost every weekend somewhere in the country. During the summer, there are several possibilities of using part of the holiday singing gospel at summer camps. Churches arrange some of them, while others have nothing whatsoever to do with any church. Often, commercials on TV show gospel music. The big commercial TV-shows like X-Factor often feature a gospel choir as backing for the rising stars and a few years back the Danish movie *Oh Happy Day* (2004) told the story of a gospel choir. Somehow, Danes have tuned in to gospel music and something is happening.

Ten years back, Odense United Methodist Church initiated a gospel music ministry in order to attract new people to the church. Today, the church is changed and orientated towards new people.

Not many churches have the ability to engage in a fruitful way with this ministry; therefore, not many unchurched people, singing in gospel choirs, become

faithful members of the church. Odense United Methodist Church is one exception to this¹ and I want to explore:

How the introduction of Gospel Choirs can revitalize the United Methodist Church of Odense and provide a model for church renewal?

Having studied gospel music in Denmark, it is clear to me that this phenomenon really gained momentum around the time of the first Copenhagen Gospel Festival in 1992. In the years after that, it spread and over the last ten years, the speed of the diffusion has increased. From time to time there are articles in church newspapers and interviews with both singers and choir leaders. Indeed, there is a lack of sufficient published material that really deals with gospel music in Denmark.

Gospel music is filling concert halls and churches around the country. That a Christian tradition can do this in Denmark is very unusual.

¹ *"The unwillingness of choir participants to join established churches is not unusual, although some churches experience more moderate success at surmounting barriers between choirs and the congregations. The Methodist church in Odense is providing such an example, as a gospel choir (Emmaus) has recently been formed from their existing choir (Nardus) and beyond for the purpose of Sunday worship involvement. However, similar attempts by many other churches have not been successful."*

The only substantial work I have come across is the work of missiologist Dr. Mark Lewis, whose book *The Diffusion of Black Gospel Music in Postmodern Denmark*, I have used a lot to gain some grip of the theology and theory concerning gospel music ministry in Denmark. What his work does not do is to ask how or if gospel music can renew traditional churches.

At any rate, as is true of all extensive studies, the researcher will come to the proverbial fork in the road where a choice must be made; in this case, the study veers in the direction of evangelization and gospel music's appeal to pre-Christian people and Cultural Christians, rather than exploring the relationship of gospel choirs and existing churches.²

I am taking the other road in the proverbial fork.

So far there is little evidence that choir singers in substantial numbers attend worship or seek membership in the churches, where their gospel choirs are rehearsing. The forms of mainline traditional ecclesiastical systems, including the state church, seem to be without any attraction to singers in various gospel choirs. This, however, is not the same as indifference towards Christianity and it is my experience, and the interviews support this, that there is a lot of Christian spirituality among gospel music participants. Some of it has syncretistic tendencies, but I am pretty sure that the same can be said about many of the long-term members of our churches, too.

² Lewis, *The Diffusion of Black Gospel Music in Postmodern Denmark*, 17.

Not all singers believe. There are people of all kinds of religious observation singing in choirs all over the country. The choirs are in general open to all and there is a dominance of a “come as you are” culture.

I will try finding answers to my thesis question:

How the introduction of Gospel Choirs can revitalize the United Methodist Church of Odense and provide a model for church renewal?

Through chapter one: *Something is rotten in the state of Denmark*, I will give a brief introduction to Danish church life where a Lutheran state church is the dominant church. This makes Denmark a country where Christendom is prevailing and this of course has impact on new people coming to church through gospel choirs. It also has tremendous impact on people’s perception of churches and their expectations of worship service. In this chapter, I will also provide some demographics of Odense, where the church is situated. Odense is the birthplace of the fairy tale writer, Hans Christian Andersen, and it is situated on the isle of Fyn. I will also provide some statistics on the United Methodist denomination in Denmark. This includes a short description of the churches where gospel music can be heard on weekly basis. Finally, chapter one will end with the creation story of Odense United Methodist Church. This is almost a fairy tale that could have been written by Hans Christian Andersen.

Chapter two: *Praising God and having the goodwill of all the people* is the theological chapter. In this chapter, I will explore the commonalities between the early history of the Methodist Movement and the gospel music ministry in the United Methodist Church of Odense.

I will see how music and lyrics of the hymns were central in the diffusion of Methodism and its theology in England. The gospel music ministry does not have any written dogmatic, but still it has a theology that expresses itself through the lyrics of the songs. I will use sources such as Mark Lewis, John Tyson, David Hempton, Henry D. Rack, Friederich Heiler, Richard P. Heitzenrater and Robert Darden. I will describe how black gospel music is diffusing in Denmark and I will explore the work of Mark Lewis in order to learn what makes this music adoptable in Denmark, and in particular how it influences the church I am studying. Like early Methodism, according to Hempton³, was in a mutual symbiosis with culture, so is the gospel music in Denmark. I will mark such connection points to help understand, why this music and style of worship is so popular. Also, I will look to what we know about the first church from Acts 2. This chapter in Acts was important to the Wesley brothers and has been immensely important to the renewal process that The United Methodist church in Odense has undergone through the last years. Wesley said that there is no holiness without social holiness.⁴ We are experiencing the gospel music

³ David Hempton, *Methodism – Empire of the Spirit* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), 18.

⁴ John R. Tyson, *Assist me to Proclaim – The Life and Hymns of Charles Wesley*. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2007), 84. Tyson here quotes the preface of the 1739 edition of *Sacred Hymns and Poems*, which John and Charles Wesley published together.

ministries maturing and by doing so, they are taking responsibility for matters of social justice. I will explore this dimension of the gospel music ministry too.

In chapter three: *Let the people talk*, I will give some comments of reflexivity, I will describe my method for the ethnographic research done.

I will provide a narrative of a Tuesday evening choir rehearsal with the gospel choir Nardus, a choir that is a part of the United Methodist Church in Odense. This is followed by a narrative of gospel music service given by the gospel choir Emmaus, also a choir that is a part of the United Methodist Church in Odense.

Finally, I have been interviewing nine singers from the gospel Choir Nardus and there will be an interview with the choir leader of the gospel choirs Nardus and Emmaus; Mette Risager. I will give some reflexivity on the process of selection and the interviews. At the end of the chapter, I will let the people talk in order to learn from their experiences singing gospel and attending worship.

In Chapter four: *Conclusion – And the Lord added daily to their numbers*. I started out in this endeavor, claiming that I, based on my work with the gospel music ministry, would provide the United Methodist Church with a model based on the inclusion of gospel choirs, for attraction of unchurched people. It is time to realize that that was a bold hope. I am not ready to build a model that everyone can

follow and then their church will be full of unchurched gospel singing people with growing faith. However, I am ready to say:

1. Gospel music's appeal in the United Methodist Churches can be a product of our rich heritage from the early Methodist movement's use of contrafactum music.

2. The Christian ethos and spirituality found in many gospel choirs can be connected to the first church as it is described in Acts 2.

3. For many singers, the gospel music and the rehearsals become a source that enriches their belief systems, because the rehearsal becomes worship for the singers, even if that is not the direct word used by them.

4. The choir leader's personality, faith and skills are immensely important.

5. If people attracted to the church through gospel music ministry are to feel at home in the church's worship, things have to change dramatically. And leading figures from the choir have to be visible at worship.

6. Diligent leadership from the pastor, choir leader and leadership team is key.

7. Vision is everything.

8. Preaching, if it is done right, is important to unchurched people.

Finally, I will end the project by giving some remarks on the role of the church based on hope through singing.

CHAPTER ONE:

Something is rotten in the state of Denmark.

I will give a brief comment on church life in Denmark. This is followed by some remarks on the tension between Christianity and Christendom. Also, I will provide some demographics of Odense, where this church is located. I will give an overview of the United Methodist Denomination in Denmark and finally this chapter will have a story and description of the United Methodist Church in Odense. In this work, I will use the example from Odense United Methodist Church, where gospel music has been a catalyst for change, to explore the basis for growth from the inclusion of gospel choirs in order to provide the United Methodist Church with a church model that can attract unchurched people.

1.1 Church life in Denmark

In Denmark, we have the numeric strong Lutheran state church. The State Church is, due to the heavy connections to the state, a very strong representative of Christendom. 80,4%¹ of the population in Denmark are members of the State

¹ <http://www.folkekirken.dk/om-folkekirken>. (Accessed January 18, 2012.)
The number on January 1. 2011: 4469109 members out of a population of 5560628 inhabitants. This is 80,4% of the population. (Accessed January 18, 2012.)

Church. Every church member pays to the church. This amounts to approximately 0,89%² of the annual income and it is paid through the tax system of Denmark.

The state church has no leading synod. It is lead directly by the parliament and the queen is the institutional leader of the church. The formal leadership is a council of bishops, who reefer to the state secretary of the church and to the parliament.

Formally, the queen is the head of the church.

Even though 80,4% of the population are members, only 2,5%³ of the population attend church on a weekly basis. Of this percentage, it is guessed that around 1 % of the churchgoers worship in the non-state churches on any given Sunday. The state does not count church attendance, so the numbers are based on surveys.⁴

When, on at rare occasions, people do attend worship services, they feel alienated and they don't understand what is going on. The order of service is given and is the same in every state church. The order of worship has not been seriously altered for centuries. Often times, the pastor speaks in a way that enforces the discomfort since many unchurched people simply do not understand what the pastor is saying. I hear people say things like: "I know they stopped speaking in Latin, but I didn't notice!" Several of the interviews I've done tell about experiences

² <http://www.folkekirken.dk/om-folkekirken/kirkeskat> (Accessed January 18, 2012.)

³ <http://www.kristeligt-dagblad.dk/artikel/267241:Statistik-om-religion--Nye-tal-paa-kirkegang-og-moskebesoeg>. (Accessed January 18, 2012.)

Question asked: How often do you attend church: 2,5% Weekly, 4,6% Monthly, rare 70,2%, never 22,4%. The numbers are from 2007. 11393 have answered the questions.

⁴ Ibid.

like this. When it comes to the music in the worship it is always organ music. Often, this is really nice since the state churches all have professional musicians playing. Unfortunately, the many worship attendees express that it is impossible to join in on the singing of the hymns since the melodies often are played in a tune where unskilled singers cannot participate. This also contributes to the discomfort that many experiences. This enforces the increasing distance between church and people.

However, the church is in the centre of people's lives, when it comes to celebrating baptisms (70% of all infants are baptized,)⁵ weddings, confirmations and funerals. And it is in the centre on Christmas, where 31 % of the population attends church on Christmas Eve.⁶

1.2 Christianity and Christendom

David J. Bosch describes Christendom as a:

Since the time of Constantine there was a symbiotic relationship between church and state, manifested during the Middle Ages in the interdependence between the pope and the ruler of the Holy Roman Empire.⁷

⁵ <http://www.km.dk/folkekirken/statistik-og-oekonomi/kirkestatistik/doebte.html>. (Accessed January 18, 2012.)

⁶ <http://www.kristeligt-dagblad.dk/artikel/348325:Kirke---tro--Flere-danskere-gaar-i-kirke-juleaften>. (Accessed January 18, 2012.)

⁷ David J. Bosh, *Transforming Mission- Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*. (Orbis Books. 2010), 274-275.

The reformation of course changed the conditions of this since the church was no longer one, but state churches emerged in Europe and they continued the strong tradition of connectedness between the rulers and the church.”⁸

In Denmark, this is still the case. The Lutheran state church is closely connected to the state. This makes the church an institution and often, it seems to me, that the state church is more about keeping up traditions than faith. If I am a little impolite, the church is a political instrument to keep the Danes in some sort of fellowship. Denmark is a very good example of Christendom.

Apart from the celebrations in life, the church is so far from the daily lives of the people. It is really on the margins of society. And that is just the way Danish people prefer it. This becomes very clear, and our politicians support it, when representatives of the state church clergy speak up on some public matter. There is always a lot of debate about why the church is interfering in political matters. Leading politicians and well-known pastors enter the debate claiming that the finest role of the church is to preach the gospel pure, and to do it inside the churches through the sermons.

The church does not find broad support for a public claim of seeking justice for the poor, the homeless or the refugees. And surely the church does not speak its voice in debates about just war, even in a situation, where Denmark, for the first

⁸ Ibid., 275.

time since World War 2, is fighting in a war in Afghanistan and until recently was fighting in Libya.

I mention this to emphasize the weight of Christendom as a Danish understanding of what church is, and should be all about, because it also influences the sub consciousness of what I think is an appropriate missional identity for the church. According to Darrell L. Guder, the church shares the language of the culture that surrounds it. But we also speak with our own alternative vocabulary.⁹ The alternative vocabulary is a very silent one. In the state church, it is found that only a handful of strong pastors speak up. In the non-state churches, it is even more rare, since the non-state churches are so marginalized that the clergy here seems to think it is safest to just say nothing.

This sub consciousness is also present in many Danes and therefore also represented in the people attending one of the choirs in our gospel music ministries. Apart from providing a worship service and funerals, most people cannot imagine what the church should do besides that.

Another implication of this is, that churches, which are not state churches, are looked upon with a great deal of suspicion. People are unfamiliar with the mainline denominations; therefore being a United Methodist Church is not in itself some thing that makes the church respectable. It makes it peculiar. In Denmark, some

⁹ Darrell L. Guder, et al., eds. *Missional Church – A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America*. (Grand Rapids, Michigan, Eerdmans, 1998), 120.

91984¹⁰ people are confessing Christians belonging to denominations outside the Danish Lutheran State Church – folkekirken, so believing in Christ and not belonging to the state church does make you part of a minority.

I think Dr. King was right when he warned against the church getting too close to the state:

The church must be reminded that it is not the master or the servant of the state, but rather the conscience of the state. It must be the guide and the critic of the state, and never its tool. If the church does not recapture its prophetic zeal, it will become an irrelevant social club without moral or spiritual authority.¹¹

1.3 Demographics

Here I will provide some basic demographics on the town of Odense. I will touch upon population and economy and I will briefly describe the neighborhood of the church.

1.3.1. The town and population

The United Methodist church of Odense is the only Methodist church on the isle of Fyn. The congregation consists of 171 members¹². Odense is the capitol of Fyn

¹⁰

http://teo.au.dk/fileadmin/www.teo.au.dk/samtidsreligion/Religion_i_Danmark_11/Kristne-tabel-2011-2.pdf (Accessed January 18, 2012.)

¹¹ Martin Luther King, Jr., *Strength to Love*, (Fortress Press 1981.) 64.

¹² Number reported ultimo 2011.

and is also the third largest city in Denmark with 191.400 inhabitants.¹³ Odense is one out of 4 Danish centers of education and its university, the University of Southern Denmark, holds 13.600 students.¹⁴ On top of that, there are a lot Bachelor-educations (educating nurses, physiotherapists, teachers etc.) so approximately 10 % of the population are students.

1.3.2. Economy

Due to many students in the city, and due to the many social problems that always follow in a big city, the average income in Odense is lower than the average income in the rest of the country. Odense has a large part of the population on public welfare, since there are a lot of immigrants and a lot of students in the town. In Denmark, students are on public welfare. They are paid by the state to study and the education is free of charge. In the district, where the church is located, some 40.635 people live. The division into age groups is as follows:¹⁵

¹³ <http://www.statistikbanken.dk/statbank5a/default.asp?w=2560>. (Accessed October 9, 2011.)

¹⁴

www.sdu.dk/~media/Files/Om_SDU/Dokumentation_tal/Studiestatistik/Bestand/bestand_hoveder12009.ashx. (Accessed January 18, 2012.)

¹⁵

www.odense.dk/Topmenu/PolitikKommunen/Odense%20i%20tal/Odense%20i%20tal/Statistik/Aarbog%202005/Befolkning/Skoledistrikter.aspx (Accessed October 9, 2011.)

Age groups (2004)	
0-2 years	1,366
3-5	1,004
6	360
7-16	3,027
17-24	7,020
25-66	22,969
67-79	2,720
80+	2,169
Total	40,635

Regarding income, the following figure shows the average income divided into age groups in the city total.

Average income in Odense ¹⁶	Average income before taxes in Kroner (5,70 kr. = 1 \$)		
Age	Male	Female	Total
15-19 years	27,590	26,819	27,201
20-29	131,974	113,612	122,749
30-64	226,493	171,987	199,275
65+	158,104	129,416	141,040
Total	183,877	142,992	162,742
Average in Denmark ¹⁷	Average income before taxes in Kroner (5,30 kr = 1 \$)		
	Male	Female	Total
	274,092	231,556	274,092

¹⁶

<http://www.odense.dk/home/Topmenu/PolitikKommunen/Odense%20i%20tal/Odense%20i%20tal/Statistik/Aarbog%202005/Indkomst/Hele%20Kommunen.aspx>. (Accessed, October 9, 2011.)

¹⁷ <http://www.statistikbanken.dk/statbank5a/default.asp?w=1680> (Accessed October 9, 2011.)

The poorest zip code in Denmark is found in Odense V. This area is not near the church. The church does have members and gospel singers living in that area. It is safe to say that members and attendees represent the entire town and all social groups¹⁸ found in Odense.

1.3.3 The Area of the church

The gospel music ministry draws people from all parts of the island. As the years have gone by, this has affected the Sunday service as well.

Years ago, the area, where the church is situated, was a relatively poor part of town and was an area with a lot of small apartments. Now, the area is kind of hip, the small apartments have been sanitized and the prices for housing has gone up. Within the radius of a mile, we have 2300 households. The area is in the city centre of Odense. Most of the buildings are apartment buildings.

People living here are well-educated people, who have good jobs and love to live in the city. Another large group of the people are young people living together in the apartments and studying at the university or at one of the schools in town.

This area consists primarily of young adults who are establishing themselves. Couples, who are living in the area, normally give birth to their first child here, and when the second child comes, they consider buying a house in the suburbs of

¹⁸ The term social groups is a grouping that only counts economy. Factors like race and ethnicity is not considered in this term.

Odense. This means, we have a lot of families with small children living just around the corner. We have practically no families with teenagers living in our immediate neighborhood.¹⁹

1.4 The United Methodist denomination of Denmark

Here, I will give a short presentation of Methodism and gospel music in Denmark.

The United Methodist Church of Denmark is a small Annual Conference. There are twelve congregations in the conference. We are twenty pastors and there are United Methodist churches eleven places around Denmark.

In 2010, the total number of professing members in the Danish Annual Conference was 1262 and baptized memberships can be accounted for a total of 792 members. It is indeed a small church in this country.

Listed in alphabetical order, the congregation and their membership numbers are:

¹⁹ For this claim I have no statistical evidence. It is base don my own experience from living in the area since 2000.

Congregation	Confessing members 2008 ²⁰	Confessing members 2009 ²¹	Confessing members 2010 ²²	Baptized members 2008 ²³	Baptized members 2009 ²⁴	Baptized members 2010 ²⁵
Esbjerg	31	31	31	25	25	25
Frederikshavn	76	84	81	36	35	37
Holstebro	13	13	13	13	14	14
København	259	251	248	205	202	210
international	41	53	45	12	13	16
Løkken	9	9	7	11	11	11
Odense	88	91	95	43	41	49
Rønne	52	55	58	51	57	45
Solrød	21	21	20	17	17	16
Strandby	453	459	472	229	222	228
Vejle	92	82	80	NO	61	61
Århus	94	94	92	74	75	82

Obviously, numbers as low as these do not pull the church towards the center of people's lives, or to the centre of society. In Denmark, numbers like these are not unusual for non-state churches and they are in my opinion adding to the suspicion that many people have towards non-state churches. Also, without naming anyone specific of the non-state churches, some of them are really peculiar and closed around themselves.

Before 1990, gospel music in Denmark was a rare phenomenon, but numerous gospel workshops, concerts, choirs, summer events, gospel worship services are a

²⁰ *Metodistkirkens Årbog 2009*. (LB-offset. Danish Annual Conference), 160.

²¹ *Metodistkirkens Årbog 2010*. (LB-offset. Danish Annual Conference), 157.

²² *Metodistkirkens Årbog 2011*. (LB-offset. Danish Annual Conference), 141.

²³ *Metodistkirkens Årbog 2009*, 160.

²⁴ *Metodistkirkens Årbog 2010*, 157.

²⁵ *Metodistkirkens Årbog 2011*, 141.

valid expression of something going on that is getting the attention of the Danish culture and country. Very often, you see gospel choirs performing in the public arena such as television. Gospel music is slowly becoming something that people know and very often also appreciate. Churches performing gospel worship service are often crowded which is in stark contrast to the normal Sunday service where the church is often more or less empty.

In the year 2006, there were more than 100 registered gospel choirs in Denmark.²⁶ New choirs are constantly arising. The most recent data suggests that in the year 2005 to 2006 at least thirteen new choirs appeared suggesting that gospel choirs still diffuse in Denmark.²⁷

The sources that Mark Lewis refer to are no longer to be found on the web. Therefore, no recent data is to be found. And no one produces trustworthy statistics on this. Static webpages have been replaced by groups on social media like Facebook.

However, a new network, www.gospelnation.dk, has seen the light. Here, gospel singers and choir leaders can connect and advertise concerts and other arrangements. This network does not hold all choirs in Denmark. Just the ones that have entered the information themselves; today you can connect to 84 choirs in Denmark.²⁸ This network is very much focused around leading figures in the gospel environment like Mads Holm Andersen (founder of [Gospelnationen.dk](http://www.gospelnationen.dk)) and Hans

²⁶ Lewis, *The diffusion of Black Gospel Music in Postmodern Denmark*, 55.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 56.

²⁸ <http://www.gospelnation.dk/gospelkor-i-danmark>. (Accessed November 9, 2011.)

Christian Jochimsen. The point being is that this network by no means covers Denmark, but is simply a part of what is happening. A lot of the choirs exist outside churches, so it is hard to say how many church based choirs are to be found.

In the United Methodist Church in Denmark, the situation is as follows: We have congregations in Strandby, Frederikshavn, Løkken, Church plant in Aalborg, Aarhus, Vejle, Esbjerg, Odense, Copenhagen, the International congregation in Copenhagen, Church plant in Solrød and Rønne. In those churches, you find gospel choirs in five of the congregations. I will list the congregations and give some short information on the gospel music ministry in each congregation.

The largest congregation in Denmark is the congregation in Strandby. For fifteen years, they had the gospel choir Chosen. And they annually host a gospel festival. But recently the choir closed down. One of the many reasons for this is the difficulty of finding a skilled leader, who is both a gifted musician, singer and a devoted Christian with membership in the church. In Aarhus they have two choirs.²⁹ A recently formed youth gospel choir lead by Mathias Aaen and the well-established gospel choir Rejoice, lead by Lene Nørrelykke. In Vejle, they have a relatively new gospel Choir that is a fresh start of prior efforts with gospel music. The choir is named New Birth³⁰ and is lead by Maria Nordby.

²⁹ <http://www.betlehemskirken.dk/index.php?id=44>. (Accessed November 10, 2011.)

³⁰ <http://www.metodistkirken-vejle.dk/86.html>. (Accessed November 10, 2011.)

The situation in Odense is thoroughly described in chapter one. But in short, there are three gospel choirs in the music ministry.³¹ The youth gospel choir Joy Sticks. This choir has existed for seven years and is now lead by Ida Frank. There is a small gospel choir, where membership is determined by audition. This choir is one of the best singing choirs in Denmark. It is called Emmaus and is lead by Mette Risager. The first choir in Odense was the gospel Choir Nardus which has existed for ten years. This choir has grown and has now 120 singers. The choir has a waiting list for singers who want to join and presently 60 persons are waiting. This choir is also lead by Mette Risager.

In Copenhagen, we find Jerusalemskirken, which is the oldest United Methodist Church in Denmark. They have three gospel Choirs. One of oldest existing gospel choirs is Kefas³² that recently celebrated its 35th anniversary. Kefas has over the years published two albums. The choir is lead by Peter Steinvig and Jacob Asmussen. The second choir is the gospel choir Saints and sinners³³ established in 1994 in United Methodist Church Wesleykirken in Gladsaxe. Wesleykirken and Jerusalemskirken merged a few years back and Saints and Sinners became a choir belonging to Jerusalemskirken even when rehearsing in a state church in their old area. The choir is lead by Peter Steinvig. Third choir in Jerusalemskirken,

³¹ <http://www.metodistkirken-odense.dk/index.php?ID=34&lang=da>. (Accessed November 10, 2011.)

³² <http://www.kefas.dk/Forside>. (Accessed November 10, 2011.)

³³ <http://www.saintsandsinners.dk/om-koret>. (Accessed November 10, 2011.)

Copenhagen, is the choir Revelation Gospel Choir.³⁴ This choir is a lead by Sofie Hermind.

Outside Copenhagen, the suburb Solrød is the place for church plant from Jerusalemskirken. A couple of years back, the congregation in Solrød was formed and this fall they started the gospel Choir Jacob's Ladder.³⁵ After two rehearsals the choir was full. 70 singers enrolled. Leading the choir is Jacob Asmussen.

On the isle of Bornholm, The United Methodist Church is called Zionskirken. This church is the home of the gospel choir Noiz, which has existed since 1992.³⁶ The choir is lead by Charlotte Nielsen. Just recently, the choir went through a serious conflict, which lead to a divide, and another choir was formed by some of the singers and the prior choir leader from Noiz. The gospel choir Noiz continues in the church, but the new gospel choir does not belong to any church.

Examples like the latter show one of the serious vulnerabilities of the gospel choir ministry. It is very dependent on the leader. The choir rises and falls with the leader. Often the gifted choir leaders are not well connected to the church and that increases the risk of splits in case of conflict.

³⁴ <http://www.rgospel.dk/index.htm>. (Accessed November 10, 2011.)

³⁵ <http://www.solrodfrikirke.dk/Gospelkor-93.htm>. (Accessed November 10, 2011.)

³⁶ <http://noiz.dk/?p=65>. (Accessed November 11, 2011.)

1.5 Something might be right: The Story of Odense United Methodist Church

More than a 100 years ago, the Skt. Jakobs Church in Odinsgade was so active, dynamic and full of life that the congregation expanded its activities to the outskirts of Odense. In Alexandragade, the new congregation, emerging from the work of Skt. Jakobs Church, began its activities. Soon, they erected a fine new church and named it Emmauskirken.

For almost seventy years, the Methodists preached and lived out their beliefs of personal and social holiness in the town of Odense. Two churches, two orphanages and engaged and caring Christians served the people in and outside the churches. They were respected all over town.

In 1969, a hard decision had to be made. The town center Church, Skt. Jakobs Church, which gave life to Emmauskirken, had declined and the brave decision was made to move all the activities to the newer church, which was no longer in the outskirts of town, but in the new centre, since the growth of Odense in those days was rapid. Church life continued in Emmauskirken, where a lot of people confessed their faith in Jesus and went on to the path of scriptural and social holiness.

Society was changing and the growing welfare of people and the city lead to the city taking hand of the babies and children in the orphanages. Today, the church has a fund from the times with the orphanages that today support a lot of the Children's -, young people's - and the gospel music ministry.

The United Methodist Church served the community and a lot of people from the surrounding buildings confessed their faith and became active members of the

church. Young people from the neighborhood were in the children's ministry, the youth ministry or engaged in scouting. The church was full of life and vibrant worship took place twice every Sunday. Also, there was a strong youth ministry, which was really active and dynamic. It was lead by one of the people who today is one of the key leaders in the church. During those days, the leadership in the church led the church towards traditionalism.

Time changed a lot but the ways of the church did not really change. The church forgot to pay attention to the changing winds in the society and long time decline was a reality the church boldly faced in the middle of the nineties. For a couple of years, there were a lot of discussions of what needed to be done in order for the church to be attractive again. One of the major changes was to rethink and renew the sanctuary. One of the conditions for the design was that it should be so welcoming to people, that members of the congregation would not be embarrassed if anyone they knew, would attend church. At that time, this didn't happen much. The congregation invested a lot of money, time and effort in this, and the new sanctuary was celebrated and taken into use in 1998.

The church looks old on the outside but it is new and fresh on the inside, just like the hearts of the people in the United Methodist Church in Odense. Since the new sanctuary was taken into use, there has been tremendous change in the church.

Things looked prosperous and the future seemed bright. A new associate pastor was appointed to work together with the senior pastor. It was time to invest in the future for this church, but serious conflict evolved in the midst of the

congregation. For more than a year, this threatened the future existence of the church and caused tension in the United Methodist denomination in Denmark.

The pastoral assignments were changed so the new pastor was appointed senior pastor. This was an arrangement that both pastors and the Pastoral Staff Relations Committee endorsed.

In Odense, the significant and new ministry of a gospel choir, which basically was the only ministry where new people came to the church, were lead to another church in town by the former senior pastor of the Methodist church, as a consequence of the conflict. This was of course very challenging times for the congregation. The possibility for meeting new people disappeared when the choir was gone. Tensions were high, people where leaving, and the new senior pastor was indeed considering his calling to ministry. If things went on like this much longer, the church would die, so the leaders of the church had to decide for the church to live or die. This was a defining moment.

The new senior pastor cast a vision for the upcoming years and the congregation engaged enthusiastically with this vision - the next day the associate pastor (former senior pastor) called in sick and never came back to the ministry.

For the next few years, the congregation followed the vision and new ministries evolved around gospel music. Eight people from the gospel choir stayed and started the gospel choir Nardus afresh with new people. The gospel music and other contemporary music influenced the services and new people began to show up. The music ministries expanded into three different gospel choirs, where a lot of

new people became attracted to the church. Growth in membership was considerable and a lot of new people in the church challenged the church in its own understanding of the meaning of being a church for the city of Odense.

After a couple of years, the vision was fulfilled. Who would have thought so? The church has experienced a lot of blessings from God. We have seen that God can bring life into something that was nearly dead and make it flourish.

In 2008, people who attended the church or one of its ministries was encouraged to participate in a discernment process towards a new vision for the Church. We used an entire season in the church to focus on dreaming and discerning what God had in mind for this church. Everyone, even neighbors who were not members but normally attended on Christmas Eve was invited to dream along. A vision blog was made on the Internet and this was open to all, also people who didn't attend church were dreaming. It was a happy day at charge conference 2009, when the congregation approved the Vision 2015 and it is now what we are striving for. The Vision 2015 is guiding all the decisions made and we are happy to say that again it feels like a dream has come true.

Today, the church is well known and respected for its music and contemporary services where a clear message of God's love can be heard and experienced. A lot of people consider the church as their church. Some become members and others attend services, sing gospel or help out without ever feeling the need for membership. In the church, there is room for people of all kinds of observation.

People are welcomed just as they are. The church is proud to be the church of the people, who consider it to be their church.

The words from Acts on the ways of the first church has been normative for the journey towards a new church:

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favour of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved. (Acts 2, 42-47)

Today, the church is a new church with a lot of new people.

CHAPTER TWO:

Praising God and having the goodwill of all the people

In this chapter I will explore the commonalities between the early history of the Methodist Movement and the gospel music ministry in the United Methodist Church of Odense.

I will see how music and lyrics of the hymns were central in the diffusion of Methodism and its theology in England. The gospel music ministry does not have any written dogmatic, but still it has a theology that expresses itself through the lyrics of the songs. I will use sources such as Mark Lewis, John Tyson, David Hempton, Henry D. Rack, Friederich Heiler, Richard P. Heitzenrater and Robert Darden.

I will describe how black gospel music is diffusing in Denmark and I will explore the work of Mark Lewis in order to learn what makes this music adoptable in Denmark, and in particular how it influences the church I am studying.

Like early Methodism, according to Hempton¹ was in a mutual symbiosis with culture, so is the gospel music in Denmark. I will mark such connection points to help understand, why this music and style of worship is so popular.

Also, I will look to what we know about the first church from Acts 2. This chapter in Acts was important to the Wesley brothers and has been immensely important to the renewal process that The United Methodist church in Odense has undergone through the last years. Wesley said that there is no holiness without social holiness.² We are experiencing the gospel music ministries maturing and by doing so, they are taking responsibility for matters of social justice. I will explore this dimension of the gospel music ministry too.

All this is done trying to answer the question: How will the introduction of Gospel Choirs revitalize the United Methodist Church of Odense and provide a model for church renewal?

2.1. Early Methodism

As stated in the preface of this chapter, I will examine the early Methodist movement and its use of contrafactum music. In the story of Methodism there is historical evidence that music can be a major contributor to church formation.

¹ David Hempton, *Methodism – Empire of the Spirit* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), 18.

² John R. Tyson, *Assist me to Proclaim – The Life and Hymns of Charles Wesley*. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2007), 84. Tyson here quotes the preface of the 1739 edition of *Sacred Hymns and Poems*, which John and Charles Wesley published together.

2.1.1. Background – Connection to Acts 2.

The social background for the Methodist movement was the diffusion of poverty primarily among the workers. Demographics from the period suggest that even though it was a period of economic expansion, half of the population was becoming increasingly poorer. The people were by John and Charles Wesley described as the “*Working poor.*”³

The early eighteenth century was religiously diverse. On the one hand we find the rural folk superstitions, while on the other end of the scale, we meet the radical skepticism of the universalist and the rational religion of Deism.⁴

The influence of enlightenment was palpable. The intellectual thinking was heavily influenced by John Locke with his “*Essay on Human Understanding*” (1690) where the influence on reason through a person's five senses became normative. In 1696 John Toland applied reason directly to religion in his work “*Christianity Not Mysterious.*”

In academic circles and religious establishment an indifference towards religion and religious expressions or worship ruled. The influence of enlightenment was real and it influenced the context of the first years of the Methodist movement.

³ Tyson, *Assist me to Proclaim – The Life and Hymns of Charles Wesley*. 3. Demographics produced by the economist Gregory King suggest this.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 4.

The Anglican Church was the church of the ruling class. From this, disinterest and apathy spread among the working class of England and the common people found comfort and meaning in the growing dissenting communities that emerged in this time. These churches reflected better the interests of the merchant, artisans and workers. This means that it is safe to assume that there were pockets of religious vitality to be found.⁵

Most people who are just a little interested in early Methodism have heard of the holy club. Recent studies show that there was not just one such group, but several small groups that all could have been called the Holy Club. The groups received their spiritual inspiration either directly or indirectly from John or Charles Wesley, but their structure were looser than many imagined.⁶

Their curriculum was largely a direct reading and a literal application of the Bible:

The religious regimen of the Oxford Methodists was derived largely from their direct reading and literal application of the Bible – especially the Greek New Testament. Acts 2,42-45 was a passage that would continue to be significant as John and Charles Wesley subsequently developed the patterns and practices of the Methodist movement.⁷

The early Methodists longed for, and really tried to grasp the spiritual experience and vitality that was found in the early church by emulating its beliefs and practices. They were also influenced by the early Eastern Church Fathers, whose

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid., 14-15.

⁷ Ibid., 15.

understanding of sanctification as Christian perfection was adopted by John and Charles Wesley.⁸

Also Thomas à Kempis well known work “The Imitation of Christ” became an inspiration to John Wesley in the years around 1725, where he corresponded with his mother about this reading. From this work he understood the purity of heart, which became very important to the Methodist movement. From Bishop Jeremy Taylor, John Wesley got the inspiration to keep track of how he used his time by keeping a detailed diary.⁹

John Wesley was convinced of the impossibility of being half a Christian by William Laws “Serious Call to a devout and Holy Life” that was published in 1728. Also Law’s book “Christian Perfection” from 1726 really influenced the Methodists.

*“Law became”, as Charles later wrote in his journal, “like an oracle to us”*¹⁰

Later, Charles became critical to Law’s approach to holiness, since Charles experienced that justification by faith had to precede sanctification.¹¹

2.1.2. Use of contrafactum music

It is obvious that after their experiences of May 1738 the Wesley’s were longing for sanctification. This is particularly noticed in the hymns of the early

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid., 16.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid., 16-17.

1740s.¹² According to Tyson, Charles Wesley's hymns are windows into his theological inner journey. They were aids to the Wesleyan worship, tools of Christian education and used as one of the most widespread examples of Wesleyan evangelism.¹³

It is most important to note that many of the people reached by the Methodists were people of no education. In this manner, the hymns were instruments to teach illiterate people basic Christian theology and by so one of the reasons for the doctrines of Methodism to diffuse all over England.¹⁴

Not just Charles Wesley's hymns changed after his experiences of May 1738, also his preaching changed. He moved from strictly written sermons to more extemporaneous preaching.

October 20, 1738 is in his journals marked as the date where he began preaching with spontaneity. He would still write sermons but more increasingly he preached without reading from a written sermon after the fall of 1738.¹⁵ According to Thompson this is a heritage that especially Afro-American parts of the Methodist Church draw upon in their efforts of reviving the worship experience as she says:

Spontaneity and improvisation are essential elements for establishing an atmosphere of freedom and religious expression.¹⁶

¹² Ibid., 238.

¹³ Ibid., 252.

¹⁴ Ibid., 25.

¹⁵ Ibid., 56.

¹⁶ Thompson, Donna McClain. *Revive Us Again: Reviving The Black Church Through Experiential Worship in the Methodist Revivalist Spirit*. (D. Min. Project. Wesley Theological Seminary, 2008.) 4.

Not only Charles Wesley's preaching was affected by his personal religious experience, but also his hymns bear witness of a change.

His hymns were born in his own spiritual pilgrimage, life experiences, and personal study of the Bible. They were loaded with biblical phrases and doctrines, as well as vibrant emotion. Set in first-person form, they placed biblical words and experiences upon the singer's lips.¹⁷

By using the first person point of view, Wesley's hymns not only narrated evangelical doctrines and experiences, but they induced it into the singer. In this way the singer became participant in the experiences they sang about.¹⁸

This really gave the hymns the life and vibrancy that makes them special even today.

Hymn singing was an expression of individual and corporate affirmation, an aid to memory, a trigger of religious emotion, and a creator of spiritual identity. It was the message set to music.¹⁹

Here we find unique similarities to black gospel music. Both Charles and John Wesley together with Isaac Watts contributed to new developments of singing in their time. Using the sublimity of emergent hymnodies and easy accessibility to other Christian movements.²⁰ According to Robert Darden, there were significant

¹⁷ Tyson, *Assist me to proclaim*, 57.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Hempton, *Methodism - Empire of the Spirit*, 74.

²⁰ Lewis, *The diffusion of Black Gospel Music in Postmodern Denmark*, 16.

differences between John Wesley and Watts. Wesley insisted that the sole purpose of the words were for the singer to be lifted up to the level of the hymn, whereas Watts preferred the words to be accessible to both the educated and the uneducated.²¹

After his conversion, Charles Wesley became more courageous standing in front of a mob preaching and singing.²² While preaching at the docks of Portsmouth, Charles Wesley was interrupted by drunken sailors. They disturbed his preaching by singing one of the tunes from the dance halls. Wesley liked the melody, so he challenged the sailors to return in the afternoon, where Wesley showed up with a new hymn, they could sing together, using the melody that originally disturbed his preaching.²³ This is one example of Wesley using contrafactum music for the sake of the movement.

The hymn he wrote was “On the True Use of Musick” published in 1749:

1. Listen into to Cause of Sin,
 Why should a Good be Evil?
 Musick, alas! too long has been
 Prest to obey the Devil;
 Drunken, or lewd, or light the Lay
 Flow'd to the Soul's Undoing,
 Widen'd, and strew'd with Flowers the Way
 Down to Eternal Ruin.

2. Who on the Part of GOD will rise,
 Innocent Sound recover,

²¹ Robert Darden, *People Get ready: A new history of Black Gospel Music*. (New York: The Continuum International Publishing Group, 2004), 39.

²² Henry D. Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast – John Wesley and the rise of Methodism* (London: Epworth Press. 2005), 252.

²³ Tyson, *Assist me to proclaim*, 268.

Fly on the Prey, and take the Price,
 Plunder the Carnal Lover,
 Strip him of every moving Strain,
 Every melting Measure,
 Musick in Virtue's Cause retain,
 Rescue the Holy Pleasure?

3. Come let us try if JESU's Love
 Will not as well inspire us:
 This is the Theme of Those above,
 This upon Earth shall fire us.
 Say, if your Hearts are tun'd to sing,
 Is there a Subject greater?
 Harmony all Strains may bring,
 JESUS'S Name is sweeter.

4. JESUS the Soul of Musick is;
 His is the Noblest Passion:
 JESUS's Name is Joy and Peace,
 Happiness and Salvation:
 JESUS's Name the Dead can rise,
 Shew us our Sins forgiven,
 Fill us with all the Life of Grace,
 Carry us up to Heaven.

5. Who hath a Right like Us to sing,
 Us whom his Mercy raises?
 Merry our Hearts, for CHRIST is King,
 Cheerful are all our Faces:
 Who of his Love doth once partake
 He evermore rejoices:
 Melody in our Hearts we make,
 Echoing to our Voices...²⁴

Seen in a historical view on Charles Wesley's context, he broke with the literary stile of his time.

Charles Wesley never narrated the allegorized account to the reader. The reader or singer is not a spectator to the redemptive events; rather, we become one of the actors in the unfolding drama.²⁵

²⁴ Ibid., 268-269.

Singing Wesley's hymns, the singer gets to be the wounded traveler or Jacob wrestling for his blessing, the blind Bartimaeus or the woman caught in adultery – guilty but by God's grace no longer accused. We are set free.

On Wesley's time, the Puritans narrated the account to people as spectators, but Charles Wesley made the singer participate in biblical action.²⁶

2.2 Diffusion of black gospel music in Denmark

In his book "The Diffusion of Black Gospel Music in Postmodern Denmark," Mark Lewis suggest a new terminology for music that has the ability to break down barriers between faith and no faith, the ability to shape a distinct religious identity, the ability to serve as a kerygmatic source – Missiomusicology.

Hypothetically, black gospel music in Denmark, measured by the numbers of people who profess faith or renewed faith as a result of involvement in gospel choirs, is just an example of missiomusicology.²⁷

²⁵ Ibid., 265.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Lewis, *The diffusion of Black Gospel Music in Postmodern Denmark*, 15.

Mark Lewis defines the ethos of black gospel music by stating the claim that it has a special ability to attract non-Christians. This is the standpoint that he holds throughout his entire dissertation, as he puts it:

The point of departure is that Black gospel music has its own distinct ethos and it is particularly unique due to its ability to attract and elicit the support of non-Christian people.²⁸

I agree with him that black gospel music has a unique ability to speak to people crossing all known borders that we use as normative and descriptive. That is what we see happen in Denmark and I will follow the same assumption throughout this project.

In Denmark, we often have the idea that gospel music has its origin in the United States of America and we seek good inspiration from musicians in America. It seems to me that we tend to forget, that gospel music actually has its roots in the African continent. Darden emphasize this in his work:

It begins where it all began – Africa. The unique combination of music, religion and worldview necessary to create both spirituals and gospel begins thousands of years ago on the African continent.²⁹

This is important, because the ethnic expression and the universal appeal can be traced back to the African continent. According to Lewis there is an overwhelming consensus among scholars about this.³⁰

²⁸ Ibid., 16.

²⁹ Darden, *People Get ready*, 12.

The gospel music speaks a clear Christian message of hope and liberation.³¹ This is appealing to people of today's Denmark. In the African-American hymnal "*Songs of Zion*" the preface written by William McClain gives words to a theology of gospel music. A theology where hope and liberation are essential elements:

The gospel song expresses theology. Not theology of the academy or the university, not formalistic theology or the theology of the seminary, but a theology of experience – the theology of God who sends sunshine and the rain, the theology of a God who is very much alive and active and has not forsaken those who are poor and oppressed and unemployed. It is a theology of imagination – it grew out of fire shut up in the bones, of words painted in the canvas of the mind. Fear is turned to hope in the sanctuaries and storefronts and bursts forth in songs of celebration. It is a theology of grace that allows the faithful to see the sunshine of His face – even through the tears. Even the words of an ex-slave trader became a song of liberation and an expression of God's amazing grace. It is a theology of survival that allows a people to celebrate the ability to continue the journey in spite of the insidious tentacles of racism and oppression to sing, "It's another day's journey, and I'm glad about it!"³²

In Denmark the gospel choirs are very open. They really represent a "come as you are" culture. My experience from Odense United Methodist Church supports this. We have a lot of diversity in our gospel choirs. People have different religious convictions, different political views. All layers of society are represented, and we have people with different sexual orientation. There is a high level of acceptance towards other people. Mark Lewis has also experienced this:

³⁰ Lewis, *The diffusion of Black Gospel Music in Postmodern Denmark*, 31.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 43.

³² McClain, William B. Preface to *Songs of Zion: Supplemental Worship Resources 12*. Ed. Cleveland, J. Jefferson and Nix, Verolga. Abingdon Press. 1981. X.

The fact that unity can be created out of such diversity demonstrates that gospel choirs in general elicit traits of the kind of ecclesia that many churches could only dream about.³³

It is common that even choirs having rehearsals in churches are not church choirs. Many choirs are open to people of all religious beliefs or non-believers and even if the message is genuine Christian, it does not mean that the singers are confessing Christians. As my interviews will show, this is also the case in Odense United Methodist Church.

Mark Lewis states that there is a great deal of irony in the fact that many choirs, despite the majorities of a non-confessed Christian faith are living according to a Christian ethos in caring for each other, in gifts of charity and in involvement in missional and humanitarian causes.³⁴

Many of the singers in Odense can be described as Seekers, and some as believers. Very often they have mixed emotions towards the institutional church that most of them deem as very irrelevant and without connection to the faith that they are seeking or living according to themselves. This is common in the interviews Mark Lewis has conducted and it surfaces in my interviews as well.

This suggests that singing gospel music in Denmark may have the possibilities to reimage or reimagine Christianity outside a church system that is deemed

³³ Lewis, *The diffusion of Black Gospel Music in Postmodern Denmark*, 49.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 48.

irrelevant, and the possibility is there to let it develop within a social context that is ultimately non-judgmental.³⁵

This being said, it is important to acknowledge that Denmark is a country and a culture that is predominantly influenced by Christendom.³⁶ For gospel singers this means that:

Christian heritage provides a common ground that gospel choir members somehow are benefitting from as they utilize texts that, in spite of all else, have a familiar “ring” about them.³⁷

Singing in a gospel choir does not necessarily mean involvement in the church hosting the choir. Actually, many singers are distancing themselves from any part of established religion, beyond what they experience as being part of a choir.

Lewis also writes about this:

The unwillingness of choir participants to join established churches is not unusual, although some churches experience more moderate success at surmounting barriers between choirs and the congregations. The Methodist church in Odense is providing such an example, as a gospel choir (Emmaus) has recently been formed from their existing choir (Nardus) and beyond for the purpose of Sunday worship involvement.

³⁵ Ibid., 49.

³⁶ David J. Bosch describes Christendom: “... symbiotic relationship between church and state, manifested during the Middle Ages in the interdependence between the pope and the ruler of the Holy Roman Empire.” The reformation of course changed the conditions of this since the church was no longer one, but state churches emerged in Europe and the continued the strong tradition of connectedness between the rulers and the church. David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission- Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*. (Orbis Books. 2010), 274-275.

³⁷ Lewis, *The diffusion of Black Gospel Music in Postmodern Denmark*, 49

However, similar attempts by many other churches have not been successful.³⁸

Here is also one of the reasons for me to write this particular project.

2.2.1. Meaning and identity

What happens with the singer and what does gospel music participation bring to the singer? Here I will briefly give a short overview of the findings that have been described. To my knowledge, the subject of gospel music in Denmark is only adequately described by Mark Lewis, so his writings are also the main stepping stone for my work.

According to Mark Lewis and based on the interviews he conducted during his research, one of the most mentioned positive thing that involvement in gospel choirs gives the singers is fellowship.³⁹

The “come as you are” ethos in many gospel choirs is a very important factor for many singers. The welcoming of people of all kinds is a strengthening factor. Often the choirs practice an extended love for your neighbor and the singers are there for each other in time of crisis. This is also in accordance with early Methodist assumptions. Tyson puts it this way:

³⁸ Ibid., 73.

³⁹ Lewis, *The diffusion of Black Gospel Music in Postmodern Denmark*, 80.

The belief that the gospel was for all people, not just the elect, was a bedrock in Wesleyan assumption that worked itself out in Charles Wesley's theology of ministry.⁴⁰

2.2.2 Emotional Experience and Sublimity

Common answers among the gospel choir constituency in the research of Lewis is that an attractive element for both Christians and non-Christians is the feeling of joy connected to singing. This feeling of joy is not necessarily connected to any experience or confession of faith.⁴¹ Leaders of gospel choirs say that gospel music covers all our feelings and emotions. Lewis cites Lene Nørrelykke:⁴²

You can express anything in gospel – grief, joy, discouragement – the entire emotional register. That is a big part of its appeal.⁴³

In my opinion the most innovative gospel choir leader in Denmark is Hans Christian Jochimsen.⁴⁴ He is broadly accepted as Mr. Gospel in Denmark. In an interview with Mark Lewis, he expresses that gospel music is not just happy music, it is more than that:

⁴⁰ Tyson, *Assist me to Proclaim*, 82.

⁴¹ Lewis, *The Diffusion of Black Gospel Music in Denmark*, 80-81.

⁴² Further reading on Lene Nørrelykke can be found on www.lenegospel.dk (accessed January 31, 2012.)

⁴³ Lewis, *The Diffusion of Black Gospel Music in Denmark*, 81.

⁴⁴ Further reading on Hans Christian Jochimsen can be found on www.hanschristianpresents.com (accessed January 30, 2012.)

It is better to say that it gives the possibility to express the self in a way that goes to where it hurts. It's O.K., for example, to question God in the music. Gospel is a tool that gives expression to all feelings, even doubt.⁴⁵

Many choir leaders are confessing Christians and by so connecting gospel music, feeling, expressions, emotions to their own faith, seeing that there are people who experience a catharsis of the soul through the music. They acknowledge that the experience for the participants does not necessarily connect to any Christian faith nor does it need to.

Among people who find faith through singing in a gospel choir, the findings of Lewis reveal that even new found faith, or new commitment to faith does not necessarily mean going to church on Sundays or joining the church for membership.⁴⁶ Many singers, according to Lewis, conceive participation in gospel music as a good thing, but do not connect it to any faith experience. They use words as energy, rhythm, beauty, quality, and positive energy.⁴⁷

It is a peculiar thing that one of the most expanding activities in Danish church life that traditionally also is about the soul of Danish culture since Christendom is so prevailing is an activity where the language is not Danish but English. One of the reasons for singing in English is the desire to make the music authentic. According to leading gospel singers in Denmark, songs cannot be translated without loss of

⁴⁵ Lewis, *The Diffusion of Black Gospel Music in Denmark*, 81

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 82.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 82-83.

authenticity. Lewis quotes Peter Steinvig, one of the leading Methodist figures in Danish gospel music:

Danish language lacks a certain finesse or elegance that is necessary to truly capture the spirit of gospel music.⁴⁸

He continues his argument: Singing in Danish *“it just doesn’t sound right, even for many Danes.”*⁴⁹

In the research done by Lewis, the issue of authenticity as a reason for singing in English was often mentioned:

The issue of authenticity was more than occasionally mentioned as a justification for singing gospel music in English rather than Danish.⁵⁰

One of the criticisms that the gospel choir ministries often face is the use of English and not Danish language. This has to be seen in a culture that has a very rich tradition of hymns in Danish and many traditional church people do not see the reason why the songs should not be translated into Danish. At the same time most singers and leaders in the gospel music segment in Denmark cannot envision the music being sung in any other language than English.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 87.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

Also leaders in the movement see it as a good thing that songs are sung in English since it, for some people, creates a distance to the text when sung in a different tongue than Danish. People of little or no faith can sing the words without feeling the pressure of the text coming too close. If the music was translated into Danish, it would be too imposing for non-Christians. Mark Lewis finds in his research that the concern for maintaining the distance is expressed both by confessing Christians and non-believers.⁵¹

Lewis also stipulates that many singers are “stricken with church-phobia” and that it is a common attitude among singers that the state church, where most people have their church experience from, is stuffy, boring and irrelevant. Many choir leaders are attentive to this, which is one of the reasons for Hans Christian Jochimsen to continue singing in English. In an interview with Lewis he says:

Gospel gets too close when it is sung in Danish. Christians are used to singing and worshipping in Danish, but non-Christians can sing without having their boundaries invaded; it bypasses barriers. The God language is not “dangerous” when it is in English.⁵²

Hans Christian Jochimsen is also leader of Summer gospel. This is three one-week courses, where people from all places in life come together for a gospel experience. For the last couple of years, I have been the chaplain during these weeks. I have experienced first hand, when planning worship services together with Jochimsen, that he really values and stresses the importance of the Christian

⁵¹ Ibid., 87-88.

⁵² Ibid.

message in the gospel music. He has, in my opinion, a very sensitive approach to this. Lewis quotes him for saying:

Gospel-evangelism” is not an intellectual approach. It deals primarily in changing peoples hearts before it seeks to change their minds.⁵³

Singing in a foreign language makes it possible to sing gospel music even while at the same time rejecting Christianity. Singing in English opens up a broader possibility of meaning construction for the individual singer.⁵⁴ In a “Come as you are” culture this opens up for personal interpretation of the experiences. In my opinion this is important for the pastor to note.

In a Christendom environment like Denmark, where people might know some of the biblical stories and the universe found in the scriptures, many lack a sufficient language to describe, what they experience. I see it is as one of my tasks to help find a suitable language to help define the newfound reality that many singers “wake up” in the middle of.

2.3. Institution versus movement.

Gospel choirs often rehearse in churches without being part of the established church. To some church people this seems very peculiar, almost as peculiar as the

⁵³ Ibid., 88-89.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

thought of joining the church might be to one of the singers in the choir rehearsing in the church. It becomes more and more clear to me that the church never stands alone. It is always dependent on the culture in which it exists – in good and bad.

According to Hempton, it is obvious that Methodist growths in the new world did not take place in isolation from the environment.⁵⁵ This is why it is very important to have a genuine analysis of the culture we are trying to reach. And it is a reason for us to understand the dynamics of power, justice and globalization hence the fact that we as a church never are immune to influences from the current worldview.

Often, I feel sad for Christians, who are always against everything and fearful in the churches' approach to the world. I think that this sometimes is a hindrance for new people to get connected to the church. The early Methodist movement was not a movement that distanced itself from the world. It did not set up sharp boundaries between itself and society. It blended in and through discipline and hard work it obtained influence in the environment:

Methodism thrived on the margins and frontiers of race and class, continental expansion and empire. It was a world-affirming movement, relatively free from the millenarian fantasies of other populist religious strains, but it set up clear boundaries of dress, speech and behavior, marking off the church from the world.⁵⁶

⁵⁵ David Hempton, *Methodism – Empire of the Spirit*. (Yale University Press 2005), 11.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 31.

Today, I think this is supposed to be an inspiration. I find too many churches that are only focused on their own business of being a church. They seem to lose every interest in what happens outside the doors of the church. The worst thing about this is that these churches lose every interest in people that are not already members. This is not the way Methodism functioned in the times where it was a movement. And in my opinion, we need to go back to the roots to rediscover this.

To understand Methodism, we need to see that during the times, when it was a movement and not an institution, people were not waiting for the leaders to fix problems. They just did whatever it took to get connected to people. Long before the church ever set up mission agencies, the church had more than a hundred missionaries working in the mission.⁵⁷ Today's thinking would be to form an agency and then find the missionaries. We need to go back to the energy that was present when the movement was a cultural revolution from below, not a political or ecclesiastical program imposed from above.⁵⁸

According to Hempton's understanding, Methodism really influenced culture in America and England, and as such the Methodist movement, and later church, was not only a part of the evolving culture. The Methodist Church was influencing its

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 30.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

society and bearer of the culture and by so, the Church itself carried the seed of secularism.⁵⁹

In this way one could argue that the church now is suffocating in its own success:

Within this framework, it could be argued that Methodism ultimately became a victim of its own success. By challenging established religious traditions and expanding religious pluralism in the British Isles and North America it was making religion increasingly a matter of consumer choice, within which it had little chance of maintaining its market share over the long term. As an agent of pluralism Methodism ultimately paid the price of pluralism.⁶⁰

Hempton introduces several theories on how paradigms of secularism⁶¹ can explain the decline of established Methodism. However, he does not find any theory that to the fullest can explain the decline.

Instead, he gives reference to three new secularization paradigms. The first one is based on Simon Green's study of religion in industrial Yorkshire from 1870 to 1920. His basic claim is that everyday religious life became more ordered, more learned. The religious institutions were so eager to be at the centre of culture, as they were creating debts, structure and buildings, that they forgot the heart of their mission. The problem was enforced when the state took over responsibilities for

⁵⁹ Ibid., 190.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 190-191.

⁶¹ Further reading on pages 189-195 in Hempton, *Methodism - Empire of the Spirit*.

things like welfare and education. In this process the churches lost every associational ideal that earlier had generated so much energy.⁶²

Institutional amalgamations and ecumenical platitudes, the characteristic response of Methodists to these problems, if anything hastened the speed of their decline, for increases of denominational scale and organizational rationality proved to be no solutions to the actual problems facing them.⁶³

Greens conclusions point to the fact that people did not lose faith in the Christian message, they just stopped going to church because the church became unimportant, since it itself built a secularist culture by the institutional choices made by the church in Britain during the period investigated. The results are not coming from lack of missionary ambition, but simply from a misreading of how voluntary organizations function in culture.⁶⁴

“The British work on decline in religion” by Callum Brown offers an insight that Methodism cannot ignore. Brown does not see secularism as a valid explanation of decline. His work has shown that the Britons regarded themselves as decidedly Christians up until the 1960s.⁶⁵

What really, according to Brown, changed the religious perception was the change of women’s roles in family life, and influence from the new emerging youth culture.

⁶² Hempton, *Methodism - Empire of the Spirit*. 195.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 195-196.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 196.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

Since Methodism relied on women to socialize new generations into the church, it was vulnerable to the particular changes of society in the sixties. Brown suggests that this will happen in any western culture over time.⁶⁶

The third model described by Hempton is what he calls a historical metaphor. The idea comes from a computer simulation of the historical development of the ancient Egyptian city of Amarna, displayed at the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston. The computer program reconstructed the city from ancient ruins to today's sophisticated town. Brick by brick were placed without removing the earlier layers. The claim is that similar developments can be traced in European religion. The bricks added to the chart here would be urbanization, political movements as socialism and nationalism, enlightenment, cultural secularity, the rise of pluralism, decline of denominational allegiance and so on. The changes coming over time build on to what is and changes the picture.⁶⁷ This challenges our impression of decline. It is worth considering using terms like transformation and adaption instead of rise and decline.⁶⁸

Hempton argues that it is too simple to blame secularization for the decline of traditional denominations. It is impossible to deny that churches are fading in Europe. This did not happen due to some irresistible force in society, but because of real people and real peoples' choices in real situations. In particular, the state churches of Europe are to blame.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 197.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 197-198.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

In particular the propensity of Europe's old state churches to align themselves with forces of conservatism and traditionalism (out of perceived self-interest) in a period of fast-moving political, economic and social change was nothing short of disastrous.⁶⁹

The point being that the church collaborated with secularization. It was not a victim of it.

The same mechanisms apply to Methodism in Europe and the United States. The church used lots of energy and money on property, education, publishing and organization. Also it stressed personal development as sobriety, work discipline, self-improvement, self-responsibility which all contributed to the broad acceptance of the Methodist Church and by so giving it a central position in culture.⁷⁰

But with the respectability and cultural acceptance came an inevitable decline in the otherworldly zeal of its earlier manifestations. In short, Methodism's cultural diffusion and ecclesiastical ambitions increased out of line with its power to recruit members and effectively disseminate its message both to its own children and to those outside the Methodist constituency. The result was increasing influence and decreasing recruitment, a pattern that is obviously unsustainable over the long haul.⁷¹

It is broadly agreed that mainline denominations decline, as they make fewer demands on their members and when they do not have a clear path of recruitment. In a market where new and more energetic movements constantly surface the church will continue to lose ground if this does not change.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 199.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid., 199-200.

Recent sociological studies show that Methodism is capable of building new faith communities in areas of substantial population movement. Hempton is of the opinion that Methodism does not thrive in older more stable populations where aging and lack of recruitment are realities to be faced. Methodism has in its own nature the ability to grow and thrive on mobility and change.⁷²

Perhaps one of the most salient conclusions one can offer of Methodism's patterns of growth and decline throughout the world is that it is not a religious movement that can survive for very long on institutional consolidation alone. For Methodism to thrive it requires energy, change, mobility and flux.⁷³

When Methodist doctrine of scriptural holiness becomes too successful in a community and the gap between culture and church narrows, Methodist churches historically face decline. Hempton puts it like this:

Methodism at its heart and center has always been a profoundly countercultural movement. It drew energy and personal commitment from the dialectics arising from its challenge to accepted norms in religion and society. It thrived on opposition, but it could not survive equipoise.⁷⁴

My personal opinion would be that the church is most healthy when it leans more towards the dynamics of a movement than the ecclesiastical structures of an established church. I will call it a healthy mess.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 201.

John Wesley says:

I am not afraid that the people called Methodists should ever cease to exist either in Europe or America. But I am afraid, lest they should only exist only as a dead sect, having form of religion without the power. And this undoubtedly will be the case, unless they hold fast both the doctrine, spirit, and discipline with which they first set out.⁷⁵

2.4 Acts 2 and gospel music

Acts 2 have been an inspiration to the United Methodist Church of Odense and to the early Methodist movement. Therefore I will investigate how this text can have importance in the gospel music ministry.

The religious regimen of the Oxford Methodists was derived largely from their direct reading and literal application of the Bible – especially the Greek New Testament. Acts 2,42-45 was a passage that would continue to be significant as John and Charles Wesley subsequently developed the patterns and practices of the Methodist movement.⁷⁶

The story about the first congregation was very important to the early Methodist movement. To me this is new knowledge. But for the last ten years this biblical text has meant a lot to the church I am serving. Acts 2, 42-47 has been repeated again and again in sermons, meetings and in dwellings on the word, and every person who is a part of the church in Odense is familiar with this text.

⁷⁵ Wesley, John, August 4, 1786. *The Works of John Wesley, 3rd ed., Vol. 13. Thoughts on Methodism, Supplementary letters.* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2007.) 258.

⁷⁶Tyson, *Assist me to proclaim*, 15.

The believers studied what the apostles taught. They shared life together. They broke bread and ate together. And they prayed. 43 Everyone felt that God was near. The apostles did many wonders and miraculous signs. 44 All the believers were together. They shared everything they had. 45 They sold what they owned. They gave each other everything they needed. 46 Every day they met together in the temple courtyard. In their homes they broke bread and ate together. Their hearts were glad and honest and true. 47 They praised God. They were respected by all the people. Every day the Lord added to their group those who were being saved.⁷⁷

This text is normative for all the work that we have done in a visionary process, which we conducted in the year 2008 that lead to the Vision 2015,⁷⁸ which was accepted at the annual meeting of the church in the spring of 2009.

We want everyone to feel and get the connection to the earliest Christian community. It is not that we want to dwell on the past. We want to be a church with a modern expression in order to be connected to peoples' lives today. We want to be a church in a way that is in accordance with the New Testament understanding of a congregation that was respected by all the people because of its authentic life and relevance to the everyday life of people.

⁷⁷ New International Version. Acts 2, 42-47

⁷⁸ **Vision 2015:**

The Church is active and dynamic

People from all over Fyn come to our church because they will find:

- A church that reflects engagement, life and faith. A faith that can change people and influence our community.
- A church with a warm and welcoming community.
- A church, which takes God and People seriously.
- A church where children and youth bring their parents because they love being here.
- A music church, where gospel music and other music have a high priority
- A church that is socially responsible both local and global
- A church that in every way communicates a clear message of God's love.

And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved

2.4.1 Outline of Acts 2, 42-47

Outside – Outward love - diakonia

42. They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.

43 Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles. 44 All the believers were together and had everything in common. 45 Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need.

Inside – inside love – koinonia

46 Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, 47 praising God and enjoying the favour of all the people.

Fruits – God's love for people

And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

To me the outline of the text is clear. There is an emphasis on both the fellowship of the believers and an equal emphasis on the way the believers meet the unbelievers, when they were in the Temple for the public worship and offerings. This makes me think that a modern New Testament congregation should consider

how to practice the love and care for others both inside and outside the congregation. The Acts describe a fellowship of believers who are of and in the community. They have good contact and good relationships with the community they are a part of. They represent a church without walls.

2.4.2 The biblical text – Exegesis of Acts 2,42-47

One of the first things in the text, that catches my eye, is the last verse saying: *“And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.”* This sentence is indeed a challenge to comprehend, since growth seems to be hard work.

We can get quite provoked by the fact that a New Testament church is actually growing. Years ago, we were not growing, but the Bible says that a church grows. Most churches in Denmark do not grow or even attract new people, so of course this text is a challenge and maybe even provocative in my context as a Danish United Methodist pastor.

A closer reading of the text suggests that it is God who is adding to their numbers daily.

ὁ δὲ κύριος προσετίθει⁷⁹ suggests that the Lord himself reserves the prerogative of adding new members to his community, and it is for his people to

⁷⁹ Verb, Imperfect Active Indicative, Third Person Singular. Translates: was adding.

welcome those he has received.⁸⁰ This means that there is freedom for us. Growth does not come out of the right programs or the new programs that work in another church. Growth is the responsibility of the Lord. And most importantly, it is a natural thing for a church to grow. The unnatural thing for a church is decline. We need to be aware of this.

This challenges our understanding of how things work. We are accustomed to the fact that a church getting more members is an unusual story, but it is not supposed to be this way. Growth and new people attending church is supposed to be a normal thing. In my culture, it is so unusual that we as a church several times has been covered by the national media due to the fact that the church is growing and that we are attractive to new people.

Verse 42: ἦσαν⁸¹ translates into “They were.” In a world that is more and more individualistic, it is important to note that the first church was focused on the fellowship.⁸²

Attraction to new people is essential in understanding the first church. They were devoting themselves to the teaching of the apostles’ διδασκαλίᾳ.⁸³ This has in it a

⁸⁰ F.F. Bruce, *The Acts of the Apostles – Greek Text with Introduction and Commentary*, (Eerdmans. 1990), 133.

⁸¹ Verb – Imperfect Active Indicative – Third Person Plural.

⁸² Bruce Milne, *Acts – Witnesses to Him ... To the Ends of the World*, (Christian Focus, 2010), 84-85.

⁸³ Noun – Dative Singular Feminine. Translation: The apostles’ teaching.

public proclamation of the teaching.⁸⁴ They were through mission connecting to the environment and the fellowship described in verse 42, which relates to the bigger group. It is public fellowship, which connotes the bond of responsibility for one another.⁸⁵

Milne talks about the community:

Pentecost birthed a community, not a collection of persons each claiming a new spiritual experience. While it would be strictly speaking wrong to refer to Pentecost as the 'birth of the church', if by church we mean the divine community of faith – that had patently begun 2,000 years before with Abraham and his successors – it would not be wrong to speak of the initiation of a new common life in the Holy Spirit of all those who own Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour.⁸⁶

Also it's important to understand that the breaking of the bread and prayers constitute fellowship. In other words, κοινωνία is a special fellowship based on the special activity of breaking bread and praying.⁸⁷

In verse 43, we read that everyone was filled with awe. The Greek words are ἐγένετο⁸⁸ δὲ πάση ψυχῇ φόβος which translates into: was occurring (feeling) in every soul awe. The use of Imperfectum implies that it was not a sudden panic

⁸⁴ Raymond E. Brown and Joseph A Fitzmyer and Roland E. Murphy, *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary. Students Edition.* (Geoffrey Chapman 1995), 734.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Milne, *Acts*, 85.

⁸⁷ Bruce, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 132.

⁸⁸ Verb – Imperfect Middle Indicative – Third Person Singular. Translation: Feeling or and was occurring.

caused by the sermon of Peter, but an enduring sense of awe⁸⁹ given the palpable relation to God by the witness of the signs and wonders.

Wonders and signs (τέρατα καὶ σημεῖα) are often present in the New Testament. In Chapter 3:1-10 we see this. The wonders and signs are there, like those performed by Jesus, to remind us that the Kingdom of God is near and as such, signs of the new things that God is doing on earth.⁹⁰

Verse 44-45: πάντες δὲ οἱ indicates some sort of fellowship inside the wider Jewish community. The Greek words εἶχον⁹¹ ἅπαντα κοινὰ corresponds to the description of the community of goods in Acts 4,32-37. According to Milne this text is often read more literally than it is to be understood. There were sacrificial giving in the community as a natural response to each other's needs as they were recognized along the way. This also makes us understand the events with Ananias and Sapphira through the understanding that the problem they represented was not the lack of giving, but the lying to the community.⁹²

ἐπίπρασκον⁹³ καὶ διεμέριζον αὐτὰ. The use of Imperfectum indicates that this was a regular practice to give to the community.⁹⁴

⁸⁹ Bruce, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 132.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Verb, Imperfect Active Indicative, Third Person Plural. Translation: To have, hold.

⁹² Milne, *Acts*, 86-87.

⁹³ Verb, Imperfect Active Indicative – Third Person Plural. Translation: They sold.

⁹⁴ Bruce, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 132.

Verse 46: καθ' ἡμέραν translates day by day and it applies to the entire verse even in to verse 47 to πρὸς ὅλον τὸν λαόν.⁹⁵

προσκαρτεροῦντες⁹⁶ indicates that they attended too steadfastly. It was devoting themselves and importantly it was with ὁμοθυμαδὸν⁹⁷ one accord, or one mind. They broke the bread in their homes. But the words κλῶντες τε κατ' οἶκον ἄρτον can also translate into 'they broke the bread from house to house.' And they did it with one heart. The word καρδίας means heart, but it also holds a meaning of generosity in it.⁹⁸

Verse 47: As stated earlier ὁ δὲ κύριος προσετίθει⁹⁹ suggests that the Lord himself reserves the prerogative of adding new members to his community, and it is for his people to welcome those he has received.¹⁰⁰

ἔχοντες¹⁰¹ χάριν πρὸς ὅλον τὸν λαόν. Bruce suggests translation to be enjoying all the people's favor. The Christian community appears to have been held in general respect for a long time.¹⁰²

τοὺς σφζομένους¹⁰³ Bruce notes the power of the Participle saying:

⁹⁵ Ibid., 133

⁹⁶ Verb, Present, Active Participle, Nominative Plural Masculine. Translation: Continuing steadfastly.

⁹⁷ Adverb.

⁹⁸ Bruce, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 133.

⁹⁹ Verb, Imperfect Active Indicative, Third Person Singular. Translates: was adding.

¹⁰⁰ Bruce, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 133.

¹⁰¹ Verb, Present Active Participle, Nominative Plural Masculine. Translation: Having.

¹⁰² Bruce, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 133.

The force of the pres. ptc. here is probably iterative: they were added to the community as they were saved.¹⁰⁴

Being saved here, according to Bruce, also corresponds to the remnant of the old Israel forming the nucleus of the new.¹⁰⁵

2.4.3 Acts – Background

The book of Acts is unique in the sense that it, together with Luke, is the best firsthand witness to the apostolic age. Presumably, it is written by Luke and as so it should be read in continuation of the gospel of Luke. Bruce advocates for this since the beginning of the Book of Acts says: πρῶτον λόγον ἐποιήσάμην. This must refer to the third Gospel. Theophilus is very likely the same Theophilus in the prologue in Luke 1: 1-4. This could serve as a prologue to the two-fold work all together.¹⁰⁶

The language and style in the two works are similar. Together with the general catholic outlook, the sympathetic treatment of women, the apologetic tendency and interest in gentiles call for the argument, and adds up to the perception that Luke and Acts are to be regarded as one work out of one writer's hand. A strong argument for this is that the end of Luke's gospel is connected to the beginning of Acts.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰³ Verb, Present Passive Participle, Accusative Plural Masculine. Translation: Being saved.

¹⁰⁴ Bruce, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 133.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Bruce, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 3.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

A precise date of the book is complicated to find. The latest event described in the book is the two years Paul spent in Rome.¹⁰⁸ According to Bruce those years are probably A.D. 60-61.¹⁰⁹ Luke gives no witness to the death of Paul. This is the latest event described. But this does not mean that the book is actually written just shortly after this.¹¹⁰

Dating Acts is very complicated. Milne talks about at least three different traditions: A date before 64, A date later than 64 and a date later than 70.¹¹¹ My encounter with Bruce makes me suggest the later date to somewhere after the year 70. My arguments for this are the ones used by Bruce when he is advocating for a date after 70 or early 80s of the first century.¹¹²

In his works, however, Luke shows little use of Paul's epistles. Bruce points to the notion that the interest on Corpus Paulinum can be caused by the spreading of Luke's works and not the other way around.

The abrupt ending of Acts does need some explanation. Bruce argues that Acts is the story of expansion of Christianity and in this light, what happens to Paul is not his aim to tell.¹¹³

¹⁰⁸ Acts 28:30ff: *"For two whole years Paul stayed there in his own rented house and welcomed all who came to see him. Boldly and without hindrance he preached the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ."* NIV.

¹⁰⁹ Bruce, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 9.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 12

¹¹¹ Milne, *Acts*, 502-505.

¹¹² Bruce, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 18.

¹¹³ Ibid., 13.

The attitude towards Roman power throughout Acts makes commentators wonder if the Neronian persecution of Christians A.D. 65 has taken place. Bruce leans towards Tacitus, considering the persecution to be a criminal act against the Christians by Nero. The act was not supported in general by the Roman Empire. Instead, the story of Paul's appeals becomes a witness of how Christianity catches the attention of the classes in Roman society. Luke writes to give an account of the progress of Christian faith, not through planning, but through divine direction. This is useful in Luke's apologetic purpose but useless in the Roman law court.¹¹⁴

One major obstacle to the late dating seems to be that the destruction of Jerusalem A.D. 70 is nowhere described in Acts. The apocalyptic expression of Abomination of Desolation was simply incomprehensible to Luke's public. Therefore, it is suggested that he, in light of what has already happened changes his writing to something more comprehensible. However, dating Acts ties to dating the gospel of Luke. Therefore, arguments for a publication after A.D. 70 are likely.¹¹⁵

Reading Acts gives the impression that the author has experienced some of the events described. The reflection on the conditions and historical events leads Barrett to conclude that Acts is written no more than 20 years after the last recorded event.¹¹⁶

Finally, there is the perspective of the writer to consider. Paul and his fellow leaders in the church were indeed involved in several disputes over doctrine. Luke

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 14-15.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 17

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 18.

does leave his reader with another impression of Paul and the other leaders than reading the epistle of Paul does. The absence of the conflicts in Acts leads Bruce to the conclusion that Luke is writing as he is looking back in time and by doing so sorting in the importance of the disputes. This makes him look at the early leaders' lasting achievements in a more satisfactory proportion.¹¹⁷

This is also consistent with him writing the story of the expansion of Christianity.

In the end Bruce concludes his search for a date saying that late 70s or early 80s are where most of the arguments presented here will be satisfied.¹¹⁸

2.5. No holiness without social holiness

In 1739 John Wesley famously wrote:

The gospel of Christ knows of no religion, but social; no holiness, but social holiness.¹¹⁹

This he did in the preface to "Sacred Hymns and other poems."

Christian perfection was the demand of the gospel and the Wesley's defined it:

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ Tyson, *Assist me to Proclaim*, 84. Tyson here quotes the preface of the 1739 edition of *Sacred Hymns and Poems*, which John and Charles Wesley published together.

Faith working by love in us is the length and breadth and dept and height of Christian perfection. This commandment we have from Christ, that he who loves God, loves his neighbor also; and that we manifest our love by doing good unto all men, especially to them that are of the household of faith.¹²⁰

In this part I will describe some of the social work happening through the gospel music ministry.

2.5.1. Gospel music and social works

A criticism the gospel music ministries often face by churchly people is that the singers are seekers in search for spiritual experiences. And they are not committed Christian since they do not attend church on Sundays. In my church, this critique is very rare, but from time to time I hear well-meaning people say things like this.

In my opinion, Lewis is right when he claims that many gospel choirs have a Christian ethos and fellowship that many churches can only dream off.¹²¹ Many choirs live out a Christian ethos in caring for each other, in gifts of charity and in involvement in missional and humanitarian causes.¹²²

This is also true in the United Methodist Church in Odense. One of our singers is a missionary who, back in early nineties, together with his wife were sent to Congo by the Danish United Methodist Church. In Congo, they gave birth to a child,

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Lewis, *The Diffusion of Black Gospel Music in Postmodern Denmark*, 49.

¹²² Ibid., 48.

who didn't response well to the medicine protecting the family from Malaria, so the family's dream of a life in mission in Africa could not be fulfilled. Other things influenced the stay too, so the family returned to Denmark and settled here.

However, Mr. Anders Flinck's heart is still burning for people in Congo. He is a skilled engineer. Ten years back, the Mission Station in Mulungwishi faced problems with electricity. This meant that the IT-department of the university in Mulungwishi had significant power problems. Therefore, Flinck went back to Congo and used his skills in engineering, his good language and understanding of the cultural differences and was able to lead a project that is funded by money from Danish Methodists and volunteer electricians worked together to supply the Mission Station with modern electricity. This started a new missions program called the Good Connection.

2.5.2. The good connection

The Good Connection is a mission program connecting the Danish United Methodist Church to the Congolese United Methodist Church in the area round the Mission Station in Mulungwishi. In Congo, 14% of all children die before they reach the age of five years. One of the main reasons for this is polluted drinking water.

At the General Conference in 2008, The United Methodist Church casted a vision encouraging the church to battle killer- diseases. The words of that vision are:

The Four Areas of Focus express the vision and yearnings of the people of The United Methodist Church. Over this quadrennium, the church will

seek to focus the work of making disciples for Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world around these areas of ministry:

- Combating the diseases of poverty by improving health globally.
- Engaging in ministry with the poor.
- Creating new places for new people and revitalizing existing congregations.
- Developing principled Christian leaders for the church and the world.¹²³

In Odense United Methodist Church, we are happy about this because we have been working in that direction for a couple of years already.

In 2006, a team lead by Anders Flinck was back in Mulungwishi. The church and the gospel choirs had been involved with the funding. Almost 450.000 Kroner were needed. The gospel choirs arranged charity concerts and the money was given to the project.

People from the Nardus Gospel Choir volunteered to go to Mulungwishi to work and this time the assignment was establishing a new drinking water well and the building of 30 water posts that was connected by 5000 meter of waterlines.

During the time the school caught the attention of a woman, Elizh Maria Hansen, a relatively new member of our church, and she was devastated to see the condition of the school and to realize that many children were not in school because their parents could not pay the tuition. Long story short, in addition to the water

¹²³

http://www.umc.org/site/c.lwL4KnN1LtH/b.4443111/k.D720/Four_Areas_of_Ministry_Focus.htm. (Accessed November 12, 2011.)

project, she renovated the school and arranged for the Gospel Choir Nardus to take responsibility for the education of children. For the last couple of years, the choir has funded education for 65 children and supplied the school with books.

The village next to Mulungwishi is called Mununu and the people here could see all the benefits that clean water gave in Mulungwishi, so the Chief of the village invited Mr. Flinck to pay a visit. A new funding process started and in 2009 new teams from the church and the Gospel Choir travelled to Congo and built a water system in Mununu. This has reduced the findings of Cholera to almost nothing since then. So water systems make a real change in people's life. This also gives a new challenge. Rumors of the fresh water have spread and the number of inhabitants in Mununu has in two year's time increased with one thousand people.

The story repeats itself again. The next village is called Lukunki. The inhabitants themselves have founded the drilling of a well to the cost of \$ 3500. Mr. Flinck made the promise that if they could find the money for this, we would fund the rest of the money needed for at water supply. This September Mr. Flinck went back and the new well was blessed by a ceremony in the local United Methodist Church and the Congolese workers have started digging for water lines. These workers are paid from money given by gospel choirs and the church. What is new here is that the local newspaper *Fyens Stiftstidene* is writing about the project and a journalist and a photographer joined Flinck on the last visit in Congo. This is quite amazing since the suspicion of non-state churches in Denmark is huge. The articles will give a lot of publicity and now the negotiations with the newspaper have made

the project a joint venture between the church and the paper. The plan is that the readers, approximately 70.000 people, can be involved in the mission work of the gospel Choirs and the Church. The paper will facilitate a capital campaign so this time it will presumably not be too difficult to find the needed 525.000 kroner. This is very encouraging for the church, not only in Odense, but for the entire denomination in Denmark.

What I see is a maturing of the gospel music ministry. There might not be an awareness of the dogma and theology, but there is a Christian ethos, that is changing people's lives. Not only the people in Congo, but also changing people in Denmark.

2.5.3 The story of "Let us Stand"

As mentioned earlier, Hans Christian Jochimsen¹²⁴ is a key figure in the further development of gospel music in Denmark and in Europe. He is known as Denmark's Mr. Gospel, taking gospel music outside the churches and into the broader society. This being said, he is also developing gospel music inside churches. At the moment, he functions as founding leader and music pastor in The Gospel Fellowship¹²⁵ in Copenhagen. This is a newly started church that exists with the aim to build a church community out of choir singers, who do not seem to find a church home in the state church.

¹²⁴ Further reading on Hans Christian Jochimsen can be found at www.hanschristianpresents.com (Accessed January 30, 2012.)

¹²⁵ Further reading can be found on www.thegospelfellowship.dk (Accessed January 31, 2012.)

Hans Christian Jochimsen is well known and respected across all churches in Denmark. He is a gifted songwriter and composer and a very talented conductor. Gospel music has taken him into many of the European countries, mainly into Germany where he is part for the movement: “Gospel für eine gerechtere Welt.”¹²⁶ Through this movement/organization, Jochimsen travels Germany giving workshops for hundreds of people at a time. Every year, he is responsible for workshops at “Gospelkirchentag”¹²⁷ where 10.000 people gather to sing gospel music.

Gospel music is maturing, also in Germany. The organizations mentioned above are active in social justice issues, among other things; they are working with projects establishing clean water supplies in several African countries.

As a promotions song for this event, Jochimsen wrote and composed the song “Let us stand.” More than anything else, this song has become symbolic for the maturing for the gospel music movement in Denmark and Europe. Gospel music is not just about fellowship and good worship experience; it is also about social justice. This is amazing because it engages people from many different backgrounds and non-church people in changing the world. That is one of the strengths of gospel music.

Let us stand
In her eyes you see her pain

¹²⁶ Further reading can be found on www.gerechtigkeit.gospel.de (Accessed November 12, 2011.)

¹²⁷ Further reading can be found on www.gospelkirchentag.de (Accessed November 12, 2011.)

You don't know her name,
You turn away, can't face the shame.

In her eyes you see her cries,
You don't know,
that something dies inside of her.
Can't take the lies.

No one seems to care, no one sees her there.
What if you and I stood as one?
Together we are strong.

Let us stand hand in hand
Let us change the world
What if we could touch just one life?
Then you will see the change that love can make.

In the night, you see his face.
He has tried but lost the race.
You turn and walk away, stealing his grace.

In his eyes, you see the lies.
You don't know that's why he tries,
to hide his face. Can't take the cries.

No one seems to care, no one sees her there.
What if you and I stood as one?
Together we are strong.

Let us stand hand in hand
Let us change the world
What if we could touch just one life?
Then you will see the change that love can make.

Text and music: Hans Christian Jochimsen.

CHAPTER THREE:

Let the people talk – Surveys and interviews

In this chapter, I will give some comments of reflexivity and describe my method for the ethnographic research done. I will also provide a narrative of a Tuesday evening choir rehearsal with the gospel choir Nardus, a choir that is a part of the United Methodist Church in Odense. This is followed by a narrative of gospel music service given by the gospel choir Emmaus, also a choir which is part of the United Methodist Church in Odense. Finally, I have interviewed nine singers from the gospel Choir Nardus and there will be an interview with the choir leader of the gospel choirs Nardus and Emmaus; Mette Risager. I will reflect on the process of selection and the interviews. At the end of the chapter, I will let the people talk and make refer back to the theology in chapter two.

3.1. Reflexivity

Before I enter into an ethnographic field study of the gospel music ministry in Odense United Methodist Church, I need to do some reflexivity work. This is important to secure transparency of the entire process, but also for my own sake, to become aware of my own role in the setting I am investigating.

3.1.1 My story with gospel music

My story with gospel music has moved me from being an amazed spectator to an active singer and promoter of gospel music in Denmark.

In 1992, the first Copenhagen Gospel Festival was arranged and I was volunteering to help out behind the scenes. It was taking place in the congregation where I, at that time, was a member. This is around the time, where I was struggling with God about a calling to enter into ordained ministry. My girlfriend was a singer in the local gospel choir Kefas, and as such I had been part of the audience at quite a number of concerts. To me gospel music was concert music.

Something was different at the Copenhagen Gospel Festival. 300 singers were in my church and they were not just singing. They were worshipping through an entire weekend. The American instructors preached one short testimony after the other and the air was spirit filled in a way I had never before experienced it in that church. It was strange not only to me, but also to my American colleague Mark Lewis who describes his meeting with Copenhagen Gospel Festival in 1994 like this:

As a “transplant” Caucasian U.S. American pastor newly embarking into ministry in the northern European country of Denmark, I found the sight of hundreds predominantly white Europeans singing, swaying, clapping and “praising” to the rhythmic sounds of African-American gospel music to be an odd juxtaposition.¹

¹ Lewis, *The diffusion of Black Gospel Music in Postmodern Denmark*, 3.

In many ways it is odd. Odd because the swinging, clapping and swaying is not a part of the normal worship experience to most Danes. One could even claim that the worship experience at all is not normal for many Danes.

I cannot say that I understood what was going on. It was so strange to me. But in some way it lured me closer, but not so close that I became a participant. I never doubted that what I saw was real and the people at the gospel festival were authentic. Their emotions and talks about how God touched their hearts were real. I did realize that people in my church that weekend found something lost, that they longed for. I longed for it too, but I could not see any place else providing that kind of worship experience. Even as a stranger to the gospel music, I felt a longing.

Shortly after this, I left Copenhagen to attend Seminary in Gothenburg, Sweden. During those four years, I had no real contact with Danish church life. And I always felt like a guest in the churches I attended during the seminary years.

In 1996 I finished seminary, received ordination for deacon and was appointed to a traditional United Methodist Church in Frederikshavn. In 1998, I was ordained elder. My new girlfriend became my wife. Soon after, she moved to Frederikshavn, where she was asked to direct the new gospel choir Chosen in another church in the area, Strandby United Methodist Church. She accepted the challenge and told me that now I was going to be a gospel singer, hence this would be an opportunity for us to spend an evening together every week. And the choir could use another tenor. It was the first choir my wife directed, but it revealed to her – and others – that she is quite gifted as a director and singer.

For three years I was a singer in Chosen. It was not in my congregation, so I did not have any pastoral responsibilities, yet of course everyone knew that I was a pastor too. This is the church I grew up in, so in many ways it was very giving to sing together with a lot of people I already knew. Many of them did have some kind of leadership over me growing up, so Thursday night was a good night every week. During those years, I got firsthand experience of being a singer in a gospel choir. I listened to the pastors devotions, attended services as a singer and basically I had a good time. That was what it was all about in that choir and that may also be one of the reasons that the choir folded last year.

After four years of ministry in Frederikshavn, it was time to move on. In 2000, the bishop appointed me associate pastor of the congregation in Odense. The congregation had a wish for new development and bringing me to town was part of that plan. Back then, it was a traditional congregation with limited contact to people outside the church walls, except for one thing: the newly formed gospel choir Nardus was the hope for the future, at least for the senior pastor. The choir consisted of approximately fifty singers, whereas most of them were unchurched. These people were the church's only contact to the outside world. The Sunday morning service was very traditional and new people attending worship was not happening. Nor did people from the choir feel the need to attend the Sunday morning worship. Still the choir was the symbol of hope and a future with happiness. Almost just as the prophet Jeremiah says it to the exiles:

For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord," plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.²

Unfortunately, things did not turn out as planned. Severe conflict surfaced and it was very destructive. The bishop appointed me senior pastor in an effort to calm things down, but things turned for the worse. After one year of conflict, I was looking at the ruins of a church. The other pastor left and he and the choir leader moved and took the gospel choir with them to another church in town. Several members left the church too and I was discouraged. What was supposed to be so good turned out so bad. It almost made me leave ordained ministry.

But then something happened. Christina Funch Mellgren, an educated piano player and experienced choir director, had recently started attending church. She became the new director for the new Nardus that my wife, Mette Risager, and I together with 6 other singers started in august 2002. A lot of footwork was done, flyers were distributed in many of the neighborhoods of the church and posters were everywhere in town. We were so excited the first evening, and around fifty people showed up and we were back in business.

It was a very exiting fall, where a lot of things happened in the church. A reading in the old newsletters shows amazement and new determination. In the December 2002 issue it says:

² Jeremiah 29, 11. NIV.

The pews from the balcony are no longer for sale! Sunday November 10th 220 people attended the gospel music worship. Even the balcony was used. The board had put the pews for sale, because we never used them. Sunday November 10th they were all in use. Those pews are not for sale any longer³

I really enjoyed that first season with the new choir. We were not the best choir in the world, but the fact that so many new people came to a church based activity really energized me. Christina and I had a lot of discussions about worship and we had a new found confidence. Also, we had money since we were only paying my salary so we hired Christina as musician and worship consultant. This was very bold and to my knowledge it is the first time a Danish United Methodist Church spends money on salary on a person who is not a pastor.

The decision was taken and the information to the congregation came through the church newsletter where the last part of the article revealed a new boldness. I wrote:

Christina is actively engaged in the planning of the worship and is working closely with Thomas Risager. The ideas are many and Christina shares her knowledge and experience with the congregational board.

Through this hired position, the leadership wants to change the worship and the entire church, so it will become relevant to people outside the walls of the church so that new people may experience a church that takes their seeking seriously.⁴

³ Thomas Risager, *The Pews are No Longer for Sale*. (Church Newsletter. December 2002. Metodiskirken i Odense), 4.

⁴ Thomas Risager, *Christina Funch is hired as the church music consultant*. (Church Newsletter. February 2003. Metodiskirken i Odense), 6.

In many ways this represented a turning point, because suddenly the same persons were leading the worship service and leading the choir rehearsals. And there was a new and deep sensitivity towards unchurched people, which applied to most of the people in the new gospel choir.

Things were thriving. A second and a third gospel choir were founded. A choir for the youth called Joy Sticks and a small gospel choir for skilled singers called Emmaus. Within 12 months, we had 150 people singing gospel music in our church and worship attendance and membership were going up.

In the new choir, I once again found the authentic sincere worship experience that I first witnessed at Copenhagen Gospel Festival back in 1992. I was no longer an amazed spectator but an active participator and now pastor in a gospel choir.

Today, gospel music is an integrated part of who I am and valuable way for me to express faith and love. To me, Tuesday evening rehearsal is worship and, as some of the interviews will show, so is it for several of the singers.

I am a part of the choir as just another tenor, but I am also the pastor of the choir and as such I give a sermon or a small devotion at the beginning of every rehearsal. I am one of the leaders. During the first years, I really led the choir, but fortunately more people have stepped up and assumed leadership, so the daily leadership is now in the hands of the choir's chairman, Sussi Lindberg, and the choir leader, Mette Risager. Since the restart of the gospel Choir Nardus, we have had to change choir leader twice. In 2007, Mette Risager stepped up to the challenge and

took over Nardus. At the same time she was already the leader of the smaller gospel Choir Emmaus.

I can't help it, I just love singing gospel and I love spending time with the people in the choir. I find it energizing and interesting to preach to and pray with the many unchurched people in the gospel music ministry.

3.1.2 Choice of method

Heifetz and Linsky talk about leading as a constant shift between being on the dance floor and on the balcony, from where the leader has the overview of all the people and, at the same time being able to see the horizon. At the dance floor the leaders are all caught up with dancing. The attention is on the partner and the rhythm carries the moment. Attention is also given to the floor, so collisions are avoided. At the balcony the leader takes himself out of the dance maybe even for a short moment, but on the balcony you can get a clearer view of the reality and see a bigger picture by distancing yourself from the hectic dance at the dance floor. From the balcony, all sorts of patterns can be seen and you will be able to see who is participating in the dance and who is not. You can see how the music is affecting people.⁵

Setting out on this project, I wanted to make a broader investigation of gospel music in Denmark. What was not on my mind was the possibility of working with

⁵ Ronald A. Heifetz and Marty Linsky, *Leadership on the Line – Staying alive through the Dangers of Leading*. (Boston: Harvard business School Press, 2002), 53.

my own pastoral context. I found it impossible to maintain the claim that I could be objectively listening and researching in an environment that I, myself, was so much a part of. In the project seminar, I was really skeptical to the idea of working with the church I am currently serving. How can I do that?

However, Mary Clark Moschella introduces the idea of ethnographic listening, which never claims to objectivity that in many other research projects always can be questioned. Moschella compares the Heifetz & Linsky term adaptive leadership with ethnographic listening. She says:

The art of pastoral ethnography is adaptive in that it involves recognizing and getting on board with the wisdom that emerges in the faith community.⁶

So this is what I am trying to do. Instead of just staying on the balcony, I want to get involved in the dance, but now as an observant. To Moschella, there is no doubt in mind that ethnographic research also has the potential to change things. The Heisenberg Uncertainty Principle also applies to ethnographic work, so there is no question that the research questions have an impact on the findings.⁷

Even as an observant I cannot disregard my role as pastor and leader. To think otherwise would be fooling myself.

Msohella states it clearly:

⁶ Mary Clark Moschella, *Ethnography as Pastoral Practice – an Introduction*. (Cleveland, Ohio: The Pilgrim Press, 2008), 242.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 11.

Ethnography was once considered an objective social science, something akin to naturalism. It was thought that by observing people in their local habitat, one could perceive the habits, customs, and styles of a group of people in action and reach clear and irrefutable descriptions of them. Though ethnographers continue to strive for accuracy in their observations and validity in their analysis, it is now widely recognized that human social life cannot really be studied in its natural state, undisturbed by the researcher. Briefly, this is because researchers are part of the world they are trying to study. An objective bird's-eye view of human society is not really possible.⁸

Ethnography is partial and biased and can never claim to be objective and exact. Also, any description of culture is difficult because cultural groups are not as consistent, as we might like them to be. Indeed, postmodernist thinkers have challenged the notion that cultures are not coherent. People are too complicated and too different and too changeable to fit into any describable category.⁹

For our purpose, we can think of culture holistically as the stories that guide our lives, the systems and symbols that we believe in and live out through our actions.¹⁰

The ethnographic description is often termed as a narrative, because a person cannot stand outside the culture he or she is trying to study, it is impossible not to interpret every observation. This is why; I will provide a narrative of a choir rehearsal evening and a narrative of a gospel music service. This, I will compare to the findings from the interviews I have conducted with 9 singers from the gospel choir Nardus and the interview with choir leader, Mette Risager.

⁸ Ibid, 26.

⁹ Ibid., 27.

¹⁰ Ibid., 27-28.

The selection of the singers is done so that I have male and females corresponding to how they represent the choir in total. At the church, we have three gospel choirs, but I have chosen to concentrate my interviews on gospel singers from Nardus. The reason for this is that I am a singer in this particular choir and just the chaplain for the other two. I have found it important to interview people who know me, because some of my questions are very personal. Also, the gospel choir Nardus is the only forum, where I speak on weekly basis and the choir is the largest group of people in our church's total ministry. This group knows me very well and I know them. They know my stories and I know a lot of their personal stories. According to Jacqueline Lewis, this is an important leadership component, because the sharing of stories creates shared identity development. Lewis says:

This is what I mean when I say that identity development can be described as the discovery of one's own narrative voice(s). Identity development, all along the life cycle, is the process of editing, screening and redacting our developmental stories into a cohesive narrative. Each person is the narrator of their experiences with objects that formed their storied selves.¹¹

I think like Lewis and Moshella that the interviews are a way of letting people tell their stories and that it is very important to let people in the choir and church hear the stories that are revealed during the interviews, when they are woven together in an ethnographic story. I think there are a lot of listening and a lot of story telling to do.

¹¹ Jacqueline J. Lewis, *The power of Stories: A Guide for Leading Multiracial and Multicultural Congregations*. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2008), 24.

Most important of our work, effective leaders succeed in conveying a new version of a groups story that makes sense in terms of both where they have been and where they are going. This is a critical competence for leading change.¹²

I did produce my theological chapter before I ever started thinking about the questions I was going to ask. I did this because I had a feeling that I needed some kind of foundation before approaching the singers. I did have some hunches on what might be going on with the people in the choir and in the church. So far the theory studied has not contradicted any of my expectations.

The way I work is what Moschella calls a predictive puzzle.¹³ In many ways I line up the data so that it either proves or disproves my assumptions based on the theology described in chapter two.

I have developed an interview guide to ensure a similar qualitative interview with all my responders. After the first interview, I realized that a too rigid use of the interview guide was a hindrance to the flow of the stories in the interview, so I loosened up and opened up for more flexibility as the interviews proceeded.

The very first two interviews were done in the persons' homes. In the situation, it worked out well, but I realized that the nature of the questions on personal faith, experiences and so on might be experienced less threatening if the context was the church office. Then, it was obvious that the person was free to leave the room at any time. The rest of the interviews therefore took place in the church

¹² Ibid., 17

¹³ Moschella, *Ethnography as Pastoral Practice – an Introduction*, 171.

office, and a little refreshment was offered. In general, the interviews were very relaxed and listening to them again, I realize that there was a lot of laughing.

During the interviews, I made a recording on a laptop computer and I took notes directly in the interview guide. When I had the feeling that something important was shared, I took a glance at the computer and made a note of the time in the recording. Going back through the notes, it was easy to find the important parts of the recordings and ensure that the transcription of the passages was correctly done. This follows the pattern Moshella describes as the less labor-intensive approach.¹⁴

During the very first interview the recording was done on a new iPad, and I had to realize that new technology has to be tested before use. The recording stopped after only a few minutes and I didn't notice. Fortunately, I had very good notes from that interview. The rest of the interviews were recorded on my Macbook Pro using Garageband with export to iTunes. The sound quality of one of the other interviews is poor, but listening carefully I am able to hear what is being said. In appendix, an example of the interview guide is provided.

¹⁴ Ibid., 127.

3.2. A narrative of a choir rehearsal evening with the gospel Choir Nardus

A few minutes to seven in the evening, people start surfacing down the streets on bicycles, on foot and in their cars. The street outside the church is jammed. People are simply entering the United Methodist Church of Odense. The church is situated in the town center, so there are buildings on both sides of the church. Lots of people are heading for the doors and entering the church. On the big screen inside the church, a power point presentation is playing. It consists of beautiful pictures from church activities and slides describing the church's Vision 2015. Thomas Risager – the senior pastor – greets everyone, shaking hands and recognizing most people by their names. At a table just inside the door, there are nametags for everyone. There are a lot of people and some have not been part of the choir for a long time, so everyone is encouraged to wear their nametag.

This evening around 100 persons show up. The membership of the Choir is 120 singers. About twenty of them are men. Among the singers in the choir, 15 people are also members of the church, so up to 85 % of the singers can be categorized as unchurched people. Since none of them are attending other churches.

The choir is divided into three different voice groups: altos, sopranos and tenors. As people are finding their seats in the church, there are a lot of talking, laughing and hugging. People are obviously happy to see each other again. One hundred people in the church give a very intimate atmosphere. This is a small church, which only seats 170 people in total. The chairs are arranged so the voice groups can see each other. This is a different way of arranging the chairs from how

they are normally placed in the church, and the gospel choir Nardus is the only one doing this. The church room is very light and the wooden installations are light pigmented wood and the Alter, readers' pulpit and so on are mobile and can be moved around in the church if needed. The church was redecorated in 1997 and has modern art paintings on the walls and very colorful green chairs and a green ceiling.

There is no longer a pipe organ. This is replaced by an electric piano, drums and amplifiers for a bas guitar. The sound system is new and state of the art; the same can be said about the stage light system that is also in the church. Looking at the building from the outside, this is not to be expected.

The singers are people of all age groups. The youngest are teenagers and many are students and young adults, but all age groups are represented in the choir. Two minutes to seven, the piano player Preben Holmberg arrives. Thomas Risager is arranging the last details required for the evening to start. Among other things, he prepares a wireless microphone with a headset, so people will be able to hear him and he will be free to move around while talking.

Right in the center for the church is a small podium. From here, the devotion is given and people are sitting all around it. Thomas tries to get the choir's attention by simply standing on the podium. People are still arriving and the host team is busy in the kitchen brewing coffee and making tea. To a stranger this might look pretty chaotic.



Figure 1: Pastor Thomas Risager is talking at the devotion time in the choir rehearsal for gospel Choir Nardus (Photo: Mette Risager)

Thomas welcomes people and silence is diffusing in the church. The last people are quietly finding their seats. The pastor starts this evening's devotion. He is talking about the meaning of advent as a necessary time of preparation, enabling us to hear the magnificent message of the savior – an infant in a stable in Bethlehem. But the meaning of salvation is more than a cute story of a child in a stable in Bethlehem. Advent is like when the leader at the workplace tries to prepare the employees in advance about a change that is to be anticipated. Doing that would be good leadership, and in the same way, God also tries to push our imagination a little before the story of the infant again is heard.

The pastor reads from the book of Isaiah chapter 35 verses 1 through 11¹⁵ on the nearly utopian expectations for water welding and salvation in a land were

dessert is the most common land. Then, Pastor Thomas prepares the choir for at time of prayer. He says: “Now we can pray together, if that is what you choose to call it, or have a moment of reflection.” He leads in prayer and the piano starts playing. Preben Holmberg plays silently and the cords are floating around the words of prayer that Pastor Thomas offers. While the music plays, people can go to the Alter and light a candle as a symbol for their personal prayer and reflection. Some are praying and others are just sitting in their own thoughts. But the room is very silent and with a reverent feel to it. A few people are letting go of their tears, which is very common during the choir’s devotion time. Pastor Thomas concludes the prayer, thanks the choir for their participation and hands over the word to Mette Risager, who leads the choir.

At 7.20 PM, she takes over and starts a bodily warm up, using music from her iPod. The music is from the album “A timeless Christmas” by Israel and the new breed. A lot of people are laughing and having a good time. The choir joins in on the

15 Joy of the Redeemed

1 The desert and the parched land will be glad; the wilderness will rejoice and blossom. Like the crocus, **2** it will burst into bloom; it will rejoice greatly and shout for joy. The glory of Lebanon will be given to it, the splendour of Carmel and Sharon; they will see the glory of the LORD, the splendour of our God. **3** Strengthen the feeble hands, steady the knees that give way; **4** say to those with fearful hearts, Be strong, do not fear; your God will come, he will come with vengeance; with divine retribution he will come to save you. **5** Then will the eyes of the blind be opened and the ears of the deaf unstopped. **6** Then will the lame leap like a deer, and the mute tongue shout for joy. Water will gush forth in the wilderness and streams in the desert. **7** The burning sand will become a pool, the thirsty ground bubbling springs. In the haunts where jackals once lay, grass and reeds and papyrus will grow. **8** And a highway will be there; it will be called the Way of Holiness. The unclean will not journey on it; it will be for those who walk in that Way; wicked fools will not go about on it. **9** No lion will be there, nor will any ferocious beast get up on it; they will not be found there. But only the redeemed will walk there, **10** and the ransomed of the LORD will return. They will enter Zion with singing; everlasting joy will crown their heads. Gladness and joy will overtake them, and sorrow and sighing will flee away. Isaiah 35, 1-11NIV

bodily exercises so all bodies are warmed up. If you didn't know this was a church, one could think it was a fitness centre. After this, Choir leader Mette leads the choir in a playful tune and rhythm exercise. She is using a lot of humor and people are laughing, having a relaxed time while trying to follow her rhythm. This is difficult for some of the singers.

At 7.40 both the souls and the bodies are warmed up and the teaching of the evening begins.

On the following Tuesday, the three choirs of the church are joining forces in a big Christmas concert from where the revenue earned is sent to Congo, where the choirs are paying for 65 children's public school tuition. Mette reveals the repertoire for the concert and suggest that this is what Nardus needs to learn this evening.

By the way, there is a new simple song that the gospel choir Nardus has to learn. It is a song that will be used when the choirs switch place on stage during the concert. First, the sopranos and the altos have to sing; *"Oh, Mary ring them bells, oh Martha ring them Bells!"*

Again, a lot of humor and appreciation is used to resolve some technical difficulties, some of the singers have. Soon, the entire choir is filling the church: *"Jerusalem, Jerusalem, ring them bells"* in three tunes.

At 7.52, Choir leader Mette gives some general information about the concert the following Tuesday. Dress code and meeting time are announced. Questions are answered.

Then the choir rehearses the song “With my whole heart.” The text is projected on the big screen of the Church, giving the singers an extra opportunity to learn the lyrics. The altos need some special attention and their voice is repeated a few times. It is the same with the sopranos. Choir leader Mette teaches them about singing using the twang – a specific setting in the vocal tract, so this is rehearsed and she is giving song lessons using many different examples and acknowledging the process – a lot of singers are laughing. At 8.06 the tenors are asked to regroup so they can hear each other better. Their tune is also rehearsed and the women in the room are screaming with enthusiasm, when the tenors find the tune. The song is put together and everything is in harmony at 8.10. The room is boiling with excitement. Everybody is clapping, swaying, sweating, dancing and singing.



Figure 2: Choir leader Mette Risager is conducting gospel choir Nardus. (Photo: Thomas Risager.)

At 8.15 the choir starts rehearsing a song that it has been working on for some time. The song is “You hold my world.” The song is very loved by the choir, so people

are really singing with both body and soul, and everyone is very concentrated. In some strange way, the room is silent even though everyone is singing and giving themselves to the song. It is one of those moments, where you don't think about time.

But the coffee break is approaching and Choir leader Mette wants us to stop in a good spot, so she is taking the song a little further. She calls Anne Feldballe, one of the lead singers, to the front of the church and she sings like an angel. The choir joins in when Choir leader Mette is giving the sign for this. Uhm... This is amazing. The music is awesome and people are really devoted to the music. *"I am amazed that you love me...."*. At the end of the song, the choir is applauding ... both at Anne Feldballe, but also applauding the song.



Figure 3: The fellowship in gospel Choir Nardus is important to the singers. During the coffee break people are having a good time. (Photo: Thomas Risager.)

At 8.30, it is time for the coffee break. People are splitting up around café tables for coffee. Today, there are cupcakes, butter cookies and fruit. People in the choir are taking turns and the duties in the kitchen are past on from week to week. The best description of the break is a loving and compassionate chaos. The

fellowship hall of the church is situated in the back of the sanctuary and when one hundred people gather for coffee standing in circles around the café tables, the level of noise is considerable. There is talking all over the place.

The pastor drinks coffee with a group consisting of four other choir members since they want to hear more about membership of the church and what expectations the church has to them as potential new members. The group gathers at the Alter in the church and coffee cups are put on the table. It is a good conversation and a few more are listening in and joining the talk.

The group splits up and Pastor Thomas goes around and talks with a lot of other choir members.

During the break, a power point presentation is playing. It pictures a cake that is gradually eaten, while a clock counts down the fifteen minutes the break lasts. People seem to be able to talk forever. It is always a little difficult to get the choir adjourned again. 15 minutes passes quickly and again it is time for choir rehearsal. The cake in the presentation is eaten and the clock has finished its countdown.



Figure 4: Power Point presentations are used when new songs are taught. People are singing, clapping and dancing during the rehearsals. (Photo: Thomas Risager.)

The choir leader Mette is at the podium encouraging people to find their seats again. The light in the church is switched off so darkness prevails for a few seconds, and finally it seems like everyone in the room has realized that the break is over and singing can start again. At 8.55 the choir resumes in the church singing: “Lift the Savior up.” Pernille Esborg, one of the singers, goes to the pastor and says: *“I was so tired today, but now I am full of energy!”* They hug.

Bodies are swaying, hands clapping and sopranos singing: *“Worthy of all the honor, Worthy of all the glory, Worthy of all the praise.”* Mette Risager is testing some new choreography for one of the verses. A lot of people are laughing again.

The choir leader urges the choir to mix between the voice groups so altos, sopranos and tenors are now mixed. Also, she wants them to stand next to someone who they don’t know very well. It is challenging for the singers to hold their own

voice without being able to hear the other voices from the same voice group, but it gives a great feel for the harmonies.

At this time, the projector is switched off, so singers have to manage the lyrics by memory. This time the choir sings: "With my whole heart."

Around 9.17: lead singer Anne Feldballe takes the microphone and sings the solo part to "You hold my world in your hands." The choir now mixed in voices sings along, this time with some difficulty, but it is a good exercise. And it is obvious that the choir loves that particular song. At 9.19 the choir is applauding when the song is finish and lead singer Anne is praised for her beautiful singing.



Figure 5: Lead singer Claus sings "The Lords Prayer." (Photo: Thomas Risager.)

Time is 9.20 and the Choir starts singing "The Lords Prayer." Also one of the loved songs that many people cherish. Claus Dragsbæk is singing two lead verses. "Amen" sounds in harmony at 8.30. The choir is clapping and Claus Dragsbæk is recognized for his singing.

Choir leader Mette gives more information on the songs that the choir is going to sing during Tuesday's concert. The Choir leader wants the choir to have fun singing the song "Jesus is right here." 3 singers, to whom the lead parts of this song are new, are volunteering to sing the leads. Rune Lomholt, Ghita Christensen and Kristian Dolborg are singing. The choir joins in "*We serve a loving God, so merciful and kind!*"

The choir leader sings extemporarily; "*You don't have to be afraid.*" Choir answers; "*He can handle your cares!*" Extemporarily: "*Jesus is right here to say he loves me....*" The choir is carried away into call and response singing and again, it is like magic is filling the church. What some of the people in the choir calls magic is what pastor Thomas always translates into presence of the Holy Spirit, but there is room for different interpretations.

It is already 9.38 and it is time for the good night song. Every choir rehearsal ends with a good night song. But before it comes to that, Choir leader Mette turns to the new song that we started the rehearsal with earlier in the evening. The voices are repeated again. This has to be right for Tuesday's concert.

Lead singer Louise Lindebjerg volunteers to sing the goodnight song. "Here I am again." The choir is applauding Louise Lindebjerg and joining in the song. "*On my own, I know, I won't make it home. You have never failed, no one else but you, Lord will see me through!*"

The final information about the weekend services is given. Choir members are invited to come. People are saying their goodbyes and chaos prevails in the wardrobe as people are trying to find their coats.

Many hang out around the tables in the fellowship area. Members of the choir board are putting the chairs back in place, and the Alter back into its original positions in the sanctuary. Pastor Thomas stands in the doorway, collecting all the nametags, giving people encouragements on their way home. There are a lot of goodbyes and hugging. Another great evening in the church has come to an end; it had a lot of singing, joy, crying, clapping, swaying, and praying. To many of the people this is worship, even for many of the unchurched people. It is a satisfied choir leader and pastor who lock down the church for the night.

3.3 A narrative of a Gospel Music worship Service in the United Methodist Church of Odense

Sunday, November 13th there is gospel music worship in the United Methodist Church in Odense. Gospel Worships is always celebrated in the afternoon, since it is our experience that it is most likely at that time of day new people attend this particular type of worship. Also, it is the time of day where the gospel choir prefers to sing.

Two hours before the worship service begins, people from the gospel choir Emmaus gathers in the church. It is time for preparations. The Alter is moved as far behind in the front as it is possible. More chairs are put into the church and the podiums for the little choir are carried from the basement and placed in the church as far back as possible in order to create as much room as possible for the congregation. The instruments, sound system, projector system and lights are tested and adjusted.

Every choir singer brought a shopping bag with brown leaves that they have collected in nature. The leaves are spread out all over the church and the choir members are all dressed in black and brown nuances that match the leaves on the floor. Of course the color palette used in the Power Point presentation during the worship service also matches the leaves and the clothing of the choir. For choir leader Mette Risager, every little detail counts.



Figure 6: Gospel Choir Emmaus and Choir leader Mette Risager. Note the leaves on the floor. Every little detail counts. (Photo: Thomas Risager.)

The piano player, Preben Holmberg, is arriving and together with choir leader Mette Risager, the choir rehearses the next hour or so. The church door is locked, because the choir needs the time to rehearse. Half an hour before the service begins, the door is opened. People have been lining up and around forty people are rushing in to get the best seats. This scenario always reminds Pastor Thomas of a store sale. For the next half hour people are entering the church. Pastor Thomas greets them all as they arrive and the church is almost full when it is time to begin the worship.

In the meantime, the choir members have been resting and some of them have a cup of coffee at the church office. Five minutes before the start, the choir gathers together with pastor Thomas and choir leader Mette for a short prayer and to surrender the worship into the hands of God.

Within the gospel choir Emmaus, it is only a few of today's twenty-six singers who are members of the church. The actual numbers are five out of the twenty-six who are members. Here in this church member or no member doesn't really matter all are welcome.

The choir assembles behind all the people at the back of the sanctuary. The lights in the church are switched off and the Gospel Choir Emmaus lights small candles, which they hold in their hands. In the front, choir leader Mette stands by herself, singing a very emotional song called "Cut." Mette Risager is a gifted singer, who somehow is able to touch people's hearts. And so she does today.

Behind her, on the big screen, a little movie is playing. It shows a candle burning and the flame flickers in the wind. The presentation shifts and reveals today's theme which is: Not Alone. Slowly, during the song, the choir brings the candles into the church, places them on the floor, in the windows, at the Alter and walks to the podium behind choir leader Mette.



Figure 7: Gospel Choir Emmaus with their candles while Choir leader Mette Risager is singing the first song. (Photo: Thomas Risager.)

When Mette Risager finishes the song, the church is applauding her. She did real well. At this time, there is already quite a lot of emotion in the church. The church is small and it is packed with people so often the atmosphere in the house tends to get a little intense. Mette leads the choir into the song: "Take rest in me." The lyrics say: "*Oh Holy Spirit take rest in me....*" This is a very dynamic song with many quiet passages. It is acapella, so every singer's voice is heard. This is very

powerful. The singers in Gospel choir Emmaus are all very skilled singers and they are selected through an audition to make sure their voices are really good together. The choir is standing with the lights and it is really beautiful. People are listening and are very quiet. Everyone is just enjoying the moment.

The choir continues with the next song, which is “Hold me now.” This is also a very emotional song. The refrain says: *“I was wondering, can you hold me now?”* It ends with an assurance of the fact that God has not forgotten you: *“Don’t you worry God is faithful and he cares.... Don’t you worry, he can hold you now.”* On the big screen there is a beautiful picture of leaves falling. People in the church are sitting and obviously enjoying the music. Many are sitting with their eyes closed.

Lead singer Susan Santana steps forward and takes a microphone. She shares the song “Footprints in the sand” with the audience. This song is a praise song, almost soft pop. The picture on the big screen shifts to a picture with footprints in the sand at a beach. Susan sings the song nicely. People are touched; the piano floats the room with nice tunes. It is peaceful in the church.

Pastor Thomas welcomes people again. Reminding them about the theme: Not Alone. He leads the congregation into prayer. And introduces the hymn: “Lille Guds barn, hvad skader dig.”¹⁶ This is a well-known Danish hymn. The theme in the hymn is that we are all God’s children and as such we are never alone. We don’t have to worry; God will always take care of us. The congregation stands while it is singing. There is no organ in the church, so the singing is lead by the piano. The congregation

¹⁶ Written by N.F.S. Grundtvig 1855-1856 on Matthew 6, 25-34.

takes their seats again. A few children are walking around in the room. Most of the children in the church are taking part of the children's ministry in the children's sanctuary on the third floor, but a few children are too small to be in another room without their parents. In the back of the sanctuary there is a table, where they can play with toys or make a fine drawing. Children are always very welcome in the church.

Lead singer Lene Bang takes a microphone. The piano starts softly and she sings the song: "Here I am." The picture on the screen shifts to a picture of a woman in the sunset. She is standing, looking out in the horizon, and enjoying the breeze in her hair. People are enjoying themselves. This is really high quality music. Not always what could be expected in a church. When the music stops, people are applauding.

The screen shifts again, now to a black and white picture. Deep in the picture, a man is sitting on a chair, looking at his hands. Maybe he is praying. We don't know. Pastor Thomas goes to the centre of the church. The gospel choir is sitting on their podiums and the church is silent. Thomas invites people to listen to a reading from the Bible and a sermon. He wears a wireless microphone in a headset, so he can move around. He is dressed in a black suit and wears a black clergy collar shirt. He is not using the pulpit, but stands on the floor with the bible in his hand reading from Matthew chapter four verses 1-11.¹⁷ The sermon is inspired by one of the singers in

¹⁷ The Temptation of Jesus.

¹ Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil. ² After fasting

the gospel choir Emmaus, who at the rehearsal in the week prior to the worship service said: *“Some times I feel all alone even though I have friends.”* Thomas use examples from everyday life, where we all can feel lonely. This is connected to the temptation of Jesus in the desert, where Jesus must have felt completely alone too. Therefore, Jesus knows loneliness and he has tried all that is to try in life, so he knows how we feel. By underlining those very common words in the Bible *“Fear no.”* Thomas ends the sermon! People are also reminded that God knows us so well that he knows the numbers of hair on our heads. Thomas is a very informal speaker and he has eye contact with people in the congregation throughout the sermon. He doesn’t use his manuscript much, but it is clear that he has one. This is prepared in advance.

The choir gets to their feet. The band sets the tune for the song: “You covered me.” This is a high-energy song and the music is really just rolling. The picture on the big screen is a baby’s hand inside an adult’s hand. The music fades into the next song: “Blessings are falling.” This is also an up-tempo song.

for forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. **3** The tempter came to him and said, If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread. **4** Jesus answered, It is written: 'Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.' **5** Then the devil took him to the holy city and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. **6** If you are the Son of God, he said, throw yourself down. For it is written: 'He will command his angels concerning you, and they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.' **7** Jesus answered him, It is also written: 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.' **8** Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendour. **9** All this I will give you, he said, if you will bow down and worship me. **10** Jesus said to him, Away from me, Satan! For it is written: 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.' **11** Then the devil left him, and angels came and attended him. (NIV.)



Figure 8: The Gospel Choir Emmaus during the worship service. They show a lot of energy, when singing. (Photo Mette Risager.)

The picture in the back shifts to a picture with hands praising God. Very out of character, the gospel Choir Emmaus stands with their arms down their side and have empty eyes. They are not moving at all. This is getting the attention of the room. Something is going on and many in the congregation sit on the edge of their chairs now. Then the refrain comes: *"Blessings are falling, are falling, are falling..."* The choir goes into a choreography that is really cool. Every singer is right on and this is so amazing that people start shouting and cheering, clapping their hands, getting on their feet to dance. The praise party is on. This goes on for some time.



Figure 9: The Gospel Choir Emmaus - The Praise party is on. (Photo: Mette Risager.)

Choir leader Mette says a few words about friendship and the next song begins. The picture shifts to a silhouette of a big tree in the sunset. The song is “What a friend” and the congregation is having a good time. There are around 140 people in worship this Sunday and most of them are not members of the congregation. Many of them are people who attend every time the church offers gospel music worship. Maybe twenty-five people of today’s congregation are members of the church.

The picture shifts to a picture of two hands forming a heart with light in between the hands. The gospel choir Emmaus starts singing the song “More than anything.” This is down tempo and relaxing. The lyrics in the refrain say: *“I love you Jesus. I worship and adore you. I just want to tell you. Lord, I love you more than anything.”*

People in the church are excited and clapping as the next song begins. Now, the picture in the back is a black and white close up shot of a mouth blowing air out

between her two hands that she is holding in front of her mouth. The song is "Breathe," which is also a silent praise song. Now the atmosphere in the church is very peaceful. The lyrics are saying, *"This is the air I breathe. Your holy presence living in me...."*

During the last part of the song, the choir goes around in the church handing everyone a leaf. The big screen picture in the back shifts to a picture of a leaf. After the leaves have been handed out and the choir is returning, pastor Thomas takes a leaf and invites the congregation into a moment of reflection or prayer. Whatever it is for the individual is all right.

Piano player Preben Holmberg plays the piano softly. Thomas is talking about how our life sometimes can be similar to a leaf. Sometimes we are green, fresh and full of energy. Piano player Preben sets a few chords on the piano and as the tunes are fading, Thomas gives another example. Sometimes we can feel almost as if others can see right through us. The only thing that holds us together is our structure, just like the structure of a leaf. Again, Preben sets a few chords and this goes on for some time. Reflection, music, reflection and it ends in prayer where the music is supporting the words. This is very emotional and peaceful. Normally we would use the candles at the Alter and give people an opportunity to light a candle as a symbol or as a prayer. But today we chose differently.

Katrine Mortensen takes the microphone and sings "Child of God" The big screen picture shifts to a picture of a little man sitting in two big hands. He is hiding his face as if he is crying or maybe praying. While Katrine sings, the gospel choir

Emmaus is quietly leaving the room. The emotions in the room are somehow changing to joy and peace as Katrine stops singing.

Choir leader, Mette, thanks people for coming and informs them of the church website, where they can find more information about the church and if they want to, they can listen to sermons and find Odense United Methodist Church on Facebook, too. Today's benediction is, as it often is, the singing of "Velsignelsen" a Danish composed gospel arrangement of the Aaronic blessing.¹⁸

The worship service has not yet come to an end. The choir has gathered on the balconies of the church and from here, they sing the last song of the afternoon. "Total Praise" which is a very pompous and powerful song. What a finish! The congregation is applauding and cheering. There is no doubt that this has been a good experience. Pastor Thomas stands outside the church and greets everyone by hand as he sends people off.

3.4. What do the people say

I participated in a choir rehearsal as an observant and during that rehearsal evening I selected nine singers for interviews. I wanted nine singers, who represented the span of age. I wanted singers, who were new to the choir and

¹⁸ Numbers 6,24. Composed by Hans Christian Jochimsen.

singers, who had been part of the gospel Choir Nardus for a long time. I also wanted men and women to be represented with the same representation as in the choir.

There are singers who openly stated that they do not believe in God and singers who said they believed, but never attended church. We have singers, who have started attending church and found faith in Christianity and some who have been part of the choir for a long time, but don't seem to have changed their belief system. The last category is people who start singing choir and immediately start attending church and claiming new found faith. It is my hope that all these categories are represented among the singers whom I have interviewed. Before the interview I cannot know for sure. I can only guess.

It has been an interesting journey to listen to what the singers really mean about their participation in the gospel choir and for some how they found a way into the church. Spending some time alone with some of the singers, which I never have an opportunity to do in the gospel choir Nardus, unless of course it is a counseling session, has been a gift. Some of them have said things that really surprised me. Many have said many good things that confirmed me in the way we try to do things. Also, I have received some good advice. In short, it has been very rewarding. And I do feel that it also has strengthened the personal relationship I have with these people. And more importantly, it has left me with the impression that my theory in chapter two is confirmed.

One of the first comments that stroke me was Alice, who said that it is very important for her as a singer, that the choir leader is a believer.

To me it is okay that a singer does not sing with a Christian conviction and passion, but the choir leader has to hold on to those convictions, otherwise singing gospel music it is false to me.¹⁹

Alice is 42 years old, married. She holds a masters degree in Law. I first met her in April 2010, when she was participating in a gospel music arrangement in the church. In August that same year, she started singing in the gospel choir Nardus. Alice is not a member of the church, but during the interview she revealed that she is considering this.

She was a singer in another gospel choir and was happy about it, until one day just before a concert. She overheard the choir leader and the piano player discuss the meaning of a certain song. The piano player explained that the lyrics were from the Bible, and what Jesus was doing inspired the lyrics of that song. This made the director burst out: *"What the hell are we singing? I just don't get it!"*²⁰ To Alice, this was too stark a contrast.

A few months later, all the gospel choirs in Odense gathered in Odense United Methodist Church and for Alice that evening became the event, where she found out that she wanted to sing in this church.

¹⁹ Alice Stærdahl Andersen, interview by author, December 21, 2011. Odense, Denmark, Garageband recording.

²⁰ Ibid.

Alice is from a home where faith has not been discussed, but she is, like most Danes, both baptized and confirmed in the Danish State Church. She describes her grandparents as very religious and she thinks that her parents could be described as Christians too. She has, from time to time, attended worship services in folkekirken,²¹ mostly when it has been special services, where the focus is on families with children. This was not a success since all her prejudices were fulfilled. As I have stated earlier in chapter one, the state church's service in Denmark are in general held in low regard and deemed not relevant to everyday life. About this experience Alice says:

The biggest problem to me is that I just don't understand what the pastors are saying, and that annoys me!²²

Also, she stresses that children in general are not welcome at a service in the State Church. If you bring children, it is all about keeping them quiet.

When she is visiting the state church, most times she has the feeling that they don't care if she comes back. And she states that she likes the "normal" by this she means the idea of the church where most people are members – the state church. This is also to be understood in the light of the state church dominance in Denmark. Every church that is not a state church is in general perceived with suspicion.

²¹ Official name of the Danish Lutheran State Church. The correct spelling is with lowercase: folkekirken.

²² Alice Stærdahl Andersen, interview by author, December 21, 2011. Odense, Denmark, Garageband recording.

I have heard many people present statements like this. My assessment of Alice is that she is a very bright and a well-educated person, so in my view this problem is not only hers. One must blame the church's liturgy and its worship style and very academic non-relating preaching. I believe that a religious background like Alice's is archetypical for most Danes.

She did know of the United Methodist Church before connecting to this particular church. She has been living in another part of Denmark where the United Methodist Church is well represented. But what she did hear was not positive, so her expectations towards the Methodist church in general were not high.

In august 2008, Alice heard the Gospel Choir Nardus in a concert at one of the public squares in town. The music and the choir's performance were contagious and she realized that she wanted something more from her own gospel choir.

Since she began singing gospel here, faith has been a growing part of her life. In the interview she talks about some of the negative experiences attending worship. She has experienced that finding faith is a slow process and it is now like breathing; which is very complicated when you try to understand the biology behind it. It is something natural and it is okay that she does not understand everything, that is just part of it. It is just uncomplicated; until someday you suddenly can't really breathe. This sharpens the attention, and it is something like that, which has happened with faith for her.²³

²³ Ibid.

About faith and gospel music she says:

Gospel music is good because it is with the heart and not with the brain. It is uncomplicated. It is a feeling in the heart and not in the brain.²⁴

She has noticed a different style of preaching here, which is like nothing she has ever heard before.

She also says:

I love to hear you speak..... Now I must be careful, since this is not meant in any negative ways, this is positive. When I hear you speak, it is uncomplicated. It is personal, compelling and you don't complicate things.²⁵

During the interview, Alice really felt that she lacked words trying to describe why she often attends worship services. The day after the interview, I received an e-mail, where she elaborated why attending worship in this church intrigued her:

In United Methodist Church – under your leadership – I feel welcomed. There is warmth, tolerance, room for differences. Children are welcome. There is room for wonder, doubt and questions and there is room for just being, who you are.

It means a lot to me that you welcome all to the Eucharist regardless of faith, doubts and membership. Then of course there is beautiful music and a very gifted piano player. And, as mentioned to you, you do not complicate faith. Your sermons (during the worship on Sundays and at choir rehearsals) are appealing, and your words touch my soul in a way that I cannot explain – and I am fine with this, even though I cannot explain it. For that is the other side of the coin. What it means to me is 100 percent on the emotional level – that is why it is so difficult to describe using other words than; I enjoy attending your church. I think it

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

is beautiful and it means a lot to me. It is like falling in love without being able to describe it, but still you feel it.²⁶

Anne Feldballe Korsgaard, age 40, is also a well-educated woman with family. Anne is a relatively new singer in the gospel Choir Nardus. Like Alice, she has been singing in another gospel choir before joining Nardus.

Anne is not a member of any church. Like most adult Danes, she received baptism in the state church as an infant, but as she puts it:

I have always dreamed of believing. I have been searching for a long time, but I have never come to terms with faith. I guess, I am too rational and that works against me in this particular matter.²⁷

Anne has taken the consequence of this and is no longer a member of the state church or any other church. She didn't want to baptize her second child. Out of respect for the believers, she doesn't want to say things in front of them without believing so she refrained from baptizing her child. Now, she attends the United Methodist Church a lot and she considers herself a little hypocritical because of this.

Among her friends, there are a lot of believers and faith has always been important to her. She has never found belief herself, but she has found beautiful places in the churches. Singing gospel music hasn't changed Anne's belief. When

²⁶ Alice Stærdahl Andersen, e-mail message to author, December 22, 2011.

²⁷ Anne Feldballe Korsgaard, interview by author, December 20, 2011. Odense, Denmark, Garageband recording.

attending a Pentecostal church, she was amazed and fascinated by how the congregation was singing and devoting themselves to the praise songs. As she puts it, it is not very Danish.²⁸

What really fascinated her was how this particular church took care of her children:

There was room for my children. They want to do something good for my children. My children are enriched by a couple of hours in the church. This enriched us all. I have a dream that some day my children will be able to believe.²⁹

Anne also stresses that she has had good experiences with non-state churches. Among other things, she mentions that she has met several pastors who were able to speak into her life and she is always amazed when people are laughing in church, and she likes that there is an atmosphere where this is okay.

The reasons for Anne to start singing gospel in the gospel choir Nardus are two. She was losing interest in the choirs she was part of. And then, like Alice, she attended a gospel gathering in our church, where all the gospel choirs in Odense were present.

Anne describes her reason for changing choir like this:

²⁸ Compared to how singing is done in state churches.

²⁹ Anne Feldballe Korsgaard, interview by author, December 20, 2011. Odense, Denmark, Garageband recording.

I just liked Mette's (choir leader) humor. It was just great fun, and the physical warm up exercises were great. And I like the really strong focus on the body.³⁰

Anne mentions that her perspectives in gospel music and belief have changed as she has realized that the music really is an interpretation of faith. In that way, it has in many aspects become more serious to sing gospel music. Anne is often a lead singer on "You hold my world in your hands" and she strives to find an internal model, so she can sing those words and really mean it, even when she knows she doesn't believe. She mentions that she, from time to time, feels guilty about singing the lyrics without really meaning them. According to Anne, this is an internal conflict for more of the non-believers in the choir. But she finds peace in the fact that she really has a deep longing for faith and from that she is able to give an authentic interpretation of the song. Anne also stresses that the feeling of guilt is not imposed by the church, the pastor or the choir leader, it comes from within herself.

Asked whether singing gospel and often attending worship in the United Methodist Church has changed her perspectives on faith and church she answers:

It has changed, but the change began a long time ago, when I started worshipping in the Pentecostal church. But what I think is this: if all churches were like this one, the state church in Denmark would not be dying. So yes, my perspectives have changed, because I have seen that a church can be like this and function like this. But I also see that it would not be like this if you and Mette disappeared or if one of you did. So it is a fragile construction.³¹

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

She stresses that the emphasis on everybody contributing to run things seems like an appealing thing. In the worship service, she likes that there is not heavy focus on liturgy and much emphasis on music. And one of the reasons for her to attend is that she just likes coming together with her daughter, and that is a question of finding a place where life quality is provided.

When Anne is asked what has changed in her perception of faith and churches after meeting the gospel music ministry and the worship service in the United Methodist Church, she explains:

Stepping into a church, the first five meters are essential. In the first five meters in the United Methodist Church, you are always greeted and welcomed. If it is not you, it is someone else or it is the old lady with the hat and the stickers for the children. She is important. There are just nice people in that church.³²

Every choir rehearsal begins with devotion where the pastor gives a small sermon; often, this is followed by prayers, music and the opportunity to light a candle at the Alter. When talking about this, Anne expresses that she really enjoys the small sermons given. In many ways, she has the impression that I am more personal and compelling on Tuesday nights than on Sunday mornings. Then she goes on telling how she experiences the lightening of candles:

What is so good in the United Methodist Church is that I have never felt any pressure. In the beginning, it was strange to me. But I looked at people lightening candles, and I thought; they are all Christians and I cannot do that, not being a Christian. It is their thing. Suddenly, one day I just felt like doing it and did it anyway. This means a lot to me because it

³² Ibid.

is the thirty seconds on my knees where I can take a deep breath and it has some meditative aspect to me. I tune in on what we are going to do. It is important to me.³³

To Anne it means everything that there is so much emphasis on singing with the body and the soul. She says:

I open up to the spiritual world in using my body and more easily, I let go by using my body. This is important. And there is a connection between the devotion and the use of the body³⁴

To Anne it is important that every season, the pastor is very open and honest saying that this is a room where faith is a part of singing gospel. But everyone is absolutely free to think and believe as they please. But of course they have to be able to be present in a setting, where faith is part of it. But everyone is welcome.

About singing in English, Anne has not been reflecting about this. But asked to reflect about it, she says:

Singing in Danish would probably be more difficult, since I think the lyrics would be more demanding.³⁵

Anne agrees that this sometimes creates a distance. As an example, she mentioned singing the song "The Lord's prayer" a couple of times without reflecting that it actually was the Lord's prayer that she normally knows in Danish.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid.

Trying to follow the spread in ages in Gospel Choir Nardus, I also did an interview with Ditte and Debbie, who are two of our younger and newest choir singers. Since they are very good friends, this interview was done together.

Ditte is twenty-two years old and is at the moment recovering from illness. She has been singing since January 2011. She started singing gospel after attending a gospel concert in a state church. And this she wanted her friend Debbie to experience too, so she was lured into singing in the gospel Choir Nardus.³⁶

When asked about her conception of church and Christianity, she says:

I have no negative feelings against it. I have just never really used the church. When I have attended, it has been a boring and old-fashioned experience.³⁷

When she elaborates, she says that she is a believer, but some times, she is not. It has just never been an important aspect of her life. And when attempting to participate in worship, it has been deemed irrelevant for her life. In my opinion, this is a very common experience for a young urban Dane.

Ditte does not attend worship services here, so she has no opinion on that particular subject in the interview. However, she does have an opinion about the

³⁶ Ditte Raun Glasdam, interview by author, December 21, 2011. Odense, Denmark, Garageband recording.

³⁷ Ibid.

devotion at the beginning of every rehearsal. Regarding the small sermon, she says that it is something new that she is listening at all, because what is said can in fact be understood. And she likes the narrative way it is done, which is far from an academic lecture approach. She also stresses the importance of lightening a candle. She says:

It feels good to light a candle. I feel there is freedom to do so, without wondering what people will think of me.³⁸

Ditte is very fond of singing in the gospel choir. The lyrics are important to her. The fellowship is giving, and the singing with the entire body and soul is catharsis to her:

I can really let go of myself and my feelings. I can scream it out. This is so good for me.³⁹

She claims that her faith somehow has grown. She feels better now than before and she is very happy to have found a place, where she is welcome just as she is.

Her friend, Debbie, is 20 years of age and is about to finish school at an adult education centre. She has been with the gospel choir Nardus since January 2011.

In most state churches, there is a professional choir to lead the hymn singing. Debbie worked as a singer in such a church and through this she has been part of many worship services in the Lutheran state church. To her, the worship experience

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

is a good thing, but also without any significance in her life. *“But many churches,”* she says *“are beautiful places that will calm you.”*⁴⁰

A few years back, she often attended worship services in the state church.

About that experience she says:

I found something nice. Something happened inside me that made me feel whole. Maybe I found myself. I was calmed down and allowing myself to feel what was inside of me.⁴¹

When asked what she had of experiences with pastors and their role, she is one, who actually knows some pastors. She says that she likes the person, the human being, but she does not understand the role that the pastor often times plays in the service.

About attending worship service here. She has done that once and it was a gospel music worship. She describes it as a good experience. She uses words as:

*“Positive, overwhelming, carried away, I can be me.”*⁴²

Debbie tells me that her life has changed since she began singing gospel music.

She says:

⁴⁰ Debbie Maria Blomstrøm , interview by author, December 21, 2011. Odense, Denmark, Garageband recording.

⁴¹ Debbie Maria Blomstrøm, interview by author, December 21, 2011. Odense, Denmark, Garageband recording.

⁴² Ibid.

I have found myself. I dare believe in myself. And it is good to know that God is there. People here meet me with great understanding. It is almost like I have received a second chance.⁴³

The devotion at the beginning is meaningful to Debbie. She says:

It means a lot. After the talk, where we have this time to reflect, the words just really sink in. I am calmed down and get connected to myself. It just means so much to me.⁴⁴

She loves the emphasis on using the body and the dancing. To her, this creates internal connection between the lyrics and the emotions the music creates. It is obvious to her that words sometimes just aren't enough.

To Debbie singing in English is not something that she has reflected upon. Many of the lyrics connect to her.

When singing "He sees the pain, you feel inside" I imagine, that he takes the pain away. I mean.... these lyrics have become an integrated part of my faith. Something happens. I feel everything is lighter.⁴⁵

Britta Cramer Poulsen, age 57, has been a part of the gospel Choir Nardus, for a long time. She has been a singer in this church since 2005, but she has been singing gospel music since 2002. Britta is married, has grown up children and grandchildren. She works at the University hospital in town.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

Like most Danes, Britta is a member of the state church and is both baptized as an infant and confirmed. From time to time, she attends worships both in the United Methodist Church and in the State Church; where she also served a term in the congregational board a couple of years back. She lives close to the home of the pastor of the local state church and years back she had a very good relationship with the pastor living there at that time. He impressed her and she became active in the church. Now, when she attends worship, it is often in family worships together with her grandchild or she attends the worship service here in the United Methodist Church. But as she says:

It is not as much as I would like it to be, but working nights, there just aren't that many Sunday mornings, where I am not with my family.⁴⁶

Like many other people, her expectations towards church worship are not high based on her prior experiences with this. She says, she is a believer, but she, like most other Danes, is not really practicing and is fine with this.

Still Britta sees every Tuesday evening as her worship. She describes the devotion time as an essential part of the choir rehearsal. It is her experience that:

The devotion opens the lyrics further. I wouldn't miss this. And the quiet time with the candles really relaxes me and prepares me to be present right here, right now.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ Britta Cramer Poulsen, interview by author, December 15, 2011. Odense, Denmark, Notes

⁴⁷ Ibid.

Britta also expresses joy about using the body when singing in the church, which is very different from one of her prior choirs. And she is really positive about everything in the church:

It is open and welcoming. I just love coming in that house.⁴⁸

Another singer, who has been part of the gospel choir Nardus for a long time is Pernille Lawaetz Esborg a 44-year-old woman. She is a former teacher in the public school system, but now she is finishing a BA as a speech therapist. Pernille has a long story as a gospel singer. Her first choir was Joyful Voices, where she started singing in 1993. Ten years later, she switched to the newly restarted gospel choir Nardus. This would be January 2003 and she has been here since then.

In 2007, Pernille became a mother and like many others, this made her think about baptism and membership. It made her decide that she was going to become a member of the United Methodist Church. Pernille is raised by a Christian family; her father being a minister in the Danish state church, Christian faith has been a part of her life since childhood. But still, she described herself as a religious seeker. When she moved to Odense for studies, she visited many of the state churches looking for a good preacher. Her experience from the state church is that it is so formal that it

⁴⁸ Ibid.

creates a distance, so she didn't find a church, where she felt at home. She never looked in the none-state churches.⁴⁹

As a child she remembers worship as every child's nightmare:

You had to be so quiet and sit so still. You couldn't move at all and it was so boring. At least during the hymns you could move just a little. It was not funny at all.⁵⁰

One of the differences between Pernille's prior choir and the gospel choir Nardus is that there is more church in it here and she describes the pastor as a brilliant communicator.

People here are not reserved towards the talk you give. They are open. Maybe because they know you are the pastor.... To me it is fine that the music is closely connected to the message of Christ.⁵¹

She describes that it is impossible for her to sing the lyrics and separating oneself from it, so for Pernille this is the natural way. The focus on the church part and the Bible also reflects in the good fellowship and care for one another that is found in the choir and that she deems to be very unusual. For Pernille, this is one of the reasons why singing gospel is church to her.⁵²

*"For me singing gospel is practicing my faith."*⁵³

⁴⁹ Pernille Lawaetz Esborg, interview by author, December 23, 2011. Odense, Denmark, Garageband recording.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid.

After she began singing gospel music, things have changed in Pernille's life. She elaborates it:

First of all, now with 100% certainty I can say: I am a Christian and I have found a place, where I belong. I cannot see my life without this church and fellowship.⁵⁴

She tells me that she is unable to stay in her faith when she is too much alone. Every time she enters the doors of the church and experiences the fellowship, she is confirmed in her belief in God. She describes the church as a very safe environment where we share the same convictions.

My faith has grown here and it is not just the gospel music that has changed things, Thomas. It is also you, who has conveyed something to me. You are a good preacher and what you are capable of is communicating in a way so you do not feel (...pause....) You are giving my faith words in a way I cannot do myself. And I like the way you; and probably the United Methodist Church, are without prejudices and the firm believe in that there is something good in all people and if you address that, instead of imposing guilt as they do in so many churches, the best in all people will surface. This makes you believe that love really can change people.⁵⁵

Furthermore, she describes her experiences of worship. She reminds me that she likes all types of worship and also attends church, when there is no gospel music. But it is of course a factor that the music in the church always is amazing. She is mentioning Mette Risager (the choir leader) as an amazing and very skilled singer.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

It is important to Pernille that what the singers are singing, is somehow connected to their inside lives. Pernille also talks about the preaching as an important factor for her to attend church. She stresses that the sermons always are compelling and that she enjoys that the pastor is not afraid to preach about politically sensitive issues. This makes it much more personal and close to the reality that we are all living in.⁵⁶

During the rehearsals, Pernille considers the devotion time to be so integrated that it could not be the same, if the evening didn't start this way. Pernille is fine with the lyrics in English, but she would be fine too with lyrics in Danish. It is no big deal what the language is.

Some things are just more easily expressed in English. But then I am not sure what I really mean. It is not correct to say that English creates a distance, but maybe it is easier to sing of emotions in another language. But it often just sounds better in English⁵⁷

Claus Møller Dragsbæk, age 40, has been singing in the gospel choir Nardus since January 2004. He is newly married. He became a member of the United Methodist Church in November 2008. He is a teacher in the public school system and he often plays the piano during worship. In September 2010 I hosted the funeral service for his dead born son, Mikkel.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

Claus has a background in what he defines as a Christian home. They attended church on a regular basis and he has, as a child and as a young man, been part of different children's and youth ministries. He has a past as a leader and instructor in FDF, which is an organization, built on the principles of the World Scout Movement, but they are not members of World Organization of the Scout Movement.

When he stepped down as a leader, his attendance to worship also decreased. He was not happy with his experiences worshipping in the state church. He was a believer but didn't practice his faith. He did, like most Danes, attend church on Christmas Eve. As he said: *"Too much form too little content."*⁵⁸

Thinking back on his earlier experiences, he remembers the pastor giving acceptable sermons, but they were delivered as if the pastor was not personally engaged in what he was preaching. It was as if, he was playing a role. As Claus says: *"I couldn't feel the pastor."*⁵⁹

As a person who actually has a longer experience with the church, Claus has a different background than most of the people in our Gospel Choir Nardus. What Claus describes about singing here is that the music just connected him with the divine and in a rehearsal or in a concert the goose bumps came and there was this feeling that this is magic in some way.

⁵⁸ Claus Møller Dragsbæk, interview by author, January 5, 2012. Odense, Denmark, Garageband recording.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

Singing gospel music has changed his perspectives on Christianity:

Christianity is more alive and honest. Now, it has become natural to me. I have to admit that reading in the Bible is not something I do a lot. But when we are gathered for singing the central messages of Christianity just come into the body somehow.⁶⁰

About the United Methodist Church, Claus is impressed by what he describes as a church, where there is emphasis on living Christianity. He tells me that he was fascinated by the sincerity, warmth and interest for people and here people are not shallow. He says:

It is so good to be part of a church where people really are interested in each other.⁶¹

Singing gospel Music has changed Claus, as he is convinced that he has found more confidence in who he is. Also, he says that he is rooted in Christianity and that there is more to it than just singing gospel music. As he puts it: *“Life is definitely more fun when you have gospel music in your life.”*⁶²

Years back, Claus was part of a newly started gospel choir where the leadership in the middle of a season wanted to use time of the rehearsal for devotion. He tells me about how this created tension in the choir and that he actually

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid.

also was one of the singers who found this suggestion odd. At that time he didn't see the connection between church and gospel music.

On the devotion time in the gospel choir Nardus, he says:

I think this deepens the fellowship. The way you say things is of course Christianity, but it can be heard and be useful no matter where you are with your personal faith. I use the lightening of candles a lot. It has been prayer for me, but it has also been a place where I have argued with God. So lightening of candles is very important. Just look at the number of people doing this.⁶³

He agrees with me, when I say that everyone regardless of faith can use this time of silence or prayer and light a candle.

Claus also likes the emphasis on choreography. He claims that it would be empty if the choir didn't move as much as we do. It enforces the message. As he says: *"Body and soul are good together!"*⁶⁴

Claus is yet another singer, who does not reflect much on the fact that we are singing in English. But thinking about it, he finds it natural that the language is English, since gospel music originated from the USA. So English is the gospel language. He doesn't think that English creates a barrier. In his view, the barrier is removed because singing in English, we sometimes do not reflect much on what we

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

are singing and suddenly the lyrics are inside us. The lyrics really become part of life since the songs are inside you, when you leave the church.⁶⁵

As mentioned earlier, Claus lost his unborn son in the fall of 2010. Two months later, another couple in the Choir lost their unborn daughter, Frida. This of course affected everyone deeply and that particular fall there was a lot of crying in the choir. On the day that Frida should have celebrated her first birthday, her mother shared a link on Facebook that she calls Frida's song. The song is: "See you in heaven."⁶⁶ Claus saw this and he describes this use of a song like this:

It opened a window to my grief. So in this way, gospel music can help and sustain people going through rough periods in life.⁶⁷

Claus also mentions that in different situations of life, it is not texts and stories from the Bible that come to life inside him, but the same stories are very much alive internally as lyrics and tunes, so in this way the central elements of Christianity is alive in his life through the gospel music.

To Claus, it is important that it is often mentioned that people are welcome to everything in the church and that this is an open house where all are welcome regardless of faith and if you choose to attend, there is no pressure to become members.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6r5NHdfDe6A&feature=share>. (Accessed January 10, 2012.)

⁶⁷ Claus Møller Dragsbæk, interview by author, January 5, 2012. Odense, Denmark, Garageband recording.

The final question to Claus and the others is this: *“What did I forget to ask you?*

Is there something else I need to know for my study?” Claus says:

I know that in your assignment you maybe cannot describe your role. But it cannot be written, without saying that it means a lot that you are welcoming all in the door. The fact that you greet them by hand, and are very fast at learning their names and that you show a genuine interest in the people coming. This is important.⁶⁸

Another male singer in the gospel Choir Nardus is Bo Nordgaard Jørgensen, age 38. Bo is a plumber and worked at a big shipyard near Odense. Now, he is under education for new employment elsewhere. Bo has a girlfriend.

Bo has been part of the gospel choir since august 2011 and is the newest singer in these interviews. However, gospel music is not that new to him. Since he has been part of the gospel Choir Collage for three years prior to his engagement here. Also, he has participated in Sommergospel twice and this is where I originally met Bo. We were in the same choir during one of the sommergospel weeks in 2010.

Regarding religiosity, Bo is like many Danes, so he attends church at the major celebrations in life, such as baptisms, weddings, and funerals and, like many others, on Christmas Eve from time to time. When he is asked about his experiences with the State Church, he explains that he finds the worship boring and very formal. He

⁶⁸ Claus Møller Dragsbæk, interview by author, January 5, 2012. Odense, Denmark, Garageband recording.

has never attended other churches than the state church. He likes it when it is more compelling, informal and personal, like he has experienced it here.⁶⁹

Bo has, until recently, not been thinking a lot about Christian faith. It is something in his life that he deliberately shut out hence life was complicated enough. But singing gospel has made him much more aware of the fact that there is more to life. Now he considers himself a seeker, who is not just ready to say I believe.⁷⁰

Bo describes his first experiences with gospel music when he attended a Christmas Gospel Concert in Bykirken:

I thought I could do that too. I sang along. It tickled in my stomach before going and it went into my heart. It almost frightened me. They had their hands up in the air. This was too much. It was strange to me because faith was strange to me and I wasn't comfortable with this.⁷¹

Bo talks about these expressions of faith and tells me that he will not raise his arms, if he doesn't mean it. If he is to proclaim faith in a way like this, he wants to mean it before he does it. He hasn't come to that point in his faith development yet.

At the moment, he reads the book "The Shack – Where a Tragedy Confronts Eternity" by W. Paul Young and this book is compelling to him, and he mentions that

⁶⁹ Bo Nordgaard Jørgensen, interview by author, January 11, 2012. Odense, Denmark, Garageband recording.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid.

this book is adding to his faith. Also Bo is reading a daily devotional, so it is obvious to me that he is working with his faith.⁷²

I have gained more faith. Not so that I am thinking about it daily, but thinking back, I see this. Gospel music and the people I have meet singing gospel, has contributed to my faith and now I sing with more conviction and now I think a lot more about faith. I am not yet a Christian. Maybe on a scale around 75%, but I would like to become one. I think it is coming.⁷³

Bo also mentions the way sermons are preached in this church:

The way you speak is helpful. It is more on an every day basis. The way you are communicating, is on a level where I can follow you, it is not too abstract.⁷⁴

He also tells me that he sometimes worships in the cathedral (state church) on Friday evenings, when the church is open. There is silence, you can light a candle and a few times throughout the evening, meditations and Taize-devotions are offered. Bo takes part in this and to him it settles him down. This is also a part of his journey towards Christian faith.

During the rehearsals, Bo is fund of the devotions at the beginning of the evening. He enjoys it very much. This centers him and he has not yet lit a candle. He would like to do this, but again he will not do it until he is ready and is sure that he really means something by doing it.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

We are singing with both body and soul. The choir leader is always encouraging the choir to move more. Bo wants to move more when he is singing. As he says:

I have tried to move more. I sing better, when I do, but I am shy, so this is a constant fight for me.⁷⁵

He tells me that in the choir, there is more openness towards other people than any other place he has ever experienced. And it is challenging to sing together especially when the choir is mixed between the voice groups.

He reflects upon the story of gospel music and the lyrics about God and Jesus.

This affects him:

It gradually comes closer, either you want it or not. It eats its way into you. Sometimes I have to take a step back, but it is coming along. It doesn't come closer if I don't allow it.⁷⁶

Singing in English is no hindrance to Bo. He hasn't reflected much on this, but he mentions Claes Wegener, who has put gospel music to some of the well-known Danish hymns. Bo sees this as an interesting project and wonders what it would like singing in Danish.

Bo finishes the interview by summing up:

The choir is like a family when we are singing. It has given me much. I trust myself more. I can be me, and I know that I am good enough.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

Through faith I have found peace and even when I cannot find meaning, maybe there is one anyway.⁷⁷

The last singer to be interviewed is Vickie Nadia Bang Clausen. Vickie is 37 years of age. She is a single mother of two boys. She works with psychiatric patients training their abilities to engage in good relations. She works part-time due to an old back injury.

Vickie has been a singer with the gospel Choir Nardus since August 2010. Asking Vickie how she used to perceive Christianity and faith. She immediately bursts out: *“Back then, life was not so much fun as now.”*⁷⁸

It was a friend from Vickie’s spinning class who told her about the gospel Choir, since she noticed that Vickie always sang along, during the workouts. This inspired Vickie to start singing gospel music.

When Vickie arrived the first evening she was shocked: *“What, is this a church?”*⁷⁹

This surprised her, since she never connected gospel music and church, but Vickie doesn’t scare easily. She is a woman who just takes things one step at the

⁷⁷ Bo Nordgaard Jørgensen, interview by author, January 11, 2012. Odense, Denmark, Garageband recording.

⁷⁸ Vickie Nadia Bang Clausen, interview by author, January 10, 2012. Odense, Denmark, Garageband recording.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

time. She has always been curious and seeking without being able to say that it was God who she believed in. Therefore, she has often tested worship services in the state church. Her impression of that is:

This is too abstract and too stiff and often it was very moralizing, not something for me.⁸⁰

Because of her back injury, she receives treatment for her constant pain. This has lead her into meditation, which has revealed to her that she actually also has a soul and that there is more between heaven and earth.

As many others, she took her two boys to baptism as infants, and later this made her think about the promises she gave in the church back then. She asked herself: *"Do I know what it means to be a Christian?"*⁸¹

Her children challenges her with all their questions on Christianity and she feels now that she has a responsibility towards her two boys in raising them as Christians. Of course, this makes her think about her own faith and she has started reading the Bible and also attending worship in the United Methodist Church on regular basis.

Vickie tells me about the first rehearsals and that she was amazed by the songs. The music and the lyrics were just amazingly good. She found herself liking every new song that choir leader Mette presented. It was just a party every week, but then something happened:

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Ibid.

Suddenly, the lyrics created meaning. The words came to life inside me.⁸²

It is a short time since Vickie started singing, but a lot of things have changed during that short span of time. She names pastor Thomas and Anders Flinck, one of the tenors, as two persons who have had an impact on her life. For instance, Anders has taken much time to discuss a lot with Vickie.

Her experiences of the devotion time is that it is a time where she is relaxed and lets go of her defenses, listening to the devotion. She says that it made her think:

How can he talk of things that regards me, and address what happens in me and in my life right now? This is spooky! What you said came to life inside me, and made everything give meaning on my journey to faith. Also because you talked a plain language appealing directly to me and I began attending church on Sundays to hear what you have to say. At the time, I feel that you are talking directly to me.⁸³

She elaborates about the preaching in choir rehearsals and in worship services:

I really like the way you make the Biblical message present in my life. Not many people can make it alive and inspiring as you can. For many years, I have wanted to read the Bible, but I have not been ready. You and the Course "Intro to faith and church,"⁸⁴ have made me ready and now I am reading.⁸⁵

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Ibid,

⁸⁴ This is a five-week class teaching about the basics in Christianity. This is offered twice a year in the church.

⁸⁵ Vickie Nadia Bang Clausen, interview by author, January 10, 2012. Odense, Denmark, Garageband recording.

She explains that her Tuesday is a very challenging day to her and her family since there are so many things happening on that particular day. Vickie looks forward to every Tuesday, because she knows the day will end with gospel music.

When I come home on Tuesday evenings, I can never sleep. I lay there in the darkness and smile, and just cannot sleep because I am so happy.⁸⁶

She elaborated her experiences as a relatively new participant in worship services. She is very excited about this and the words are coming really fast:

I feel joy. It is alive. The hymns are fantastic. I become glad. It nurtures my process. It is so good. The highlight is your sermon. I don't know from where you get it. But just keep going! It is always relevant for where I am in my life and on my way here, I was thinking that it is strange that the church and the choir suddenly take up so much space in my life. It is peculiar.⁸⁷

She thinks a lot of how her colleges and her family react to her as a person of faith. This really is challenging for many of the people that used to know Vickie. She has the theory that many people are skeptical because most people have had negative experiences with worship and church. So people really wonder what happened to her.

Vickie is fascinated because she really feels that the church here, really is interested in her, and in getting connected to new people. She says:

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

You and the church care! And you use a language that people understand.⁸⁸

Asked about the rehearsals, she burst out with the statement:

I have found my faith in singing gospel music, so the rehearsals are important.⁸⁹

For a long time, she didn't realize at all that it was devotion in the beginning when pastor Thomas was speaking and she just listened. But to her, an evening in the choir would not be right, if it didn't start with the pastor talking to the choir. Vickie has noticed that people just listen and they are all right with the devotion.

Asked how the emphasis on using the body when singing, she tells me about an evening, where her pain in the back was really agonizing. She hadn't been able to move the entire day. But when we had been singing for some time, she realized that she was singing and dancing, liberated from the pain. As she says:

Singing with the soul and body is natural. It is connected. I feel I am in flow. I just love being here. Body and soul are singing together.⁹⁰

Singing in English is just natural to her. But still she says:

But I remember when singing one particular song it was a defining moment. We were singing the song "*Calling my name.*" When we sang that, I found my faith. When we sang, "*How many times do I go against your will?*" Wauuuw, I got the chills, it tickled inside me. I realized that

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

God loves me. He is ready, waiting for me. Filled with love waiting for me, to realize my love for him.⁹¹

She tells me that this song really spoke to her and she gave into this and said:

"Okay: I surrender, I believe in you!"⁹²

So it doesn't matter to Vickie what language we are singing in. The message reaches its goal.

She keeps talking about her new faith:

What a liberation man! I have always been a happy person. But now I found peace. He believes in me, and I believe in him.⁹³

3.4.1 Interview with the Choir Leader Mette Risager

Mette Risager⁹⁴ is married and the mother of two girls. She is married to pastor Thomas. She is educated in physiotherapy and has, until recently, worked as such. Mette leads two of the three gospel choirs in the church. The gospel choir Nardus and the gospel choir Emmaus.

Three years ago, she started a new education at the Complete Vocal Institute⁹⁵ in Copenhagen since she wanted to educate herself as a singer and as a singing

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Further reading can be found at www.metterisager.dk. (Accessed January 31, 2012.)

⁹⁵ <http://www.completevocalinstitute.com>. Accessed January 14, 2012.

teacher. In total, this is a four-year education. Last year, Mette stopped working as a physiotherapist, because singing and teaching singers took up more and more time, and now it seems that she can make a living of her dream.

Mette's story with gospel music also begins at Copenhagen Gospel Festival in 1992. She was very young and her choir took part in the gospel festival and she felt for the first time the rush of singing gospel music. Then Mette was hooked.

Back in Silkeborg United Methodist Church, Mette initiated the start of the gospel choir Rejoice. She was not the instructor. The church again had to use its sanctuary that had been closed for years since the congregation was in serious decline. Sixty new people suddenly appeared and the choir was having a good time and there was new hope for the church. But long story short; changes happened in the pastoral appointment and, as a result of that, serious conflict emerged and that resulted in the church's disintegration and the choir was resolved.⁹⁶

Mette moved to Frederikshavn, where her husband was serving as a pastor in the United Methodist Church. Shortly after her arrival, the gospel choir Chosen from the United Methodist Church in Strandby offered Mette the position as choir leader. The choir had been singing for about a year. Mette says about this:

This was my debut as a conductor, but it turned out to be easy for me. It felt natural. Of course it was challenging because I didn't have much theoretical knowledge about music. I had to learn to play the piano, so I

⁹⁶ Mette Risager, interview by author, January 13, 2012. Odense, Denmark, Garageband recording.

had the possibility to learn the different voices preparing for the rehearsal. To me, music had always lived in my heart, not in my head.⁹⁷

At the same time, Mette was accepted as a singer in Opstand Gospel Choir.⁹⁸ At that time, this was the absolute best gospel choir in Denmark. Then and now, the singers are all among the best singers and instructors in Denmark. The choir is lead by Hans Christian Jochimsen. For Mette, this has defined her development as a singer and instructor. But it has significance beyond that:

This was important for my own understanding of myself as a person and as a singer and in accepting that I have a gift with this music. Opstand Gospel Choir was what helped me through rough periods in my life. I experienced that this music could do that.⁹⁹

In the year 2000, Mette moved to Odense together with her husband. Mette was immediately asked to lead the choir Songs of Joy in Svendborg, the neighbor United Methodist Church. This choir, Mette led for one and a half year. Because of conflicts here in Odense, which also affected the cooperation with the pastor in Svendborg, who was also part of the conflict in Odense, Mette had to stop leading the choir in Svendborg.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ <http://www.gospelnet.dk/default.asp?id=41915>. (Accessed January 14, 2012.)

⁹⁹ Mette Risager, interview by author, January 13, 2012. Odense, Denmark, Garageband recording.

One night, there was an ecumenical gathering of youth leaders from all over the country in Odense. They celebrated praise song worship and Mette attended this. The Pentecostal church preacher suddenly goes to her and talks to her:

You will enter a period in your life, and you will have an important task ahead of you. It is about singing!¹⁰⁰

At that point, Mette didn't know what he meant, but as the conflict in the church of Odense surfaced, she soon did.

Mette also shares another experience, which took place at another Copenhagen Gospel Festival. She is guessing that it was around 1998, but she doesn't know for sure. At the service, she was coincidentally sitting next to one of the instructors, Patrick Henderson, while singing hymns. Later that day during the rehearsal where maybe 500 people were gathered, he paused. He said: "*There is a gifted singer present*" and he asked Mette to stand, so all could see her.

Later that day, she met him in the hallway and she told him that he was a little far out. But he said to her that maybe she didn't know now. But he was sure that God had plans for her and then he prayed for her. In retrospect, this was a defining moment for Mette.

Christina Funch Mellgren, the current conductor of the gospel choir Nardus, was pregnant and gave birth and it was natural that Mette took over the gospel choir Nardus during that period. She says about this experience:

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

This turned out really fine. The choir was really happy about this. They were so fine with it that it actually felt a little problematic, when the interim period ended.¹⁰¹

Mette decided that she would give the returning choir leader lots of room when she came back. Therefore, she had a period where she wasn't singing in the gospel choir Nardus. However, after a year it was time for the choir to find a new leader, but Mette didn't feel ready for this at the moment, and she was still the choir leader of the gospel choir Emmaus.

The new conductor only led the choir for one year. He was living in Aarhus and the drive every week was too much. During this year, Mette was singing in the choir again and she was active as a lead singer during the last season, where he led the choir.

Once again the choir is looking for a new choir leader. This is never an easy task. Seeing the applicants, Mette had this feeling:

I felt, I couldn't have the gift of leading a choir and not step up at this time, so even if I didn't really feel up to the task of leading a very big gospel choir, I accepted the challenge.¹⁰²

Since 2007, where Mette has lead the gospel choir Nardus. Mette describes this period as defining for her and says that it shaped her identity as a choir leader. Also, it has been defining for her that she decided to study at the Complete Vocal Institute and to be invited to teach at Sommergospel, where she finds inspiration for the

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Ibid.

entire year. Also, Sommergospel has become a forum of good colleagues among the gospel choir leaders in Denmark. For Mette, these weeks are very special. She says:

Sommergospel is a place where I am filled. The fellowship among the instructors and the inspiration we give each other is so valuable. This is absolutely necessary for me to be a part of when I, as a choir leader, am giving of myself all the time.¹⁰³

For many churches, having a gospel choir often just means that the choir has a place to rehearse. The story of Odense United Methodist Church is different. Mette is asked why she thinks things are different in the church here:

I think it is very very important that the persons who attend worship see that the leaders of the choir also are central persons in the church. They see Preben Holmberg play the piano, they hear me sing a song maybe a very different song than gospel music, and they listens to you, who sing as a tenor in the choir, preach as the pastor in the church. I think it is important that this is connected. Also, it is important that parts of the choir now are a part of the other life in the congregation; so new people attending worship also meet people from the choir in the worship setting. Also, it is very important that people from the church are also diffusing into the choir. It is important that people from the congregation participates in the work around the choir.¹⁰⁴

For Mette, the choir rehearsal is a spiritual highlight during the week. She is not sure if it is worship, but maybe it is to her because she means something different with this particular word. Mette recognized that the devotion is very important to many of the singers and she sees the value in this.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

I see how many members of the choir light a candle, so I am convinced of the significance of this. For me, most of the time it is part of the preparation for my teaching right after the devotion.¹⁰⁵

Asked why she focuses so much on body and soul in her teaching and why this is so important to her, she says:

I am a physiotherapist, so the body is important to me. This affects my conviction on this. I think it is impossible, at least here in our earthly life, to separate body and soul, intellect and body, emotions and body. It is all connected. Singing gospel music without the body, we would only use a small part of the instrument we are given. I am of the conviction that body and soul cannot be separated. It is not about choreography, it is about forgetting yourself. To come to a place where we do not think about the body. I think the body for some people is a hindrance.¹⁰⁶

As a singing teacher, Mette has experienced that the voice as an instrument is much more than the vocal chords and the vocal tract. The natural use of the voice involves the entire body.

Often, the body is a limitation for many. And it is often in the body that low self-esteem begins or pain emerges.

For many people, the body is more a prison than a temple, but when we sing the body and soul become one.¹⁰⁷

Mette tells me that she has experienced many people who think less about their body and this creates tension in both body and psyche. She wonders why so

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

much of what happens in the church has absolutely nothing to do with the body. She describes the choir rehearsal as the biggest energy discharge during her week. She claims that if she gives the choir 100 % energy, the choir mirrors 50 percent of the energy. So, her energy level always has to be more than the choir has to give. But she also receives energy back in seeing how much joy the music gives the singers. *“It is a gigantic adrenalin kick standing in front of the choir.”*¹⁰⁸

It is hard for her to calm down and sleep after a choir rehearsal, but also it is very satisfying to be the choir leader of the gospel choir Nardus.

Mette underlines the fact that as a pedagogic instrument, an appreciative and positive approach is very valuable. It is important to her that the process sometimes has to forego the goal. It is important for her to appreciate the progress of the individual singer. We have to recognize the borders each singer crosses. Therefore, it is not always the perfect end result that is appreciated.

Also she says that one of her mottos is: *“If a choir is to sound good together they have to be able to laugh together.”*¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

CHAPTER 4: CONCLUSION

And the Lord added daily to their numbers

In this endeavor, I started by claiming that I, based on my work with the gospel Ministry, would provide the United Methodist Church with a model, based on the inclusion of gospel choirs, for attraction of unchurched people. It is time to realize that that was a bold hope. I am not ready to build a model that everyone can follow and then their church will be full of unchurched gospel singing people with growing faith.

4.1 Eight Claims

But based on my experience and the accumulated knowledge throughout this project, I am ready to say:

1. Gospel music's appeal in United Methodist Churches can be a product of our rich heritage from the early Methodist movement's use of contrafactum music.
2. The Christian ethos and spirituality found in many gospel choirs can be connected to the first church as it is described in Acts 2.
3. For many singers, the gospel music and the rehearsals become a source that enriches their belief systems, because the rehearsal becomes worship for the singers, even if that is not the direct words used by them.
4. The choir leader's person, faith and skills are immensely important.

5. If people attracted to the church through gospel music ministry are to feel at home in the church's worship, things have to change dramatically. And leading figures from the choir have to be visible at worship.

6. Diligent leadership from the pastor, choir leader and leadership team is key.

7. Vision is everything.

8. Preaching, if it is done right, is important to unchurched people

About this project and the conclusions reached, I would like to state that a Doctor of Ministry project always suffers from lack of time. It is a never-ending puzzle to find time needed for in-depth studying and writing. Therefore, this is a finished D.Min. Project, but I am not done with the study, since it will continue as a natural part of assuming leadership in this church and its gospel music ministries. The project gives a blink of a moment in the gospel music ministry and Odense United Methodist Church and in my thinking and leadership right now at this particular point in time and history, and it is to be read and understood as such.

4.1.1 The First Claim:

Gospel music's appeal in United Methodist Churches can be a product of our rich heritage from the early Methodist movement's use of contrafactum music.

There is no doubt in my mind, according to Hempton, Rack and for the matter Heizenrater, that the way the Wesley Hymns carried the Methodist movement as it gave words to the experienced theology is similar to what happens in the gospel choir Nardus. The words get under your skin. One of the interviewed singers expresses it like this:

*"But when we are gathered to sing the central messages of Christianity, it just comes into the body somehow."*¹

The hymns and the worship in the Methodist movement had some of the same characteristics as are found in a gospel choir singing with body and soul. Hempton says:

The point is that Methodism was from the start a form of religion associated with song, music, rhythm and emotional release from anxiety and from traditional social expressions of bodily comportment and restraint.²

The lyrics are the biblical words that are sung, danced, embodied and brought to life during a concert or a rehearsal evening. In many ways, this provides relief.

¹ Claus Møller Dragsbæk, interview by author, January 5, 2012. Odense, Denmark, Garageband recording.

² Hempton, *Methodism – Empire of the Spirit*. 135.

People can scream out their pain and emotions. Where in church or worship in the Danish tradition can you do this?

Tyson is describing the past, but he could just as well describe a choir rehearsal in the gospel choir Nardus:

By uniting heart and mind in an act of praise and adoration, Wesley's hymns cause the singer to participate in and to experience the gospel's truths in a way that sterile theological definitions do not.³

4.1.2 The Second Claim:

The first church sets an example for the Christian ethos and spirituality found in many gospel choirs.

This is consistent with the Methodist heritage, since a literal application of the Bible – especially Acts 2, 42-45, was very important to the first holy clubs formed during the revival.

In acts 2, there is an emphasis on both the fellowship of the believers and an equal emphasis on the way the believers met the unbelievers, when they were in the Temple for the public worship and offerings. In the gospel choirs, singers do have equal value regardless of their relationship to the church.

³ Tyson, *Assist me to proclaim – The Life and Hymns of Charles Wesley*. 253-254.

The Acts describe a fellowship of believers who are of and in the community. They have good contact and good relationships with the community they are a part of. They represent a church without walls. Gospel choirs are indeed open fellowships representing a “come as you are” culture that many churches today can only dream about.

The verses 42-45 can describe a gospel choir:

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need.

There is a fellowship that includes all. We are praying and eating together. Even from people who openly say: “I am not a Christian.” You, as a pastor get prayer requests. People in the choirs gather for devotion to the apostles teaching, they are really taking care of each other and they are involving themselves in missional and humanitarian work. I think Mark Lewis is absolutely right when he claims that many choirs have a Christian Ethos that many churches can only dream about.⁴

⁴ Lewis, *The Diffusion of Black Gospel Music in Postmodern Denmark*, 48-49.

4.1.3 The Third Claim:

For many singers, the gospel music and the rehearsals become a source that enriches their belief systems, because the rehearsal becomes worship for the singers, even if that is not the direct words used by them.

Without having made a comparative study on rituals in worship and in a rehearsal setting, I find it safe to say that to many singers the rehearsal has elements that makes it constitute a worship experience even for a singer who has little or no experiences of traditional worship as a result of no or little experience with worship.

All my interviews revealed that the devotion in every rehearsal is of significant importance to all singers interviewed. To my surprise, this was regardless of prior faith commitments. Even singers claiming no faith, found devotion time to be of great meaning and importance.

A rehearsal evening has a lot of resemblance with the perfect worship. In the words of Craig Miller, worship is crucial:

The reason worship is a crucial part in the life of faith for a believer is that worship changes us. Through the experience of worship, we are drawn closer to God; we are challenged to love one another; and we are called to be in ministry, to go into all the world telling of the joy of knowing Jesus Christ.

The artful combination of music, Word, sacrament, and interaction with fellow worshippers create a life changing experience that compels us to desire an even deeper experience of God. Worship is not simply an

experience or a learning event or a time for fellowship. At its best, worship moves the believer forward and deeper into the life of faith.⁵

I believe, if a rehearsal is done right, it can also be a crucial part of the life of faith in a non-believers life. Singing gospel music will challenge the singers believe system.

4.1.4 The Fourth Claim:

The choir leader's person, faith and skills are immensely important.

Several of the persons I interviewed told me, that they had been singing in other choirs prior to their engagement here. A common reason for stopping was lack of will to lead by the choir leader. Also, the choir leaders lack of Christian faith was mentioned as a reason for finding a new gospel choir. Lewis, who finds support for notion that the correlation of Christian meaning and gospel music is more likely to be drawn when the leaders and symbols of the church are present, confirms this.⁶ Several of the singers interviewed talked about the importance of the faith witness from the choir leader, without me asking about it. As a choir leader, wanting it or not, you are a representative of the faith expressed in the songs. The choir leader

⁵ Miller, Craig Kennet. *Next Church. Now – Creating New Faith Communities*. Discipleship Ressources, 2003. 144-145.

⁶ Lewis, *The Diffusion of Black Gospel Music in Postmodern Denmark*, 52.

must be ready to take upon her or him the role of a hermeneutic.⁷ This is also the role for the pastor, but no matter how it is put, the choir leader is an exponent for the faith expressed in the gospel music.

The research done by Trine Berg Hansen supports the notion that relational gateways⁸ are the most important entrance into a gospel choir. Here the choir leader is important, not only the musical skills, but also the relational intelligence and the ability to communicate is of high importance. A choir leader has to be genuine interested in the singers' life and has to be present at the social media such as Facebook and be willing to make a considerable effort communicating with the singers during the week.

Finally, it is really important that the choir leader and the musicians are skilled musically. Of course it also matters a lot that they also are capable of teaching the choir their voices. This certainly requires some pedagogical finesse as well, since nothing is more boring for a choir than endless repetitions.

Many churches hire a choir leader, who is not a part of their church in an effort to draw people to church through gospel music ministry. We tried that too. This person was in all areas a gifted choir leader and a nice person. But in the end, leading the choir was a job to him, and singers can sense the difference between a choir leader who works for money or one who works out of a calling. Regarding the

⁷ Ibid., 169.

⁸ Trine Berg Hansen, *What can church based gospel activity do in terms of in-reach mission to its Danish participants – and what can it not do?* (M.A. Dissertation. Unpublished, University of Sheffield at Cliff College, 2006.), 66.

music there was a lot of development during that period, but there was really no diffusion of people between church and choir.

4.1.5 The Fifth Claim:

If people attracted to the church through gospel music ministry are to feel at home in the church's worship, things have to change dramatically. And leading figures from the choir have to be visible at worship.

Initially, this church started the first gospel choir in order to attract new people to the church. And new people did come. But after a while, I, as the pastor, started to worry: what if one of the singers suddenly attended worship? At that time, our worship was very similar to the state church worship, only the quality was poorer; this was anxiety-provoking to me. I realized that if a singer attended Sunday morning worship, I was sure that it would only happen once.

At the same time, people in the congregation were impatient because no new people came to worship. I do remember a charge conference, where we debated and finally agreed on that the criteria for success regarding gospel choir was not to make the singers attend worship and think it was amazing, but the criteria of success would be if the gospel choir could become a ministry where people could hear, experience and express a clear message of God's love. It was not the case that we

wanted to have two churches in one, but the congregation was willing to let go of the control with the gospel choir. The gospel choir was met with trust and it was set free.

Also, the church realized that if new people were to feel welcomed in our church we had to learn how new people conceived worship. Everyone participating in worship in the church was all long-term members and they became more aware that worship preferences for them might differ from the preference of new worshippers.

When new people come to church, they have to feel welcomed. One of the singers said that the first five meters are essential for the experience of going to church.⁹ By this, she expressed her gratitude of the simple fact that within the first five meters entering the church, she was always greeted with a handshake, and she felt appreciated. Someone actually cared that she came.

In Denmark, one of the most secular countries in the world, hymns and organ music are not heard outside the churches. Not many have organ music on their iPods. Therefore, this kind of music can create an unfortunate distance. We have taken a very conscious decision that all kinds of music is worthy to be played in church. Also, we have taken a deliberate decision that no form of worship is better than any other. This means that one Sunday, it is gospel music that dominates the

⁹ Anne Feldballe Korsgaard, interview by author, December 20, 2011. Odense, Denmark, Garageband recording.

worship and the next Sunday it could be hymns, most often though, genres are blended in an effort to carry the central message of today's worship.

This has the consequence that some of the music a gospel choir singer meets, when attending church, has a familiar ring to it. Also, we always try to invite singers from the choirs to sing during Sunday worship. Most of the time, the piano player from the gospel choir is also the piano player during worship. Most Sundays, our singers can meet the choir leader in church, either participating or singing, too. It is essential that some of the people from the choir, who are members of the church, meet the singers attending church. And the significance of the piano player, the choir leader and the pastor participating in worship cannot be underestimated.

The same can be said about the music. It has to be of high quality and the musicians have to be skilled. People, who like music, will not attend a church, where the music is of poor quality. The same can be said about the sound system and video systems. The generations coming to church in these years know good quality when they see it and they walk away from bad sound experiences. I know, I do!

4.1.6 The Sixth Claim:

Diligent leadership from the pastor, choir leader and leadership team is key.

It is said that if we want the same results, we don't need to change anything. In most of the churches I know, the results ought to create an urge in us to change things.

In Odense United Methodist Church, the conflicts we had almost caused the church to die. The good thing, which came out of this, is awareness of the fact that change was less threatening than death of the church. Taking a look from the balcony, several things needed adjustment and change and now was the momentum to do it, because many had seen the need and resistance towards change itself was very low.

As a pastor and a leader, one of the primary tasks is to define the reality, take clues for the future and help articulate a vision that can build a bridge to the future. Leadership is about defining reality. The story of Nehemiah is a very good example. Nehemiah goes on an inspection of the walls of Jerusalem before he meets with the officials:

Then I said to them, You see the trouble we are in: Jerusalem lies in ruins, and its gates have been burned with fire. Come, let us rebuild the wall of Jerusalem, and we will no longer be in disgrace. I also told them about the gracious hand of my God upon me and what the king had said to me. They replied, Let us start rebuilding. So they began this good work.¹⁰

¹⁰ Nehemiah 2, 17-18. NIV

Nehemiah facilitated a definition of reality, using the clue for the future that a city needed rebuilding for its walls and his impact on Jerusalem was about much more than just building a new wall.¹¹

As a pastor, you are a leader but no one leads well alone. Therefore, it is crucial to have a leadership team around you. It is wise to have a couple of people to test your ideas on, but it is also important to have a few people who has courage to tell you, when you made a mistake, or had a bad idea.

One of the singers interviewed said she liked the fact that the choir leader, Mette Risager, wanted to lead the choir. It is important to build a culture, where the people elected for different ministries also have the permission to lead and the courage to do so.

Leadership is about more than making people feel good. It is also about ensuring that goals are met and results are obtained. When we are evaluating pastors or candidates for ordained ministry, we look upon character and competences. It is more unusual to evaluate on contribution. We need to ask, *“What does this leader accomplish?”*¹²

I think it is time to focus on effectiveness and results in ministry. Two essential tools are the “so that” question and vision, which brings me to my seventh claim, but

¹¹ Lovett H. Weems, *Church Leadership – Vision, Team, Culture and Integrity - Revised Edition* (Nashville, Abingdon Press 2010). 49 and 76.

¹² Tom Berlin and Lovett H. Weems Jr, *Bearing Fruit – Ministry with real results* (Nashville, Abingdon Press, 2011). xiii

first a remark on the “so that” question. Much too often, church starts ministry just because someone thinks it would be appropriate. Often, we forget to ask why we should do this. Therefore, every suggestion to do anything in church should be followed by “so that?” and here the expected outcome should be stated. Often times, we need to ask the “so that” question several times before we really get the answer to why we should do something. Let me give an example:

In Odense United Methodist Church, we said: We want to start a gospel choir so that new people are attracted to the church. The question needed to be asked at least one more time. We want to start a gospel choir so that new people are attracted to the church. So that new people become part of the church. The question needed to be asked at least one more time. We want to start a gospel choir so that new people are attracted to the church. So that new people become part of the church. So that new people become faithful disciples of Christ. The “so that” question is an important question helping us to define what it really is we want to achieve.¹³

4.1.7 The Seventh Claim:

Vision is everything.

Imagine having an idea of how the future will be for this church. Imagine what it would be like if all ministries in the church worked in the same direction. Imagine

¹³ Ibid., 19-34.

if all knew why we did all the things we do in church? With a good vision, articulated out in even the smallest ministry, this can be a reality. That is what I have experience in Odense United Methodist Church.

It is so liberating because it unites people in a common effort and it gives the leaders and others room to work because we all know where we are heading.¹⁴

Also, there is a great feeling of accomplishing what we believe God wants the church to be like on this particular place. Working by a vision is mind-blowing and it adds to the fellowship's identity.

As one of the interviewed singers said, when I asked him what it meant for him as a relatively new singer in the gospel choir Nardus that the church had a vision, he said:

"It feels good to know that the church knows where it is going and why."¹⁵

4.1.8 The Eight Claim:

Preaching, if it is done right, is important to unchurched people.

In my interviews, the subject of preaching appeared in every interview without me asking for it. The message is clear and unison: The preaching has to be

¹⁴ Ibid., 63-65.

¹⁵ Bo Nordgaard Jørgensen, interview by author, January 11, 2012. Odense, Denmark, Garageband recording.

good, personal, compelling, and funny and the biblical story has to be connected to everyday life.

It is my experience that sermon series can be really compelling to people. Our statistics show a significantly higher attendance in worship when we are running a sermon series. Last year, we had a series on the five languages of love, where we were talking about relationships, sex and love. This obviously made quite a few new people attend worship.

Many of the people I have interviewed mention the importance of relevant, relaxed and funny preaching. For my part, this was not the style of preaching I learned while in seminary, but today I love if people are talking back to me during the sermon.

This is demanding on pastors and everyone else involved in worship. But let us remember that it is not about pleasing what we could call a spoiled generation, it is about doing God's will in mission, with whatever means necessary to help people into a meaningful and serving relation with God and the risen Son.

4.2 Can the Gospel Choir and church contribute to the world in an authentic manner?

My church is now on a journey towards being an authentic New Testament congregation. It has changed from being a church that was self-centered and all

about the church itself, to a place of worship, where the fellowship, the breaking of bread, the teachings of the apostles, and the diaconal work is at the centre.¹⁶ The church now has an identity of being sent to the city although we have been living here for more than one hundred years, we are now living here for a reason. We are sent, bringing good news and hope to the people who live here. We feel strongly that we are an alternative community that is sent to make a powerful authentic witness to our city bringing a clear message of God's love.¹⁷

There has been a powerful change from an ecclesiocentric view of the church to a theocentric missional understanding of the ministries of the church for the better of the community.¹⁸ The early New Testament church was not about the church. The entire construction of the fellowship and eventually the church was a way to be in mission and service to the needs of the community. This also means that the church, for the first time in years, has a real connection with the community and the people living just around the block.

Through the gospel music ministry, the church has been well known for its good music and relevant services with good contemporary music, so that people

¹⁶ Acts 2, 42-47 is normative for the new church formation that we are trying to live out in Odense.

"The believers studied what the apostles taught. They shared life together. They broke bread and ate together. And they prayed. 43 Everyone felt that God was near. The apostles did many wonders and miraculous signs. 44 All the believers were together. They shared everything they had. 45 They sold what they owned. They gave each other everything they needed. 46 Every day they met together in the temple courtyard. In their homes they broke bread and ate together. Their hearts were glad and honest and true. 47 They praised God. They were respected by all the people. Every day the Lord added to their group those who were being saved."

¹⁷ Guder, *Missional Church*, 127. Clear message of God's love is the mission statement of Odense United Methodist Church.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 81.

again are coming to this church, especially when they are in a place in life, where the question of faith needs attention again. In a secular post modern country like Denmark, this typically happens when it is time to get married or when the first child comes and questions of baptism is under consideration. We are in the process of getting nearer to the centre of this community. Since we have the situation with most people in membership in the nominally strong and very respected state church, we will probably never be in the centre, but we are definitely moving away from the periphery of the community and getting closer to the centre. This is an improvement, and it creates further urge for the needs of the community.

4.2.1 Reclaiming the role of the church through song.

I think there are two things that we need to think of. One is to help people back to a theological framework of understanding. The second is to help people get familiar with a long forgotten theological language.

4.2.1.1 Providing a theological framework through song.

In the Danish culture, there is a need for a new theological framework of understanding. A couple of years back, the cartoon crisis showed us that we do not have a common understanding for the meaning of theology anymore. Whenever a person takes his or her faith seriously, Danes are scared and we do not understand it. Therefore, we were taken by surprise by the strong reactions to the Muhammed Cartoons in the Danish newspaper Jyllandsposten back in 2006. The reaction was

strong. Muslims in Denmark protested and in countries in the Middle East, the Danish flags and Danish Embassies were put on fire. Consumers all over the Middle East boycotted Danish groceries.

To this day, the paper has not yet apologized for hurting so many people's feelings. They still think they were in their right to do this, because their freedom of expression/speech comes before everything else. In my opinion, freedom of speech also involves responsibility and a choice to say nothing. We don't have a well-developed understanding of theology neither Christian nor Muslim theology.

Denmark is proud to be a Christian culture. But the way we have been living for the past century, we have reduced Christianity to cultural artifacts that have no direct influence on our daily lives. Now, Christendom is so embedded in our culture that we don't see it, when it is influencing our lives. Many Danes have come to think that Christianity is the same as Danish culture – an expression of Christendom.

Many don't know that it is our roots from Christianity that guides decisions and the building of society. We don't know it because we have lost our theological framework. One of the major reasons for this is the loss of theological language.

4.2.1.2 Providing a theological language through song.

When people do not attend church, they gradually lose contact with the Bible and the stories of Jesus fade away. In my generation, the stories were well known by our grandparents, who told them to us. Our parents – early baby boomers –

neglected the stories and did not tell them to us. Therefore, the common biblical framework and language is sadly getting lost in our culture. This is also the experience of one of the singers in the interviews.¹⁹

In my church, we are through the gospel music ministries connected to a lot of unchurched people. The biblical illiteracy that I meet is sad. I remember teaching about Passover from Exodus 12 and grown men were sad – they had never heard the story before, remarkable to find that in a so-called Christian culture!

What I find in the gospel music ministry is that we suddenly have a lot of people coming to church who actually have no church background. Many of the singers are curious and they are reacting strongly to the sermons I give and they are amazed by the lyrics we sing. It is a very strange situation to stand among people who are cultural Christians, but not believing in Christ, singing lyrics in a very emotional way, lyrics that for the most part are directly taken out of the Holy Scripture.

4.3 Church can be much more than people expect.

The church in Danish culture has lost its credibility. In my opinion, there are several reasons for this. One of the bad things that happened to the church of the

¹⁹ Alice Stærdahl Andersen, interview by author, December 21, 2011. Odense, Denmark, Garageband recording.

western world was the Constantine synthesis in 312, when Christianity became the state religion of the Roman Empire.

Until then, the church had to fight for its existence and survival. The Christians of the first church were really taking care of the widows, the orphans, the oppressed, the poor, the sick and so on. The church was fighting for justice and righteousness and Christianity was about serving and making a difference for people.

In Denmark, the dominant church – the State Church – doesn't even have to think about survival. The state will take care of that, so it is a common perception among people, and state church pastors, that it doesn't matter that the churches basically are empty on Sundays because if people really needed the church they know where to find it. As one of the most quoted Danish state church pastors puts it in an article on how gospel music seems to fill the churches:

The quality of a Danish worship service cannot be measured by the number of people attending. That would be like selling goods, without any interest in the quality.²⁰

The fact alone that he connects Danish and worship is amazing. To me, worship knows of no nationality. And to me, it is interesting if people show up or not - that is the first indicator of quality. As many of the singers interviewed indicated;

²⁰ "Gospel for Gud og hvermand." Gregers Lohse: Daily Newspaper: Berlingske Tidende, September 21., 2008. The pastor quoted is Jesper Langballe: "Kvaliteten I en dansk gudstjeneste kan ikke måles på hvor mange mennesker, der kommer. Det er det same som at sælge en vare, uden at man interesserer sig for kvaliteten."

worship as they know it has little to do with their every day life and nothing to do with their needs.

What happened to the serving of the poor, the widows, the oppressed, and the sick? Christianity became Christendom and the state church and many other churches became a provider of spiritual wellness. And who needs that?

The church has turned into something it was never intended to. By the example of Jesus and the early church, it is obvious to me that the church is called to do more than provide wellness Christendom. The church is going to serve the society and to speak against injustice, inhumanity and unrighteousness, which is also what so often is addressed in the gospel music.

In his book “The Prophetic Imagination,” Walter Brueggeman talks about the church being largely enculturated to the American ethos on consumerism. I think Brueggemann is right in his assertion that the church with its enculturation loses its ability to believe or act in a credible way in society.²¹

This phenomenon is not just found in the American context. I believe that it applies also to the European and Danish context as well. I believe that the prophetic imagination is an important voice for the church to use in times of spiritual emptiness from Christian spirituality and the dominant Christendom. Consumerism among others has taken God’s place, but the shortcomings of the financial markets have indeed revealed that consumerism was a poor replacement of God in our lives.

²¹ Walter Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination – Second Edition*, (Minneapolis, Fortress Press, 2001,) 1.

In my church, the gospel singers are experiencing the grace and freedom in God while singing. A lot of them come to us saying: *"I cannot sing, but I would love to try."* A lot of them have to learn how to relax and use their entire body for singing and letting go of anxiety.

Brueggemann describes how oppressed people cannot sing. This speaks to me as I have experienced how singing can set people free from the powers of whatever oppression they may face. Another notion about singing is that the people old enough to remember the times of World War 2 and the German occupation of Denmark speak with compassion about how people gathered for events where they sang all the traditional Danish patriotic songs. These songs embrace what Brueggemann would call grief and praise as ways of prophetic criticism and energy.²² Brueggemann reveals that all new beginnings do not come from decree but from song, which is in alignment with Second Isaiah.²³

When the birth of Jesus is proclaimed, the song of the angels is an enthronement formula. It is a new song for a new king. The songs for a new paradigm sounded from Elizabeth, who should not have been able to give birth. From Mary, being a virgin, who should not have been able to carry a child and the old dumb man Zechariah, who saw the prophetic picture of the promised future with the new king. And finally, of course, the song came from the angels who sang the new song to the outcast of those times, the shepherds.

²² Brueggemann, *Prophetic Imagination*, 117.

²³ *Ibid.*, 103

In my ministry, I see on weekly basis that singing can give oppressed people a new reality. Who is oppressing people today? It is not people in exile, but still there are persons who are well functional people, but who sense that there is something that is just not right. "Consumo ergo sum"²⁴ seems to be the mantra of the time and not everybody can be consumers to such a distinct that the commercials tell us to be. A lot of meaningful work and no time for family but still not everybody gets this. People feel oppression but do not necessarily know who, or what is oppressing them, but indeed they long for freedom and a new reality of life.

Both Jeremiah and Second Isaiah spoke out of despair and out of the liberating tradition of Moses trying to give people the opportunity to grieve and hope.²⁵ But real liberation came with singing and real energy comes from the song, which will put Yahweh on the throne, and Babylon to her grave.

Only people in covenant can sing. It is time for a new song when a new covenant inaugurates a new mode of reality. We need bold prophetic imagination to face that boldly and to catch the new tones of the new freedom and new reality of freedom for God's people. But also to take back the theological language that we lost when the church got so enculturated that it became dumb. We have to speak hope again.

²⁴ My reframing of Decartes' "cogito ergo sum"

²⁵ Brueggemann, *Prophetic Imagination*, 70.

4.4 Reclaiming hope through song.

The gospel music ministry is all about giving people back their theological framework and language, so life with God, with hope and with endurance again can find meaningful expressions. The texts provide a language of hope, grace, love and forgiveness that really is lost for many of the unchurched people. Now, it is found, although a lot of them don't know what they have found. They just love being in the church, singing and being connected to the new language of the Holy Spirit.

As a culture, we have lost a lot, which we are not yet looking for, but we do feel the longing for it. We just don't know what we really are longing for. Somebody needs to point that out. We have to reclaim hope.

In attempting to help give back to the people the theological framework and language, we face two dangers. Thiemann warns theologians against the loss of distinctive beliefs and practices of the Christian tradition that undermines the "bite" of Christian witness. On the other hand, there is a risk of losing the public realm when trying to persevere the characteristic language and patterns of Christian narrative and practice.²⁶

If Christians are to find an authentic public voice in today's culture, we must find a middle way between these two equally unhappy alternatives.²⁷

²⁶ Ronald F. Thiemann, *Constructing a Public Theology – The church in a pluralistic society*, (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1991,) 19.

²⁷ Ibid.

In my ministry with the gospel music singers, I often have to answer the hard questions and have to live with the fact that I become the exponent for whatever actions God does, to which they disagree. I have to answer questions of why God killed all the Baal prophets? Why were all the newborns in Bethlehem killed? How cruel is your God? The choir leader and the pastor do have an apologetic role.²⁸ That is a part of engaging into public ministry and it is to be taken serious that people want to discuss these things with you.

Public theology is a genuine risk-taking venture. By opening the Christian traditions to conversation with those in the public sphere, public theology opens Christian belief and practice to critique that inevitably emerges from those conversation partners.²⁹

I am confident that one of the most important tasks for a public theology is to speak to a longing world about genuine hope of a better world brought into the world by Christ. In my context, I find that the gospel music's kerugma of hope is appealing to people of just about every political and religious observance.

Thiemann seems to agree:

...one of the most important political tasks for the contemporary Christian community is to be a community of hope in a culture that is increasingly cynical about our common human future.³⁰

²⁸ Lewis, *The Diffusion of Black Gospel Music in Postmodern Denmark*, 169.

²⁹ Thiemann, *Constructing a Public Theology*, 23.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 25.

In my Danish context, we have kept the speaking of hope to ourselves. It is only heard in the churches, never in the streets. Culture has forced Christianity back into the churches so that whenever a person needs to hear a voice expressing hope they could just go to one of the (empty) churches and it would be provided.

Mathewes would think of Denmark as a very peculiar place:

Christians should be interested in thinking about public life, not just for their fates as citizens, but also for their fates as Christians. This is not a matter of argument. Christianity just is a public religion. It is not a mystery cult, nor is it fundamentally esoteric; it lives in the public.³¹

He argues that vibrant Christian faith presses us outward towards one another as fellow citizens of the Kingdom of Heaven.³²

The cynicism³³ Thiemann talks about is a result of the human temptation to lean into an apocalyptic worldview. This serves as escapism to avoid God,³⁴ which is basically what our present culture does, when it provides false hopes of salvation from ourselves in self-realization through consumerism and cynicism.

A healthy public theology will provide an eschatological worldview in opposition to the apocalyptic cynicism. This doesn't mean that the world will not end, but it means that we are not the ones to end it. The end of the world is a matter of God's will not ours. As Mathewes puts it: "*Christianity must perpetually resist its*

³¹ Charles Mathewes, *A Theology of Public Life*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007,) 25.

³² Ibid.

³³ Thiemann, *Constructing a Public Theology*, 25.

³⁴ Mathewes, *A Theology of Public Life*, 40.

*own temptation towards concluding.*³⁵ Having not yet concluded, it makes sense to speak or sing hope into the world.

Paul speaks about hope in Romans 8,24-25.³⁶ Here, he argues that a hope seen is really not a hope. We hope for what we do not yet see. We will hope for what we do not yet have. In an eschatological worldview, there is an open ending. The world is going to end, yes, but we don't know how, that is up to God, so there is still hope for a better world.

Hope is patient with unknowing; it does not allow its wishes to construct a fantasy of what will happen next.³⁷

Hope is not optimism nor is it pessimism; it is seeing things as they can be, not as they are. Hope acknowledges what happens, but it does not approve of everything that happens to us. It makes no effort to disguise its non-acceptance of reality, but it continues to hope for at better future.³⁸

Hope calls attention, not to itself, but to the world – to how the world can change.³⁹

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 41.

³⁶ "For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what he already has? But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently." Rom 8,24-25. NIV.

³⁷ Mathewes, *A Theology of Public Life*, 243.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 242-243.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 244.

Hope also creates solidarity. To be hopeful is not to be alone. Hope is not argued for, it is confessed. Which is just what happens when we are joined in singing the hope from the gospel music. It is a confession of hope. Hope is a confession of loyalty, as despair can be an act of betrayal. Hope comes to us in community. It is not just solidarity with hope itself, but solidarity with one another as well. Which really implies a public reality and place for a kerugma of hope into a world of more and more cynicism and despair.⁴⁰

4.4.1 Singing hope is a new way of living.

Hope is thus not a matter of the will or decision; it is assent, participation, cooperation – being in tune with the world, ...⁴¹

Hope is not a state of the mind or psychological disposition, it a mode of participating in the world. It is a way to response to the life we are all called to live. Hope becomes a way of living during the world.

Hope is an ascetic practice because it involves resisting the temptations to judge, to sum up, in order better to prepare ourselves to inhabit what our desire for judging shows us we want, prematurely, to possess even now. Hope is knowledge, but the recognition that all “knowledge” we have now stands under a radical eschatological judgment.⁴²

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid., 245.

Hope is a way of life, a way of suffering, an ascesis in vulnerability to change. It is hope for change that will shape our hopeful souls in light of the reality of our eschatological hope.

Hope is both realistic and fantastic, true vision and powerful imagination.⁴³

And we must realize too that hope is never generated among us, but always given to us. Hope is a prophetic gift of grace.⁴⁴ Brueggemann argues that newness from God is the only serious source of energy.⁴⁵ Hope provides us with new songs to sing while enduring the world.

It is my hope that we, as one of many churches in Denmark, will live public lives and that we will be able to invite more people to join us in singing the songs of hope.

The introduction of gospel choirs will revitalize the United Methodist Church of Odense and provide inspiration and guidelines for church renewal.

Sing to the LORD a new song;
sing to the LORD, all the earth.
Sing to the LORD, praise his name;

⁴³ Ibid., 249.

⁴⁴ Brueggemann, *The prophetic imagination*, 79.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 78.

proclaim his salvation day after day.
Declare his glory among the nations,
his marvellous deeds among all peoples.
For great is the LORD and most worthy of praise;
he is to be feared above all gods.

Psalm 96,1-4. NIV.

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APPENDIX ONE

Interview guide

Question	Answer	Remarks
Name		
Gender		
Age		
Occupation		
How many years in the choir		
	<i>Before getting connected to this church:</i>	
What did you think of gospel music?		
How was your conception of church and Christianity?		
Would you describe yourself as a believer?		
How often did you attend a service?		
How was your experience of this?		
What did you think of pastors in general?		

<p>Had you ever heard of the United Methodist Church?</p> <p>- If yes, what did you hear?</p>		
<p>What made you start singing gospel?</p>		
	<p><i>After getting connected to this church:</i></p>	
<p>What do you think of gospel music?</p>		
<p>How is your conception of church and Christianity?</p> <p>- What changed?</p> <p>- Do you know why?</p>		
<p>Will you describe yourself as a believer?</p>		
<p>How often do you attend a service?</p> <p>How is your experience of this?</p>		
<p>What do you think of pastors in general?</p>		
<p>What do you know of the United Methodist Church?</p>		

<p>Can you say that it has been a life changing decision to start singing gospel music?</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Elaborate?</p>		
	<i>At a choir rehearsal:</i>	
<p>What does it mean to you that there is devotion time in the beginning of every rehearsal evening?</p>		
<p>What does it mean to you that there is emphasis on singing with both body and soul?</p>		
<p>What does it mean to you that the songs are sung in English?</p>		
<p>Are the lyrics of any meaning to you in your daily life?</p> <p style="text-align: right;">How?</p>		
<p>What is your favorite song?</p>		
<p>Is there anything that you think a hopeful student like I need to know?</p>		

APPENDIX TWO

Lyrics from rehearsal evening with the gospel Choir Nardus

This Appendix contains the Lyrics of the songs used in the narrative of the rehearsal evening in the gospel choir Nardus. The songs are listed in alphabetical order.

Here I Am Again

Hans Christian Jochimsen

Here I am again
In need of You – to see me through
Hear me once again
I pray that You – will see me through

On my own I know – I won't make it home
You have never failed, no one else but You
Lord, will see me through

Here I am again
In need of You – to see me through
Hear me once again
I pray that You – will see me through

On my own I know – I won't make it home
You have never failed, no one else but You
Lord, will see me through

Jesus is right here

Walt Withman

What if He cares for you
What if He sees you through
What if He died for you
To say He loves you

We serve a loving God
So merciful and kind
He reaches out
To say He love you

Jesus is right here now
Jesus is right here
Jesus is right here
To say He loves you

Lead: You don't have to be afraid
Choir: He can handle your cares

You don't have to be afraid
Choir: No no He an handle your cares
Lead: You don't have to be afraid
Choir: He can handle your cares
Lead: You don't have to be afraid
Choir: No no He an handle your cares
Yes, Jesus loves me
Yes, Jesus loves me
Yes, Jesus loves me
For the Bible tells me ...

Jesus is right here now
Jesus is right here
Jesus is right here
To say He loves you

Lift the Savior Up

Olanda Draper

Lift the Saviour up
He's worthy
Lift the Saviour up
He's worthy to be praised
Lift the Saviour up
He's worthy
Jesus is worthy to be praised

From the rising of the sun
He's worthy to be praised
To the going down of the same
He's worthy to be praised

Hallelujah hallelujah
Lets exalt the name of the Lord
Hallelujah hallelujah
Jesus is worthy to be praised

Oh come let us adore Him
Oh come let us adore Him
Oh come let us adore Him

Christ the Lord is
 Christ the Lord is
 Worthy to be praised
 Worthy to be praised

Worthy of all the honor
 Worthy of all the glory
 Worthy of all the praise
 He's worthy

The Lords Prayer

Hans Christian Jochimsen

Our, our Father which art in heaven
 Hallowed be thy name
 Thy kingdom come, thy will be done
 On earth as in hea-ea-eaven
 Thy kingdom come, thy will be done
 on earth

Give us this day our daily bread
 And supply us with all that we need
 See to those who haven't got anything at all
 Hear their sigh, comfort them
 every time they cry
 Oh - Lord, you are the only one who can
 satisfy
 Our deepest need inside

Thy Kingdom come
 Thy will be done
 On earth

Forgive us Lord, for we have sinned
 Thy righteous way, we abandoned
 Help us today, to forgive our debtors

Lead us not
 into temptations
 But deliver us
 from all evil
 That corrupt us and leads us from your way

Aaaahhhh
 Thy Kingdom come thy will be done

Thine is the Kingdom the power and glory
 Forever and ever, Amen!

Thy Kingdom come
 Thy will be done

Amen!

With my Whole Heart

Nolan Williams Jr. - Lamar Campbell

With my whole heart
 Lord, I will sing to thee
 With my whole heart
 I'll make melody
 I'll focus on thy glory
 So I can come before Thee
 With my whole heart

Standing in
 thy presence
 There's joy
 Unspeakable and free
 I bow in awe and reverence
 Crying holy, how I adore thee
 With my whole heart
 Lord, I will sing to thee
 With my whole heart
 I'll make melody
 I'll focus on thy glory
 So I can come before Thee
 With my whole heart

Standing in thy presence
 There's joy
 Unspeakable and free
 I bow in awe and reverence
 Crying holy, how I adore thee
 Yes adore Thee

With my whole Heart
 With my whole Heart
 With my whole Heart

You Hold My World

Israel Houghton

Take my heart
 Lord will you take my heart
 As I surrender to Your will

I confess You are my righteousness
 And until You move me I'll be still
 And know that You are God

You hold my world in Your hand
 You hold my world in Your hand and
 I am amazed at Your love
 I am amazed that You love me
 You hold my world in Your hand
 You hold my world in Your hand and
 I'm not afraid - my world is safe
 in Your Hand Oh In Your hand

Take my life
 Lord You will take my life
 You are the reason that I live
 reason that I live - reason that I live

I believe You have forgiven me
 And by Your grace I will forgive
 And know And know
 That You that You are God
 And know that You are God

Ohhhhh oh oh oh oh uhhh

You won't let go of me. You won't let go
 Never let go
 You won't let go of me. You won't let go
 Never let go
 You won't let go of me. You won't let go
 Never let go
 You won't let go of me. You won't let go
 Never let go
 You will take care of me. You will take care
 Always take care

Won't let go
 Won't let go

You hold my world in Your hand
 You hold my world
 And you won't let go

APPENDIX THREE

Lyrics from gospel music worship service

This Appendix contains the Lyrics of the songs used in the narrative of the gospel music worship with the gospel choir Emmaus. The songs are listed in alphabetical order.

Blessings Are Falling

Walt Withmann - CSC

Blessings are falling are falling are falling
Blessings are falling are falling are falling
Like the sweet sweet rain
Blessings are falling are falling
are falling on me

Favour is ...

Mercy is ...

Oh Lord I receive Your blessings
Oh Lord I receive Your grace
Oh Lord I will dance forever more

Blessings are falling are falling are falling
Blessings are falling like the rain
Blessings are falling are falling are falling
Blessings are falling like the rain

Breathe

Donnie McClurkin

This is the air I breathe
This is the air I breathe
Your holy presence
Living in me

This is my daily bread
this is my daily bread
Your very word
Spoken to me

And I --- I'm desperate for You
And I --- I'm lost without You

This is the air I breathe

This is the air I breathe
This is the air I breathe

Cut

Plumb

I'm not a stranger
No, I am yours
With crippled anger
And tears that still drip sore

A fragile frame aged
With misery
And when our eyes meet
I know you see

I do not wanna be afraid
I do not wanna die inside just to breathe in
I'm tired - of feeling so numb
Relief exists I find it when
I am cut

I may seem crazy
Or painfully shy
And these scars wouldn't be so hidden
If you would just look me in the eye
I feel alone here and cold here
Though I don't want to die
But the only anesthetic that makes me feel
anything kills inside

I do not wanna be afraid
I do not wanna die inside just to breathe in
I'm tired of feeling so numb
Relief exists I find it when

I am cut
Pain
I am not alone

I am not alone

I'm not a stranger
No I am yours

Footprints In the Sand

Leona Lewis

You walked with me
Footprints in the sand
And helped me understand
Where I'm going
You walked with me
When I was all alone
With so much I no along the way
Then I heard you say

I promise you I'm always there
When your heart is filled with sorrow and
despair
I'll carry you
When you need a friend
You'll find my footprints in the sand

I see my life
Flash across the sky
So many times have I
Been so afraid ooh
And just when I
Have thought I've lost my way
You give me strength to carry on
That's when I heard you say

When I'm weary
Well I no you'll be there
And I can feel you
When you say

Here I Am

Leona Lewis

This is a crazy world
These can be lonely times
It's hard to know who's on your side
most of the time

Who can you really trust
Who do you really know
Is there anybody out there
Who can make you feel less alone

Some times you just can't make it on your own

If you need a place where you can run
If you need a shoulder to cry on
I'll always be your friend
When you need some shelter from the rain
When you need a healer for your pain
I will be there time and time again
When you need someone to love you
- Here I am

If you have broken dreams
just lay them all on me
I'll be the one who understand
so take my hand

If you reach emptiness
you know I'll do my best
To fill you up with all the love
That I can show someone
I promise you you'll never walk alone

Everybody needs somebody who
keep a heart and soul in two

Hold Me Now

Kirk Franklin

The spring of April's gone, the leaves
have all turned brown
The children are all grown up
and there's no one around
I'm looking over my life and all the mistakes
I've made and I'm afraid, afraid

Somebody told me that You would wash all
my sins, and cleanse me from the scars that
are so deep within. So I'm calling to you, if you
can hear me - I don't know how
I was wond'rin, can you hold me now?

You are the only One that's patient when I fall
Your angels come to save me ev'ry time I call
You don't laugh at me
when I make mistakes and cry
You're not like man, You understand - me

To ev'ry broken person
that may hear this song
To ev'ry boy or girl that
feel their smile is gone
I know exactly how it feels
to lay in the bed at night and cry, and cry

Don't you worry, God is faithful and He cares
 about the tears you drop
 and the pain you feel, He's there
 When you are weak that's when
 He's strong, even though you don't know how

God can and He will hold you now
 God can and He will hold you now
 God can and He will hold you now
 Don't you worry He can hold you now

More Than Anything

Lamar Campbell

I lift my hands in total adoration unto You
 You reign on the throne for You
 are God and God alone
 Because of You my cloudy days are gone
 I can sing to You this song
 I just want to say that I love You
 more than anything

Love me in Your arms
 You are my shelter from the storm
 When all my friends were gone
 You were right there all along
 I've never known a love like this before
 I just want to say that I love You more than
 anything

I love You Jesus
 I worship and adore You
 Just want to tell You
 Lord, I love You more than anything

I love You Jesus
 I worship and adore You
 Just want to tell You
 Lord, I love You more than anything

I love You Jesus
 I worship and adore You
 Just want to tell You
 Lord, I love You more than anything

Take Rest in Me

Unknown

Oh Holy Spirit,
 Take rest in me
 Make me Your temple
 Restore my soul
 My heart is Yours Lord
 This I decree
 Oh Holy Spirit
 Take rest in me
 Oh Holy Spirit
 Take rest in me

Total Praise

Richard Smallwood

Lord I will lift mine eyes to the hills
 Knowing my help is coming from You
 Your peace, You give me
 In time of the storm.
 B You are the source of my strength
 You are the strength of my life
 I lift my hands in total praise to You

Amen

What a Friend

L. Spencer Smith

Never been down a time
 When You didn't pick me up
 Never been to empty
 When You didn't feel my cup
 Never been out so far
 When You didn't pull me in
 Oo Wee, Oh year – what a friend
 Oo Wee, Oh year – what a friend

Never been down a time
 When You didn't pick me up
 Never been to empty, no
 When You didn't feel my cup

Never been
 Never been
 Never been out so far
 When You didn't pull me in
 Oo Wee, Oh year – what a friend
 Oo Wee, Oh year – what a friend

I've learned how to lean
 And depend on Jesus
 He's been my friend, sho'nuff
 And He's been my guide

I would be nothing
 Without You in my life
 Oo Wee, Oh year – what a friend
 Oo Wee, Oh year – what a friend

What a friend – what a friend – what a friend
 What a friend of mine
 He's a mighty good friend
 What a friend – what a friend – what a friend
 What a friend of mine

Personal friend of mine
 Personal friend of mine
 Personal friend of mine
 Personal friend of mine

Personal

You Covered Me

Donald Lawrence

I could've lost my mind,
 wanted to give up so many times.
 But God was my ancor,
 a consistent waymaker.
 Hez, I'm grateful God covered me

Well the enemy came against me
 Atacked my body and my ministry
 But what God ordains
 He will maintain
 I'm grateful, He covered me

You covered me,
 Hand of protection all around me
 If not for Your Grace and your mercy
 Thank You Lord, You covered me

You covered me
 Hand op protection all around me
 If not for Your Grace and your mercy
 Thank You Lord, You covered me

I failed so many times
 But Your love devine
 You touched this soul of mine,
 And restored me

You covered me
 Hand op protection all around me
 Your grace and mercy covered me
 I clould've lost my mind
 Wanted to quit many times
 But, God, what You ordain
 I'm a witness, You will maintain

You covered me
 Hand op protection all around me
 Your Grace and mercy covered me

You covered me