

Why Bother? A Socio-Theological Inquiry into Dimensions of Compassion
In the Boomer Culture of Ottawa

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To Paul, Gregory, Thomas, Lorraine, Micki, family and friends

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GLOSSARY

Boomer. A term applied to people born in the years 1946-1965 which I have used to include late Pre-Boomers; namely, those who, born before 1946 were in the work force from 1960 to the time of my research in 2011-12 and are still active in the community. I interchange the term Boomers with young seniors for this demographic.

Conscientização. This is the Portuguese term for Paulo Freire's model of consciousness raising or removing the fear of freedom. As he described it in his preface to the 1967 edition of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* this process "enrols people in the search for self affirmation and thus avoids fanaticism". (P37)

Faith. A word that refers to belief and/or trust in someone or something expressed as a doctrine, ideology, personal experience, tradition or insight.

Frameworks. A concept of Charles Taylor he uses to refer to immanent or closed and transcendent or open frameworks which frame world views. The closed framework refers to what he calls in *A Secular Age* the "self sufficient immanent order" (543) which accepts the eclipse/ denial of transcendence (371). The transcendent or open framework by contrast acknowledges transcendence and the indwelling of the divine spirit, of God, in human life.

Inter-human. A word used by Edward Farley in *Deep Symbols: Their Postmodern Effacement and Reclamation* (1996) to differentiate the levels of obligation for each other experienced between those living within large institutional frameworks and those within intimate communities; that is, "This separation or alienation between the interhuman and the institutional may be what we mean by "advanced industrial society." (44).

Metaphor. A word which refers to an object or idea that imaginatively alludes to, and enlightens a reference to someone or something. According to Richard Osmer in *Practical Theology: An Introduction* metaphor allows for locating similarity in difference as in using a metaphor as a model to assess theory.

Narrative. According to the Canadian Oxford Dictionary (1998) a narrative is an oral or written account of connected events in the order of their happening. In this thesis I have used the word narrative to refer to a reflected coherent, if not structured, account of a sequence of actions which may underlie a belief or idea. I include in my use of the word narrative the core symbols, images and rituals holding in memory key events that inform individual and collective identity.

Practical Theology. A method of theology that brings together practical reason and tradition in conceptualising and implementing the common good. It was born out of the rebirth of practical philosophies that emphasise practical wisdom (*phronesis*) over theoretical or technical reason.

Praxis. A Greek word used to define a theory-laden practice in fundamental practical theology.

Religion. This refers to collective belief in and worship of a higher power defined by doctrines, rituals, symbols, traditions and culture.

Spirituality. A term used to refer to the life of the spirit. Spirituality in this sense can be amorphous and experiential or structured and reasoned around a specific community, history, doctrine, ritual or symbols as understood in the term Christian life which referred historically to life in the Holy Spirit. .

Social Imaginary. A phrase used by Charles Taylor in *A Secular Age* (172), with a usage somewhat similar to the word vision of Don Browning, to indicate something bigger than social reality. The concept here is the way ordinary people “imagine” their social surroundings which is communicated in images, rituals and stories.

Social Capital. According to Robert Putnam’s usage this word refers to networks and acts of reciprocity as both private and public goods; that is as a private good in personal networks that serve individual needs and interests, and as a public good in agreed upon ways of doing things through behaviour and institutions that bind a community to a common vision and purpose.

Story. An account of past or imaginary events, a tale or anecdote according to the Oxford Canadian Dictionary (1998). To make a distinction between story and narrative I have used the word story in referring to a more anecdotal telling of something real or imagined.

Validity Claims. A phrase referring to truthful communication in practical theology that defines moral and cognitive claims. In doing practical theology according to Don Browning in *A Fundamental Practical Theology* there are five such criteria which must be addressed: vision, obligation, tendencies and needs, environment/context, rules and roles.

Vision. In the practical theology of Don Browning this word constitutes the “envelope of practical reason”; meaning that a vision shapes the world view within which the inner core of practical reason works (*A Fundamental Practical Theology*, 1971, 107).

WWI. World War I

WWII. World War II

ABSTRACT

Ontario will soon become an aging society (2017) at a time when this once rich province has become a have not province in Canada according to definitions used to assess federal-provincial transfer payments. In the past half century since the 1960's the public culture has shifted from one dominated by Anglo-Saxon Christian values and social norms to one that is highly urbanized and multicultural seeking to welcome and balance the values and norms of many cultures and faiths. Much has changed in the life time of what is now the aging Boomer generation. Practical theology provides an approach to practical moral reasoning and practical wisdom in the light of Christian tradition with which to engage in the ethical and moral challenges in contemporary culture. From the perspective of Christian tradition compassion at the collective and personal levels will be essential to ensure that future generations have the means with which to carry forward the tradition of a just and caring society. Such a society must demonstrate respect for human dignity of the individual while assuming a collective responsibility for the common good by engaging the voices of people most affected by the interests of the powerful. Compassion needs hope, and hope needs faith in something life giving. This dissertation presents an approach for young seniors with which to begin to create this future through locating in their life stories the sources of faith that inspires hope in life with the freedom to sustain compassionate engagement with those on the margins of society, particularly frail elders in the years ahead.

INTRODUCTION

A major demographic shift occurred in the years after WWII when returning soldiers found jobs and settled into married life after decades of economic and political turmoil. The resulting boom in births is now coming full cycle as this major demographic surge ages and eventually dies off over the next fifty years. By 2031 one quarter of the Canadian population is expected to be 65 and over, and the number of very old people will be a growing percentage of the aging population if today's public health care standards are sustainable. This societal challenge occurs in a secular public culture guided by a utilitarian public philosophy that seeks the greatest good for the greatest number of people.

The purpose of this dissertation is to shed some light and understanding on the practical moral question of dimensions of compassion in respect of aging in an aging secularised society. The national capital of Ottawa, the location for this research, is a bilingual English-French speaking city composed of on the one hand, different Christian traditions in a multi-denominational, increasingly multi-ethnic English speaking community, and on the other hand, the historic, and until recent years, more homogenous Roman Catholic culture of the Francophone community¹.

The vision of the modern state in Canada is peace, order and good government that require legislation, revenue collection and programmes articulated in rational, universalistic policies that provide the greatest good for the greatest number of citizens. The Christian vision of life in a dominant Christian culture according to Thomas

¹ A very recent book by Paul-Emile Roy, *La crise spirituelle* (Montreal, Bellarmin, 2012) covers the evolution of the Church and spirituality in the culture of Quebec since the 1950's in what he refers to as the great failure of the Quiet Revolution to be true to its own cultural memory.

O'Meara, a Dominican emeritus professor of the theology at Notre Dame University in Indiana, assumes that the rules and the roles of citizens entail service and caring.² The question driving this dissertation is how can a generation without a shared moral narrative of compassion come together voluntarily to create and sustain service and care for frail seniors in a compassionate aging society.

My research question was influenced initially by research in Australia on the spiritual dimension of aging by Elizabeth MacKinlay, inaugural director at the Centre for Ageing and Pastoral Studies at St Mark's National Theological Centre in Canberra. Her research as presented in *The Spiritual Dimension of Ageing* used an adaptation of a Spiritual Health Inventory for Elderly People (SHIE) in looking at the connection between varieties of spirituality, faith, hope and active engagement in life among seniors.³ My study includes religious faith and volunteering in the triangle of culture, religious affiliation and social commitments. Quantitative research has been undertaken since 2001 in Finland by the practical theologian, Anna Birgitta Yeung Pessi, on the triangle of religiosity, volunteering and social capital.⁴ She cites the work of R.A. Cnaan to highlight the interest of her research, making the point that only a few studies have completed socio-demographic comparisons concerning volunteering and religious

² Thomas O'Meara, F O.P., *Theology of Ministry: Completely Revised Edition*. (New York: Paulist Press, 1999) 5.

³ Elizabeth MacKinlay, *The Spiritual Dimension of Ageing* (London: Jessica Kingsley, 2001) Chapter 2 "Examining spirituality and Ageing" 25-44.

⁴ Anne Birgitta Yeung, "An Intricate Triangle – Religiosity, Volunteering, and Social Capital: The European Perspective, the Case of Finland," *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly* 33/3 September 2004, 401-422 On page 403 Yeung cites Cnaan R.A., A. Kasternakis, and R. J. Wineburg. "Religious people, religious congregations, and volunteerism in human services: Is there a link?," *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly* 22, (1993), 33-51.

motivation. R.A. Cnaan did earlier research similar to that of Yeung and found that he had arrived at the same conclusion as Yeung; that is, that people over 65 prior to 2001 tended to volunteer in both the churches and the wider society. Yeung refers to this effect of religiosity (affiliation and internalized conviction) and this wider volunteering as bridging faith and creating social capital.

Charles Taylor's in-depth philosophical analysis of the place of faith in modern and post modern Western culture has guided my reflections on contemporary culture. Insights on the legacy of a Christian past have been studied by the French sociologist of religion, Danièle Hervieu-Léger. She refers to this legacy as a chain of the memory of religion that continues to shed light on the importance of religion and moral values as an historical influence on modern society. The American sociologist Robert Putnam and Canadian sociologists Michael Adams and Reginald Bibby have provided data and analysis on values and norms of the Boomer generation in English speaking North America generally; with particular attention to values, norms and the place of religion in Canada by the latter two.

The research question concerns the narratives and spiritual resources that inform the dimensions of compassion for collective responsibility in the Boomer demographic in English speaking Ottawa. Stephen Bevans refers to the two elements of contextual theology as "taking seriously" the experience of the past by which he means Christian texts and traditions and the experience of the present or context; namely, the socio-economic environment and social change.⁵ An episode of crisis within a community triggers reflection on the need for change. Practical theologians recognise that change is

⁵ Stephen Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, rev.ed. (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2002) xvi.

accomplished in logically consecutive movements as follows: informed critical reflection on the crisis; relevant wisdom from the faith traditions of the community; a dialogue between traditional sources of moral guidance and the values and norms of the real world interpreted by the human sciences; and finally, the articulation and application of a plan of action to implement change. There are four pragmatic questions to be considered. “What’s going on?” “Why is this going on?” “What ought to be going on?” “How might we respond?”⁶

Richard Osmer, an American practical theologian, regards the significance of practical theology as a theology that informs, and is informed by, ministry or pastoral action that occurs within human structures that experience periods of stability and instability varying between evolutionary and revolutionary changes.⁷ Elaine Graham approaches practical theology with a wide perspective and knowledge of contemporary everyday life and faith experience in a polyglot secular world. In her introduction to *Transforming Practice: Pastoral Theology in an Age of Uncertainty* she refers to her model of practical/pastoral theology as a “critical theology of Christian practice” that works with various sources and “alternative strands” of Christian tradition to arrive at a critical understanding of the importance of practical wisdom in Christian life. Graham’s approach to transforming practice validates social trends as “sources of Christian concern and Divine revelation”.⁸ Transforming a situation of crisis into a situation good for

⁶ Richard R. Osmer, *Practical Theology: An Introduction* (Grand Rapids, Mich., Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2008), 4.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 203.

⁸ Elaine Graham, *Transforming Practice: Pastoral Theology in an Age of Uncertainty*, (Eugene Oregon: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2002), 96.

humankind requires critical analysis by people affected by the crisis. Paulo Freire's term, *conscientização* to describe transformation as a process of critical reflection on theory laden practice⁹ is an important documented experience in understanding transformation in the context of practical theology.

Don Browning was an early leader in defining critical aspects of practical reasoning. For Browning, practical theology can be read as either a religiously oriented practical philosophy, or, as a practical philosophy of religion.¹⁰ He challenges the practical reasoning that takes place in religious communities with the question "in what way do religious communities exhibit reason?"¹¹ to which the answer calls upon reflective thinkers to make frequent turns around corners of "cultural deconstruction and reconstruction".¹² He integrates the norm of practical wisdom or *phronesis*, in each of four fundamental movements of transformation in practical theology. Religious communities he wrote, like all human activities change according to changing circumstances "Religious communities go from moments of consolidated practice to moments of deconstruction to new, tentative reconstructions and consolidations."¹³ Browning claims that religious communities "constitute powerful embodiments of

⁹ Paulo Freire (1921-1997) in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* and *Pedagogy in Process* developed a model for what is now referred to as a transformational critical pedagogy to initiate questions regarding what is going on, why, and how to create change. This teaching method is congruent with the practice-theory-practice methodology of practical theology.

¹⁰ Don Browning, *A Fundamental Practical Theology: Descriptive and Strategic Proposals* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), 3.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 1.

¹² *Ibid.*, 7.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 6.

practical rationality” by which “their religious meanings can free practical rationality to function all the better”.¹⁴

The movement from practice to theory to a renewed practice is the practical reasoning that occurs whenever change is required to respond appropriately to changing circumstances. Practical reasoning becomes practical moral reasoning when critical reflection on Christian tradition is engaged in a critical assessment of changing circumstances. Browning claims that narratives and metaphors of Christian tradition are implicit in the practical wisdom called upon in ethical decisions regarding social change.¹⁵ In fundamental practical theology, theory-laden practice is called *praxis*. Four questions guide this movement to a strategic practical theological *praxis*: knowledge of the situation in all its particularity including the competing religio-cultural narratives at play; finding the morally correct balance between these competing narratives; defending the validity of the position taken; and finally communicating effectively the process of change.¹⁶

Don Browning regards fundamental practical theology as “critical reflection on the church’s dialogue with Christian sources and other communities of experience and interpretation with the aim of guiding its action toward social and individual transformation”.¹⁷ The first of four movements of practical wisdom in addressing a need

¹⁴ Browning, *Fundamental Practical Theology*, 10.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 10.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 55-56.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 36.

for change or renewal he refers to as Descriptive Theology.¹⁸ The task in this movement is a descriptive and critical analysis of the theory laden practices of a social issue in contemporary culture that generates theological reflection. The first movement covers the first two chapters. Chapter One describes the social situation being examined in the context of a review of some currents in contemporary western culture that are challenged by this situation. Chapter Two is the empirical research into dimensions of compassion in Ottawa. The second movement constituting Chapter 3, referred to as Historical Theology, is a review of selected normative texts of Christian tradition that deal with dimensions of compassion in Scripture and Christian practice.¹⁹

The third movement in Chapter Four, titled Systematic Theology, investigates systematically the general themes of Christian tradition that respond to the general questions in the social situation of the research question.²⁰ Chapter Four brings into conversation the dimensions of compassion in Christian tradition in Chapter Three with those in contemporary western and local cultures in Chapters 1 and 2. Compassion understood as suffering with others [*The Oxford Dictionary, 1933*]²¹ must respect ethical judgements, and in so doing calls on theology for insight and guidance in working theologically with the social sciences. Biblical scholar Walter Brueggemann makes the point that in post modern culture as in the biblical tradition, speech rather than

¹⁸ Browning, *Fundamental Practical Theology*, 47-48.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 49.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 51.

²¹ *The Oxford Dictionary*, (London, Oxford University Press, 1933).

metaphysics is the expression of God's presence in human history.²² This insight is particularly helpful for correlating faith and culture in contemporary popular culture that is not familiar with religious intellectual traditions and images. The fourth and final movement in Chapter Five is referred to as Strategic Practical Theology. This movement considers the means, strategies and rhetorics for transforming a situation.²³ This fourth movement is concerned with the validation and effective communication of the practical moral reasoning and *praxis* called for in order to transform the concrete situation that initiated the cycle.

The method for the empirical research was qualitative research using oral and written interviews and field notes in my role as a participant observer. This research data together with critical observations on contemporary culture from the literature research has formed the basis of a grounded theory in respect of dimensions of compassion in contemporary culture. The research design model for grounded theory work in qualitative research that provided the flexibility for bringing together the data for analysis according to Don Browning's method was the interactive hourglass research design model of Joseph Maxwell²⁴. In this design the research question is located between the purpose of the research and the conceptual context of the problems that are in constant interaction with the questions arising in the research method (interviews and field notes) and the validity tests for the research findings. Don Browning's method provides five levels of

²² Walter Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Press, 1997), 64-65.

²³ Browning, *Fundamental Practical Theology*, 56.

²⁴ Joseph Maxwell, A., *Qualitative Research Design: An Interactive Approach*, (Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, 1996), 5-7.

validity claims for a truthful communication of the emerging grounded theory in this thesis that work together as a system of practical thinking in truthful communication. The validity claims for this grounded theory are: vision (metaphysical) or world view; obligations or normative ethical claims consistent with the vision; tendencies and needs (the pre-moral needs of humankind); socio-political and ecological constraints; and the concrete patterns of acting (rules and roles)²⁵.

I, the researcher, am a member of the very fortunate generation of Canadians born between 1940-1965 who have enjoyed over a half century of economic opportunity, social development, and peace. I took up the question of compassion and culture upon retirement from a career in the Foreign Service when at the request of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Ottawa I joined the Interfaith Network for Isolated Seniors. In this assignment I came to appreciate the diversity of the human, community and public financial resources needed to sustain aging in an aging society. These are resources that might not be as available for aging Boomers as they had come to expect of their tax investments in generous public funding of health and social programmes. The circumstances of an aging society are a moral challenge for the Christian community, a fact that was confirmed in *A Vision for the Aging Church: Renewing Ministry for and by Seniors* by Michael Parker, a Canadian emeritus theologian at Regent College, University of British Columbia and his American collaborator, physician James Houston. They state

²⁵ Browning, *Fundamental Practical Theology*, 71.

in respect of aging in an aging society that “care giving will be the great test of character this century, and yet the modern church is virtually mute on the topic”.²⁶

I see the need for a Seniors Ministry in the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Ottawa, and for other Christian communities to take leadership together in creating neighbourhood pastoral ministries. I propose as a strategic practical outcome of this research two action/reflection programmes of formation for young seniors in respect of their own aging. One is a series of workshops for neighbourhood churches or seniors’ centres and the other is a certificate programme at Saint Paul University for Boomers who engage in caring for seniors. Spirituality in aging and engagement in community building for frail seniors by young seniors would be integral topics for putting reflection into action. The goal would be to help young seniors reflect upon the religious or spiritual sources of their hope in life that will guide and nourish their relationships and their spiritual awareness as they age. My conclusion is a post Vatican II renewed emphasis on pastoral action as the work of all the baptized, laity and ordained within “a community which, accepting a vision of humanity and a faith in unseen divine presence is essentially and unavoidably ministerial”.²⁷

²⁶ James M. Houston and Michael Parker, *A Vision for the Aging Church: Renewing Ministry for and by Seniors*, (Downers Grove, Ill.: Intervarsity Press, 2011), 39.

²⁷ Thomas F. O’Meara, *Theology of Ministry* rev.ed. (New Jersey: Paulist Press, 1999), 5.

Chapter 1: A Descriptive Theology

1.1 Introduction

The task of this chapter is Descriptive Theology, an understanding of what Browning refers to as three components of “common human experience”; namely, the socio-cultural history of individual agents, interpretations of institutional patterns and practices, and interpretations of the cultural and religious symbols that give meaning to individual and institutional action.¹ Two questions guide this movement of practical theology: “What’s going on?” and “Why is this going on?” This chapter concerns a socio-cultural shift now underway as Canada begins to shift from a young population to an aging society sometime around 2017.

Horizons in social science research refer to the outer influences, the periphery of consciousness which shapes human sensibilities and informs a practical moral resolution of a crisis when transformation is necessary.² The social change underway in our city as well as across the nation is the aging of our society and the limitations foreseen now regarding the public financial resources available for adequate dignified care for frail seniors. The research question of this dissertation concerns the spiritual resources in the Boomer culture that might inspire compassion and care offered by young seniors for frail seniors with limited finances, and a limited able caring circle of family and friends, if existent in the later years.

¹ Browning, *A Fundamental Practical Theology: Descriptive and Strategic Proposals*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), 61.

² *Ibid.*, 91.

The task of this chapter is to explore the roots and culture informing the world views or vision of the Boomer generation in order to understand and nurture the obligations of compassion within this demographic. The challenge lies in the interface between culture, volunteering and spiritual resources for faith, hope and practice in a time in history when autonomy, authenticity and individualism have become significant cultural values. In the words of Richard Osmer the first task is to “discern patterns and dynamics in particular episodes, situations or contexts”³ in order to explore a correlation between the contemporary local cultural context and our Christian tradition. I want to determine if present practices of public and private care in Canada, specifically in the capital city of Ottawa, that have been formed by Christian memory and tradition are sustainable when Christian memory fades in the face of normative societal values that favour human flourishing. While I cannot answer that question precisely, current public discussion polls that seem to favour the right of the autonomous person to select the time and means of death suggests that the Christian normative value on the sanctity of life from conception to natural death right is not publicly sustainable. My research interviews were used to determine if the Boomer generation used Christian tradition spontaneously as a reference to questions of fulfilment and fears for the future.

My first step in this chapter is to present a range of demographic, economic and social facts that challenge the capacity of our local society to meet the needs of frail seniors in an aging society. Following the presentation of these facts I explore the cultural context of a particular demographic sector; namely, educated and mainly retired English

³ Richard Osmer, *Practical Theology: An Introduction*, (Grand Rapids, Mich., Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2008), 4.

speaking seniors 70 years of age and under in Ottawa who have sufficient financial security to be in a position to volunteer generously and compassionately in meeting the needs of frail seniors and other marginalized groups. As stated in the Introduction culture is considered for this dissertation in the context of the norms, narratives and practices associated with the commitments and activities of everyday life. I have followed what Browning refers to as the essential elements of a valid test of our cultural context by beginning with what he refers to as “the situated richness” of a practical question.⁴ The context of the question frames the vision and expectations of life of which the key elements for this chapter are the socio-economic and physical environmental factors which form the obligations, needs, rules and roles guiding Boomers as they go about their daily lives.

1.2 An Aging Society

1.2.1 Demographic Facts

On 1 January 2011 the first wave of the Boomers born in 1946 turned 65 years of age and applied for their Old Age Security pensions. Suddenly concern about the coming of the aging of the Canadian population was “on the radar screen” as a subject for economic, social, and political policy analysts, scholars and media pundits. According to Statistics Canada’s usage, Canada will officially become an aging society when the number of people 65 and over is greater than the number of people 16 and under. This phenomenon is expected to occur nationally between the years 2015-2017. According to the Ontario Department of Finance 2013 report on the national 2006 census by Statistics

⁴ Browning, *Fundamental Practical Theology*, 94.

Canada, the province of Ontario becomes an aging society in 2016 when the number of people 65 and over is greater than those 14 and under.⁵ When that inversion occurs, Ontario, the Atlantic Provinces, Quebec and Saskatchewan will join a number of other aging societies⁶ – most European countries, Japan, China. In 2009 the percentage of seniors in the Canadian population was 14% compared to 8% in 1960. Statistics Canada indicated in their Survey Number 3602⁷ in 2010 that using low, medium and high growth rate projections based on the population mix of today one quarter or more of the population would be 65 and over by 2036. According to urban and social planners with the City of Ottawa this shift, all things being equal, could mean for the city an increase from 110,000 seniors in 2012 to 250,000 by 2031. The Statistics Canada study also estimated that nationally the working age population would decrease from 69% in 2009

⁵ Ontario Ministry of Finance Ontario Population Projection Update Spring 2013 based on the 2006 Census “The number of seniors aged 65 and over is projected to more than double from about 2.0 million, or 14.6 per cent of population in 2012, to almost 4.2 million, or 24.0 per cent, by 2036. By 2016, for the first time, seniors will account for a larger share of population than children aged 0–14. <http://www.fin.gov.on.ca/en/economy/demographics/projections/#s2> accessed 28/11/13.

⁶ According to Statistics Canada projections based on the 2006 census the proportion of seniors in Atlantic Canada and Quebec is projected to be markedly higher by 2031, ranging from 25.3% of the total population in Quebec to 29.5% in Newfoundland and Labrador. In the western provinces, demographic factors and migration patterns within the immediate future are expected to work in the opposite direction where higher birth rates and/or an influx of migrants from other provinces are expected to slow the current growth of the over 65 population. By 2031 however, the proportion of seniors in the western provinces is nonetheless projected to range from a low of 21.4% in Alberta to a high of 24.9% in neighbouring Saskatchewan. In Ontario the number of seniors aged 65 and over is projected to more than double from 1.8 million, or 13.9% of the population in 2010, to 4.1 million, or 23.4%, by 2036. By 2036 other than Ontario will have more than the national average of a quarter of the population aged 65 and over according to the federal government. http://www4.hrsdc.gc.ca/.3ndic.1t.4r@-eng.jsp?iid=33#M_2. (accessed 2 February 2012).

⁷ Statistics Canada Demography Division. ‘Population Projections for Canada, Provinces and Territories 2009-2036’ (published by the Ministry of Industry 2010). www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/91-520-x/91-520-x2010001-eng.pdf. (accessed 2 February 2012).

to 60% or less of the population by 2036. These numbers imply a rising median age of the population from 40 in 2009 to 45 in 2036 and somewhere closer to 47 in 2061.

The number of frail old will increase dramatically in the years ahead when the percentage of the working age population is expected to be proportionately lower. According to the 2006 Statistics Canada Census the numbers of Canadians over 80 in 2006 was 1 in 30, but by 2056 that proportion could be as high as 1 in 10 should life styles remain the same and longevity continues to rise. By 2036 this probability would anticipate 3.3 million people over 80 rising to 5 million by 2061. The 90+ age group could triple in size in the same time frame from 79,000 to 291,000. This is an important scenario for the economic and social welfare of the country because health professionals estimate that by age 75 most seniors have at least one chronic health condition and should therefore be living in smaller more manageable accommodation some of whom will already be dependent on an extended network of public and private health services such as institutional assisted living or home support.

1.2.2 Financial Challenges

While poverty among seniors decreased dramatically with the introduction of the publicly funded Canada Pension Plan (CPP), Old Age Security (OAS) payments and the Guaranteed Income Supplement (GIS) in the late 1970's and early 1980's, the Boomer population is reportedly ill prepared for the personal income resources needed to cover the extended life spans made possible with modern medicine. A weakening income scenario for individuals will occur as the socio-economic challenge facing Canadians since 2008 could mean decreasing taxpayer paid financial and human resources sufficient to house and care for an ever increasing number of elderly people 80 and over.

There is a lively debate in Canada underway about how much public and private money must be set aside individually and collectively for the retirement years. A 9 June 2010 Leger Marketing survey of 1,542 adults commissioned by the Bank of Montreal (BMO) Retirement Institute presents a picture of contemporary senior incomes which may point to a future pattern of income viability for seniors. This survey found that only 48% of those over 55 have a retirement income strategy or a rainy day account for unexpected emergencies. One third of respondents in that survey reported not having considered the possibility that their savings would last into a great old age.⁸ An article by Joe Friesen in the *Globe and Mail* of 24 November 2010 reports on a 2009 Conference Board of Canada study “Campaign 2000” which reported that the rate of poverty among seniors had jumped from 4.9% to 5.8% in 2008.⁹ This may be the result of increasing numbers of middle income retirees dropping down the income ladder as the result of investment losses in the 2008 financial crisis and/or are not keeping up with inflation. This report reflects Statistics Canada findings that indicate that because of transfer payments between levels of government to individuals the bottom 20% on the income ladder saw their incomes increase by 15.4% from 1980 to 2000 and then by another 7.9% from 2000 to 2005. In that same period middle income earners saw their incomes rise in those years by only 11.1% in the period 1980 to 2000 and again by only 3.7% in 2000-2005. The Council on Aging (Ottawa) reported¹⁰ in August 2008 that while the average

⁸ Jack Cheveau, “Half of Boomers do not have a Retirement Plan, BMO Survey Finds,” *The Ottawa Citizen*, 10 June 2010.

⁹ Joe Friesen, “Number of seniors living in poverty soars nearly 25%,” *The Globe and Mail*, November 24, 2010.

¹⁰ Council on Aging, Ottawa, “Housing Seniors Choices, Challenges and Solutions,” August 2008.

income of seniors in Ottawa was nearly \$40,000 in 2006, 43% of Pre-Boomer senior women and 21% of senior Pre-Boomer men were living on less than \$20,000. 27% of all seniors reported living alone which increases income vulnerability.¹¹

One outcome of the financial crisis of 2008 was recorded in an October 2008 survey by the Royal Bank of Canada which reported that 40% of Boomers plan to work part-time after 65,¹² the largest number (up to three quarters) of whom are expected to be working in retail establishments as either managers or salespeople according to a statement by the president of the Retail Council of Canada in July 2008.¹³ These facts could also indicate that salespeople do not earn enough before 65 to retire at 65. The impact of current and future European and US sovereign debt difficulties on Canadian retirement incomes has not yet been considered, although changes to pension schemes and eligibility criteria are changing even before the instability of these crises is taken into account.

¹¹ Jack M Mintz, the Palmer Chair of Public Policy at the University of Calgary and past research director for the Federal-Provincial-Territorial Ministers of Finance Working Group on Retirement Income Research, does not agree that seniors are vulnerable to poverty and promotes a more optimistic scenario for senior incomes. In his research he estimated that 80% of Canadians are saving sufficiently for retirement. The question here is what is sufficient which he says is a retirement replacement income of 50% of peak earning for upper income retirees while Canadians earning less than \$40,000 per year he says will be protected by federal transfer payments such as CPP and the OAS which will bring them up to 90% of their pre-retirement income. 75 to 80% of those now earning between \$40,000 and \$100,000 appear to have a good potential mix of various retirement incomes when putting together CPP, OAS, some owner or employer benefits, RRSP's and TFSA savings.

¹² Garry Marr, "Trouble in Boomerland," *Financial Post* February 28, 2009.

¹³ Daniel Drolet, "Retailers Happy to Teach Older Workers Valuable New Tricks" *The Ottawa Citizen*, July 11, 2008.

1.2.2.1 Public Financial Support for Social Programmes

The health of federal public finances which support social policies is politically related to the demographic expectations and restraints on personal and public finances. These policies first saw the light of day when a younger population and a large demographic was in the work force over the past half century. During the 1950s and 1960's elevated Canadian productivity delivered higher personal and business incomes and taxes which resulted in budget surpluses sufficient to fund extensive social programming increases in the 1970's. By 1979 the imbalance between the growing cost of social programming and lessening economic growth called for new taxes such as a modest increase in the gas tax that was thought to be sufficient fiscally but proved not so politically for another 15 years. The cost of social programming for seniors is either in the form of transfers from the federal government directly to seniors such as the Old Age Security pension or indirectly through provinces with jurisdiction for health and social programming. In December 2007 the CD Howe Institute, an economic and business think tank in Vancouver, published a *Background* study entitled "Time and Money: The Challenge of Demographic Change and Government in Canada"¹⁴ to alert planners in and out of government to the need to adjust planning at all levels to take account of the changing demographics.

Affording current levels of public support for seniors in Ontario may become more challenging. Ontario tax returns, barring a continuation of stagnant or even declining growth in average incomes, might increase slowly with a population projected

¹⁴ William B.P. Robson, *Time and Money: The Challenge of Demographic Change and Government Finances in Canada*, C.D. Howe Institute, 2007, <http://site.ebrary.com.proxy.bib.uottawa.ca/>, (accessed May 15, 2010).

to grow largely through immigration from 13 million in 2010 to 16-19 million by 2036 according to a 2010 Statistics Canada study.¹⁵ TD Economics in a recent special report *Charting a Path to Sustainable Health Care in Ontario*¹⁶ supported this analysis.

In making a similar case for Ontario, Ragan¹⁷ projects that without any changes public health care costs will increase at least 6.5% annually well into the future when the growth in Gross Domestic Product is estimated to be around 4% per annum at best. At this continuing rate of imbalance, even if the provincial deficit is addressed, the report expects that health care will increase from today's 43% of the provincial budget to 80% by 2030. In this scenario this increase would occur six years before the peak increase in the senior population nation-wide. Ragan's report indicates that with the already high tax rates in place in Ontario there is very little room to increase taxes to cover all other provincial responsibilities. According to Ragan change will be necessary in the delivery of health and social services in Ontario, particularly for seniors.

The Conference Board of Canada also reviewed the actual 2011 Ontario provincial budget¹⁸ in order to weigh the increasing cost of health care and the increasing

¹⁵ Statistics Canada, "Population Projections for Canada, Provinces and Territories, 2005 to 2031," Survey number 3602.

¹⁶ Toronto Dominion Bank. *Charting a Path to Sustainable Health Care in Ontario* http://www.td.com/economics/special/db0510_health_care.pdf, (accessed February 8, 2011). This report was based in part on input supplied by Mark Stabile and Carolyn Hughes Tuohy of the University of Toronto School of Public Policy and Governance.

¹⁷ Christopher Ragan, "Two Policy Options driven by Population Aging," *POLICY OPTIONS*, (October 2010) 79. Christopher Ragan teaches economics at McGill University and currently holds the David Dodge Chair in Monetary Policy at the C.D. Howe Institute. From January 2009 to June 2010 he was the Clifford Clark Visiting Economist at the Department of Finance in Ottawa..

¹⁸ The Conference Board of Canada http://www.conferenceboard.ca/topics/economics/budgets/ontario_2011_budget.aspx (accessed 3 August 2011).

levels of debt servicing costs against other expenditures and revenue expectations. 43% of the provincial budget goes to health care of which almost half is for 14% of the population aged 65 and over. Federal transfers to provinces for health care are decreasing. Reducing health care expenditure increases from the current 7% annual growth rate since 2006 to a growth rate of 4.4% in 2011-12, to 3.4% in 2012-13 and then to 2.8% in 2013-14 will come at the cost of very large budget cuts elsewhere if the province is to limit overall budget increases to 1.4% down from 6.2% growth in the years 2006-11. Such cuts will be essential to accommodate the decrease in federal transfer increases for health to 2% from 6% annually beginning in 2017. Growth in the health budgets and federal provincial transfers for health is dependent in future years upon a commensurate percentage growth in GDP and tax revenues.

Without increased revenue growth the impact of these cuts for all sectors of provincial expenditures will be severe, particularly so in light of the increasing percentage of interest payments on the growing provincial debt. Nearly two thirds of the provincial health care budget is managed by 14 local health integrated networks (LHINs) in Ontario. A 2007 report “Aging in Place” by the Champlain LHIN which serves Eastern Ontario, stated that the elderly population here would have increased by 13% from 2005 to 2010, with a projected increase of nearly 60% by 2020, and 126% by 2031. Their estimates of demand for extra support by this population suggest that 25% have or will require some level of support, and another 10-15% have, or will have, multiple and complex needs requiring support from multiple organizations and agencies. This latter group which represents only 3% of the population, accounts for 30% of health expenditures according to planning estimates.

In summary, before the financial crash of 2008 and public awareness of the aging of the Boomer generation, the topic of the needs of an aging society was not given much media or political attention. By 2010 the topic had hit the public agenda. Professor Ragan in the article cited above wrote that the advantageous demographics which had allowed government to extend social benefits on a large scale must now be reversed in keeping with the timing and depth of the demographic inversion. For Ragan the only way to work with productivity and tax revenue declines which accompany a demographic inversion would be to choose between higher taxes from a declining tax base or to make equivalent cuts in government spending, “Ignoring this fact is a sure route to the future problems that come from high levels of government indebtedness. Only time will tell how our governments choose to confront the productivity and fiscal challenges created by population aging. But they need to begin thinking about them very soon”.¹⁹ In his personal appearance and presentation to a select group of invitees in the House of Commons on 3 November 2010 at which I was present Ragan stated that by 2040 the gap between tax revenue and government expenditures would be 4.2 percent, which in today’s economy would be \$67 Billion annually.²⁰ He then finished his remarks with the comment that the choices ahead for government are moral choices. This prediction by a

¹⁹ Christopher Ragan, “Two Policy Options driven by Population Aging,” *POLICY OPTIONS*, (October 2010) 79.

²⁰ “. . . if Canadian provincial and federal governments made no adjustments to their other spending programs or their tax rates between 2015 and 2040, but at the same time maintained commitments to public health care and seniors’ benefits in their current form. Total spending as a share of GDP would gradually rise above tax revenues, so that by 2040 the gap would be 4.2% of GDP. If this gap were to occur in today’s economy, it would be about \$67-billion.” From Macdonald Laurier Institute website citation of a paper for MLI by C Ragan *Canada’s Looming Fiscal Squeeze* <http://www.macdonaldlaurier.ca/financial-post-demographic-debt-wall-by-christopher-ragan/> (accessed 8 December 2011).

well respected economist speaking to parliamentarians confirms the significance I attach to the coming challenge to the founding Christian normative values of our Eurocentric society. For this reason the decisions which Canadians make in addressing what Professor Ragan refers to as moral choices will reflect the shifting values which have informed public and private decision making in the past 50 years.

1.3 Culture and Faith in the Boomer Generation

1.3.1 Overview of the Era

As David Foot, professor emeritus of economics at the University of Toronto has pronounced on several occasions, that demographics determine everything about modern life.²¹ The issues specific to such a large demographic of Boomers will drive the market, legislation, and possibly the media as well. Since the 1960's the youthful Boomer generation has been the target of consumer marketing and the subject of much social analysis and liberal social legislation. Reginald Bibby, Board of Governors Research Chair in Sociology at the University of Lethbridge from where he is responsible for monitoring social trends in Canada over the past thirty years, demonstrates that between the early 1980's and 2000, Canadians born in the years 1946-1965 made up 50% of Canadians between 20 and 64.²² This demographic is in the prime productive period of life, and is thus the prime consumer demographic. By 2016 the impact of this

²¹ David Foot with D. Stoffman, *Boom Bust & Echo: How to Profit from the Coming Demographic Shift* (Toronto: Macfarlane, Walter & Ross, 1996).

²² Reginald Bibby, *The Boomer Factor: What Canada's Most Famous Generation is Leaving Behind*, (Lethbridge, A Project Canada Book, 2006). Bibby states on page 3 that consistent with American usage, he prefers 1965 as the cut off point for boomers for reasons of consistency with American analyses of what he researches in a similar cohort in Canada.

demographic cohort on economic activity will decline to 33 percent and further to 22 percent by 2021, and by 2021 by another third to 15 percent.

Some iconic images in English speaking Canadian Boomer memories during the early adult years of the Boomer cultural era (1960-1975) are the lives, loves and self destruction of many popular music figures; for example, the Beatles, the Rolling Stones, Joan Baez, Judy Collins. Recorded for all time in the memory of this generation are images and stories related to the dramatic show of youthful excess at the 1969 Woodstock Vermont weekend; hippy clothing, free love with the availability of the birth control pill, marijuana and LSD, but so also was the dramatic defence of human rights in the campaign for voter registration in the Southern United States.

At the same time there was this idealistic, energetic movement also at the forefront of the Boomer wave of young people who, in the words of the United States President John F. Kennedy were challenged to ask themselves "...ask not what your country can do for you, ask what you can do for your country". The first wave of Canadian Boomers volunteered in the sixties and early seventies either outside of Canada with the Canadian University Service Overseas (CUSO) or with distant community organisations of the developing world to teach English or French and basic skills in the schools, hospitals and even within foreign government ministries. The same youthful enthusiasm for engagement in social reform occurred in movements such as Katimavik or Frontier College in respect of the underdeveloped areas of Canada. This generous impulse and search for adventure also occurred in student-led activist protest groups such as Ban the Bomb, women's rights, anti Vietnam War protests; support of asylum in Canada for American draft dodgers.

For the Catholic communities of English and French speaking Canada, Vatican II opened up the possibility of a more inclusive culturally sensitive experience of church and the world for young Catholics. For example, the energy for positive change emanating from Vatican II inspired an experiment in communal living in downtown Toronto led by religious teaching staff and students of St Michael's College at the University of Toronto. This was a 1960's and 1970's cult-like psychotherapeutic movement, known as Therafields which at one time occupied thirty-five communal houses in downtown Toronto and four nearby farms. At its height the movement had 900 members experimenting with a countercultural life style.

Thanks to the accumulating government budget surpluses, this historic youthful demographic bubble of the immediate post war years achieved early financial independence with the availability of part time work and student loans. With growing public revenues the federal and provincial governments slowly assumed greater responsibility for the financial and domestic security of individuals, thus allowing citizens a greater degree of personal independence and freer lifestyles. Previous to the mid 1960's responsibility for the basic welfare had been the moral and civic responsibility of families, neighbours, churches and communities that exercised closer personal control over public mores and behaviour.

The post war period was not entirely without challenges of periodic economic uncertainty, multi-ethnic immigration, massive technological change, high degrees of personal mobility, rapid urbanization and urban sprawl, and in recent memory, rapid globalisation. Several of the participants in my qualitative research had lived through divorces, single parenthood, putting aging frail parents on public support just as

government social programmes adjusted to the effects of socio-economic and cultural changes. Examples of new government programmes at that time were subsidies to help industries adjust to the negative impact of free trade agreements, subsidies and special programmes to help single parents on minimum wages, health and social programmes for a growing list of addictions. Recent governments have cut back on these social investments in order to balance budgets at a time when the children of Boomers are experiencing difficulty establishing their adult lives.

In the 1960's and 1970's the energy of the new individualism, consumerism and the multiple forces of globalization ushered in new visions of the possibilities for human flourishing. Modern government and the philosophical framework of modern public policy complemented these cultural forces of material and social progress by adopting anodyne, quantifiable, bureaucratic, and politically correct language to guide the relationship of the private citizen to the larger national community. At the current time there is growing awareness of the need for a new model of governance that will balance the post modern homogenising influences of globalisation with the fracturing influences of subject-centred identity and knowledge. This is evident in the way modern communications allow citizens of the world to communicate privately as equals while security minded public servants in most governments acquiesce consciously or unconsciously to the whims of hierarchical authority. The result is cynicism and growing distrust for all authorities. Can the vision of the past half century hold for the remaining years of Boomer lives? Edward Farley in his book *Deep Symbols* (1996) referred to this as the loss of a shared sense of relationships of obligation witnessed in the choice of words to describe the place of individuals in advanced industrial countries; that is, the

organization man, one-dimensional man, and in what he refers to as the triumph of the therapeutic in a culture of narcissism.²³ In the private lives of individuals, away from their institutionalized identities, instantaneous global communication between individuals in very distinct cultures challenges faith in a specific vision of the meaning of life. In this private space the value of equal regard in modern industrial cultures would suggest that interpersonal differences can be harmonized to avoid conflict. This can lead to a radical pluralisation and relativity of religious and ideological beliefs.

1.3.2 Cultural Commentaries: “Seeing Ourselves as Others See Us”

The daily newspapers provide anecdotal evidence of insights on the Boomer culture quite different from scientific analysis. Professor Christopher Ragan above referred to moral choices regarding who gets state help in the future aging society. An example of moral choices and the triumph of the therapeutic appeared in an interesting article concerning a Toronto woman deciding about “foetal reduction”. The story concerned a Toronto couple deciding whether or not to reduce the twins to one foetus, because as the professional career mother said “I just didn’t feel I would be able to care for (twins) in a way that I wanted to”, to which the attending physician responded “I do believe people should have the choice given the cost of raising children today”.²⁴

Locating a sense of belonging for Boomers lies in the tension between a domesticated intimacy and the experience of anomie in the globalising world of travel and technology. Theologian, Sharon V. Betcher, from the Vancouver School of Theology

²³ Edward Farley, *Deep Symbols: Their Postmodern Effacement and Reclamation*, (Harrisburg, Pa.: Trinity Press International, 1996), 89.

²⁴ *National Post*, 11 December 2010.

commenting on contemporary Canadian life styles in Vancouver wrote that “Vancouver today harbours a people spinning at the vortex of the free-market system, a people relationally bereft”. She then attributes this sense of anomie to the absence of a “shared culture at the heart of urban life, with modernity having encouraged the razing of ties to kin as well as religious de-ritualisation”²⁵ A Toronto writer, Craig Macinnis, in *The Ottawa Citizen* on 25 February 2007, reflects on the Boomers and their contemporary culture as one of “self absorbed aesthetes” who are “also all about the quest, the eternal struggle, for ‘authenticity’”.²⁶ This quest for authenticity he refers to as self indulgence which is “now peddled as an exhilaratingly new and improved version of honesty”.

Environmentalism reflects another basis for moral choices in the 21st century. In his reflection on the first decade of the second millennium Robert Sibley wrote in the *Ottawa Citizen* of 30 December 2008 that “environmental ideology is to the early 21st century what political ideology was to the twentieth century: that is to say, environmentalism has become a “crypto-religious fundamentalism”, finishing with the comment that environmentalism has moved into “the salvation and redemption business”.²⁷ According to Sibley this fundamentalism is a crisis of meaning “in the sense that many people have turned to religion because the modern project, the Enlightenment project of scientific progress and material betterment, no longer satisfies our desire for

²⁵ Sharon V. Betcher, “Take my yoga upon you: a spiritual *pli* for the global city.” In *Polydoxy: Theology of Multiplicity and Relation*, eds. Catherine Keller and Laurel C. Schneider (New York, Routledge, 2011), 59.

²⁶ *The Ottawa Citizen*, 25 February, 2007.

²⁷ *The Ottawa Citizen*, 30 December, 2009.

meaning and purpose.” In a review article for *The Ottawa Citizen* of 2009 he refers to the disturbing anti human attitudes of extreme environmentalists.²⁸

The decline in the amount of time for friendship was the subject of a 2008 Statistics Canada survey on friendships and a subsequent article in *The Ottawa Citizen* on 17 January.²⁹ In this survey it was reported that 82% of Boomers said they had at least a couple of friends in 2006, down from 85% in 1990 and further that only 33% of urbanites against 69% of rural people claimed that they know their neighbours. Changing venues for meeting people of one’s choosing either on line or in volunteer activities is mirrored in the decline of traditional service clubs as reported in an article in *The Ottawa Citizen* on 19 January, 2009, “A Dwindling Herd: Elks, Moose, other Fraternal Lodge Orders are Losing Members”. The secret initiation and membership rituals along with unusual hats or aprons are thought to be the cause of the demise, but the Calgary author of this article suggests that the need for mutual help offered by these societies declined when government gradually stepped in to meet a wider variety of social needs.

Edward Farley, professor emeritus of theology at Vanderbilt University in Tennessee, referred to the present culture as one of narcissism, an outlook that suggests a disengaged vision of the values of others. Cynicism and the loss of youthful enthusiasms were the subjects of some articles by senior Boomers as for example, Stephen Marche writing for the *National Post*, refers to the Paris student riots in 1968 as ineffectual youthful blossoming into a “smug self-righteous pseudo-revolution that fulfilled the self-aggrandizing fantasies of the Boomers” which became the “dominant style for many

²⁸ *The Ottawa Citizen*, 30 December, 2009.

²⁹ *The Ottawa Citizen*, 17 January, 2009.

decades”.³⁰ Marche ends his article by telling readers to find some glimmer of hope in the fact that the Boomer culture “which started 40 years ago is at long last over”.

The insights of journalists with respect to the funeral of Princess Diana and that of the 2011 public funeral of Jack Layton were opportunities for reflections on the significance of sentimentalism in contemporary culture. Robert Sibley observed that the funeral of Princess Diana, whom the media had rendered the iconic victim, reflected the “steady sentimentalisation of western culture”.³¹ His article suggests that the social phenomena of western society – violent crime, family breakdown and the confusion about morals and manners are regarded as the result of inadequate government policies which can be reversed by changing the environment rather than the vision of the citizens. He then locates this sentimentality in the animal rights movement whose advocates he says base their claims on the extension of human rights to animals. He links the funeral of the Princess to the celebrity culture of the age asking how she and other celebrities became cultural gatekeepers. As a reference he cites the Nigerian author Uzodinma Iweala “This is the West’s new image of itself, a sexy, politically active generation whose preferred means of spreading the word are magazine spreads with celebrities’ pictures in the foreground, forlorn Africans in the back.” Janice Kennedy in *The Ottawa Citizen* of 27 August 2011 in her article on the Jack Layton funeral refers to the Princess Diana funeral as “mourning sickness”, a “media fed phenomenon that encourages ersatz grief whipped up by a frenzy of excess”. She then moves onto the funeral of Jack Layton as a “mass outbreak of recreational grief”. She concludes with the advice that Jack Layton

³⁰ *National Post*, 8 November, 2008.

³¹ *The Ottawa Citizen*, 25 August 2007.

should be remembered with a “clear-eyed realism” in appreciating “genuine virtues rather than fabricated legend”.

Personal spirituality rather than participation in collective religious rituals was about doing your own thing. An interview in *The Ottawa Citizen* with the singer Melissa Etheridge in *The Ottawa Citizen*³² highlights this in respect of the intention of the singer’s goal and “determination to live her life truthfully”. The article cites her “deepest realisation” coming out of a one year period of chemotherapy and radiation that “All there is/Is atoms and space/ Everything else is illusion”. The singer’s claim is that humans must connect with their spiritual sides and “become responsible for creating our own illusion”.

The topics selected by Canadian journalists that comment on contemporary culture that have been cited in this section provide a sense of the contemporary urban culture of Canadians as they enter their senior years. In summary, some aspects of the culture are the triumph of the therapeutic, anomie, cynicism, environmentalism, personal spirituality, sentimentalisation, self indulgence.

1.3.3 Historical Roots of the Boomer Culture

The time frame of what I refer to as the Boomer culture is from the mid 1960’s to when the first of the Boomers turned 65 in 2011. Key elements of the cultural framework of the Boomer culture indicate some threads of spirituality if not religious faith which might facilitate a conversation between our past traditioned public Christian culture and that of our contemporary secularised public culture. Charles Taylor offers a

³² *The Ottawa Citizen*, 21 July 2008.

comprehensive analysis of the roots and critical shifts in contemporary western culture and religious feeling over the centuries. As he is both a philosopher, was a centre left political activist and is a religious believer his inquiry into the historic foundations of contemporary culture is sensitive to the arguments of both reason and of religious faith. His approach has guided my selection of signposts on the historic and cultural highway of history. His use of frameworks of meaning making to distinguish between meaning making embedded in the natural world (the immanent framework) and that open to a transcendent God, spirits or forces (the transcendent framework). Taylor refers to this distinction as “tailor-made for our culture” and foundational to an understanding of the changes in our culture.³³ His writing includes a series of images that work with this distinction, such as exclusive humanism, self sufficing humanism, the modern moral order, the affirmation of ordinary life, human flourishing. While he has been critiqued for his anti-secularism perspective³⁴, his approach to exploring the place of spirituality, religion, philosophy, and the arts in western cultural history has informed an appreciation of the roots of contemporary culture in this dissertation. Charles Taylor has focussed on philosophical trends that reflect the European roots of the traditional English and French cultures which come together in the national capital on the banks of the Ottawa River. While multi-ethnic migration is having a growing impact on the local popular culture, the institutions of official Ottawa still tend to be more Euro-centric.

³³ Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age*, (Cambridge Mass.: The Bellknop Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), 16.

³⁴ John Patrick Diggins, “The Godless Delusion.” In a book review of *A Secular Age* in the *New York Times* December 16, 2007, <http://www.nytimes.com/2007/12/16/books/review/Diggins-t.html> (accessed 13 March 2010).

Robert Putnam's approach to social change in the USA provides insights on the creation and loss of social capital accompanied by data from significant national surveys of attitudes and social realities in the USA. He considers that the social capital in church communities is a leading source of American social capital although he does not discuss or speculate on the contribution of religious beliefs and spirituality in social capital formation. Putnam identifies many topics in his work that would throw light on the observations of local journalists cited above in respect of the decline of social capital and a related weakening in norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness in the contemporary culture of the USA.³⁵ He refers to the hollowing out of active membership in the many American institutions that appear to be strong because they continue to exist but do so with declining volunteer hours and finances.³⁶ He notes the same hollowing out in religious institutions in respect of certain demographics. He cites the work of sociologist Wade Clark Roof who has estimated that half of the two thirds of Boomers in the US raised in religious families who opt out in their twenties and thirties return to membership in their faith communities at middle age.³⁷

Reginald Bibby in his book, *The Boomer Factor*, has observed that Canada follows European trends in religious participation.³⁸ He cites a 2005 Gallup Poll finding

³⁵ Robert D. Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*, (New York, Simon & Schuster Paperbacks, 2000), 19.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 72, 130, 256.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 72.

³⁸ Reginald Bibby, *The Boomer Factor: What Canada's Most Famous Generation is Leaving Behind*, (Toronto: Bastian Books, 2006), 179.

that indicates in that year 66 percent of Americans attended a religious worship service in a six month period whereas only 43 percent of Canadians had done the same.

According to Taylor there is an emerging new western anthropocentric identity which he claims has roots in many of the elitist intellectual trends and enthusiasms that came together during the rapid urbanisation and industrialisation of north European countries in the nineteenth century: romanticism, utilitarianism, imperialism, materialism, rationalism, socialism. The cultural shift for the masses on the move from rural settings to the utilitarian world of urban industrial centres meant the loss of a more intimate relational hierarchical world view or vision that had previously dictated the rules and roles of members of small communities. This social environmental change according to Taylor led to shifts in perceptions of social, economic and religious obligations of people to one another. One positive impact of these many changes in people's every day lives in the 18th and 19th century was a growing sense of control over life and therefore less personal vulnerability to the forces of an enchanted magical world; however the changes also reduced the more secure sense of the meaning and purpose in one's life that these same myths had provided.³⁹

The European Enlightenment renewed in western culture a spirit of rational inquiry into natural laws that guide the natural world, thus demonstrating that material truths could be explained according to observable facts. The quality of daily life improved in societies which adopted new scientific ways of making war and/or producing goods, services, and ultimately jobs, wealth and personal choice. Myths embedded in tradition had lost their authority because normative assumptions for human behaviour

³⁹ Taylor, *Secular Age*, 299-302.

could be rationally tested according to the assumptions of the scientific method. Human faith in divinely held truths as revealed to humankind regarding the mystery of life was transformed by the discovery of scientific truth about the natural world. The work of Charles Darwin, for example, appeared to provide tangible proof that biological and zoological adaptation to the material environment was independent of Divine intervention and that creation by and of itself was adaptable and explicable in the context of its time and environment. According to Taylor the ethics of human health then came to be understood as having two separate domains – objective knowledge and subjective intent.⁴⁰ At the rational intellectual and aesthetic levels, human life had lost its potential for mystery and for transcending itself in union with mystery, thus becoming as flat as reason.⁴¹ The spiritual heritage among the northern European elite of this period was the attainment of an aesthetic self transcendence above the mundane preoccupations of daily life in many forms of artistic expression, in the attainment of moments of heroic human perfection in noble thoughts and actions, in romantic escapist eulogies to the beauties of nature, and in sentimentality at the level of popular cultural expressions.⁴² This intellectual, artistic and spiritual heritage accounts for the connections I made between spiritual resources of the Boomer culture that inspire relationships, as found in Chapter Two. The popular culture at the opening of the new millennium reflects what Edward

⁴⁰ Charles Taylor, “Sex and Christianity: How has the Moral Landscape Changed?” In *Commonweal*, September 28, 2007.

⁴¹ Taylor, *Secular Age*, 570, 382. Charles Taylor cites Matthew Arnold’s poems, “Dover Beach” and “Stanzas from the Grande Chartreuse”, as representative emotional expressions of this loss of mystery.

⁴² The reality of an inspiring vision of the noble responsibilities of leadership and the high calling of patriotism collapsed in the western world with the millions of unnecessary deaths, injuries and subsequent displacement, poverty and political instability perpetrated by very poor and insensitive military and political leadership during and after WW I in the UK, Germany and France.

Farley refers to as the death of the life ordering master narratives of tradition in the ‘land of forgetfulness’.⁴³ A term Taylor employs to refer to the loss of tradition is ordinary or secular time such that ‘when something is past it’s past’.⁴⁴

1.3.4 Truth in Contemporary Culture becomes Contextual

The culture of educated people of the late 20th century believes that non-scientific truth is grounded in personal experience and therefore is relative to experience. Taylor has captured this sense of the relativity of knowledge in his phrase the “social imaginary” to describe a way to imagine the contents and potential that guides human life; namely, “the ways in which they (people) describe their social existence, how they fit together with others, how things go on between them and their fellows, the expectations which are normally met, and the deeper normative notions and images that underlie these expectations”.⁴⁵ He prefers the term social imaginary to social theory in order to highlight the importance of the images and narratives which keep everyday life ticking over in easily recognisable patterns.⁴⁶ The social imaginary of the early baby Boomers in post World War II Canada in the 1960’s was one of material progress, increasing physical comforts, mobility, financial security, stable families, the expectation of reasonable access to education and good health. These social benefits and expectations were integral

⁴³ Edward Farley, *Deep Symbols: Their Postmodern Effacement and Reclamation*, (Harrisburg, Pa., Trinity Press International, 1996) 11 and Chapter Three ‘The Land of Forgetfulness: Rethinking Tradition’.

⁴⁴ Taylor, *Secular Age*, 55.

⁴⁵ Taylor, *A Secular Age*, Ibid., 171.

⁴⁶ Charles Taylor’s term social imaginary is more restrictive than the meaning which Don Browning gives to the word “vision”. Don Browning in *Fundamental Practical Theology*, p 40, specifically includes in vision what he refers to as “the ultimate edges of experience” which includes “tradition-saturated images”.

to a sustaining metaphor for the social imaginary of this period; one that Taylor names “the economy”.⁴⁷

While the importance of the fiscal economy to national success was a well known historic reality in the earlier histories of many countries (Britain, Holland, Germany, France, Meiji Japan), in the Anglo-Saxon post WW II world the economy has become synonymous with what Taylor then refers to as “the sanctification of ordinary life”.⁴⁸ This sanctification relies upon a heightened sense of collective agency articulated according to scientifically observable laws of nature by the freely expressed and implemented will of the people, as defined and managed in the public sphere (government, media, the courts, the arts).⁴⁹ What Taylor refers to as the “modern moral order” encompasses the content of ordinary life in what the English philosopher John Locke refers to as the ordering of a society around the principles of mutual benefit and the rights of its members.⁵⁰

The significance of concepts of the natural law identified by John Locke such as the presumption of equality and the requirement of original consent refer to this moral

⁴⁷ Taylor, *Secular Age*, 178-181. The word ‘economy’ is used by Taylor to refer to a new moral order emerging in the sixteenth century in which the natural order of life came to be defined by naturally interlocking structures that address the basic needs of ordinary life. This social imaginary slowly came to replace an earlier elitist moral order that envisioned the significance in human life of “higher modes of existence” based on a direct relationship with God which was realised in great acts of military or religiously inspired glory and honour. This was a shift away from a hierarchical social imaginary open to God’s place in human affairs to the modern moral order which assumes a natural, objectively observed ordering of ordinary life in which God does not intervene.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 179.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 180.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 160.

ordering of society around principles of mutual benefit and the rights of its members.⁵¹ The significance of such concepts in selecting dimensions of compassion in the culture of my interviewees is my understanding that these Lockian principles are grounded in neither religious narratives nor in the metaphysics of existentialism, but rather, in the principles of the laws of nature observable in the flourishing of plant and animal life. Don Browning has provided a simpler, more pedantic format of the guiding principles of modern public life which he says combines the universalisation principle of Kant with the utilitarian principle of the aggregate good.⁵² This latter outlook might well describe certain policy approaches in designing policies in Canadian governance structures which are pragmatic and short term.

According to a French sociologist of religion, Danièle Hervieu-Léger and chief editor of the *Archives des Sciences Sociales des Religions*, the search for a social imaginary that incorporates and addresses spiritual needs as understood in religious spirituality and feelings, is very present in western culture. She highlighted the importance of non quantifiable religious phenomena emerging in Europe in the late 20th century.⁵³ Her work has challenged European sociologists of religion to understand the nature and phenomena of belief and religious feeling rather than quantifying participation in religious events. The existence of churches, synagogues and temples is emblematic of

⁵¹ Taylor, *Secular Age*, 160.

⁵² Browning, *Fundamental Practical Theology*, 101.

⁵³ Danièle Hervieu-Léger, *Religion as a Chain of Memory*, trans. Simon Lee (Polity Press, 2000) from *La Religion pour Memoir* (Paris: Editions du Cerf, 1993), 28.

the persistence of religious narratives in the culture without implying acceptance of the moral values implicit in those monuments.

Truth claims must be validated in contemporary culture as they are in the writings of academic research.⁵⁴ Jürgen Habermas, a post WWII German philosopher who developed a theory of human rationality, in which human reason only meets the claim to truth when it is the product of “non-coercive, mutually-revealing exchanges of human communication.”⁵⁵ In stating that rational truth must meet the test of both a liberating communication and a commitment he thus incorporates the validity and necessity of subjectivity in the social interaction of communication. Such a test for a claim to truth relativised and/or contextualised truth led Don Browning to work with Habermas’ ideas and concepts in order to “enhance critical discourse in conflictive and pluralistic modern societies”.⁵⁶

⁵⁴ Jean François Lyotard explored the implications of universal truth in grand theories otherwise referred to as over-arching meta-narratives which he then discarded in favour of limiting truth to the specific context of truth claims. He was concerned about the context of claims to justice; he denied a universal or foundational narrative by which to validate justice in favour of a sense of a justice located in the minute differences of a total context which he acknowledged as “le differend” between the agent and its object. The truth claims articulated by Jürgen Habermas informed the approach to practical theology taken by Don Browning, Elaine Graham and many of their successors. Jürgen Habermas, a post WW II German sociologist and philosopher reacted to claims to truth based solely on the practical and technical truths of science. He said that truth must emancipate the beholder and/or user of a technical truth from preconceived limitations. He arrived at this conclusion after examining the truth claims to dominance in Nazi philosophy and its praxis in domination. A biographical note including this perception of Jürgen Habermas is located on the site of The European Graduate School, “Graduate and Post-Graduate Studies” 2011 from <http://www.egs.edu/library/juergen-habermas/biography/> (accessed August 8).

⁵⁵ Jürgen Habermas, *Theory of Communicative Action* (1981) cited by Elaine Graham in *Transforming Practice: Pastoral Theology in an Age of Uncertainty*, (Eugene, Oregon, Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2002), 146.

⁵⁶ Browning, *Fundamental Practical Theology*, 71.

Don Browning uses Habermas' four claims for truthful communication as a base of what must be met for practical thinking whether religious or secular: obligations flowing from what is said, tendencies and needs of the speaker and those addressed, environmental context and constraints of the discourse, rules and roles of the players. According to Browning, Habermas' situatedness of real time and place in inter-subjective communication does not allow for future possibilities such as divine forgiveness, the "convergence of justice and happiness", the ultimate goodness of creation, self sacrificial living.⁵⁷ This limitation on future possibilities led Browning to add the test of vision as a validity test for claims to truth. This test Browning also used to account for the historically situated place of the speaker because as he says the search for certainty is "illusory from a pragmatic and hermeneutical point of view."⁵⁸ Hervieu-Léger defends this insight for practical theology, in saying that signs of religion and religious manifestation are alive in everyday language for those who know where to look for what would constitute signs in terms recognized by the social sciences.⁵⁹ Hervieu-Léger acknowledges that while reference to a faith based religious *eschaton* is not within the working constructs of sociologists, there is a gap between the limitations of everyday life and the human desire for fulfillment.⁶⁰

Browning has assumed in the free communication model of Habermas the significance of mutual recognition of a fuller natural order of pre-moral goods (basic

⁵⁷ Browning, *Fundamental Practical Theology*, 205-06.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 69.

⁵⁹ Danièle Hervieu-Léger, *Religion as a Chain*, 29.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 3.

needs and tendencies). Working with Habermas' idea of free communication Browning concluded that a pre-moral good would necessarily include experiential and theoretical knowledge as well as recognition of a full range of human needs including both religious truths and their relation to the social and ecological environment of the speakers.⁶¹ Browning makes the point that in his model of locating truth in inter-subjective communication Habermas did not include religious belief in the possibility that human kind overcame the limitations of time as do believers who put faith in the resurrection of Christ. The addition of vision to account for religious beliefs and practices makes possible the distinction between the immanent and transcendent frameworks of meaning that are necessary for a conversation between dimensions of compassion that are inspired by relationships in every day life and those that are open to mystery and Christian tradition.

1.3.5 Human Flourishing

Human flourishing for Charles Taylor evokes philosophical and theological consideration. What makes life worthwhile or fulfilling? The answer to this question according to Charles Taylor is located in the actions and practices of people's daily lives whether that be in living for something intangible beyond everyday life, in living completely within what is tangible and available to human existence, or in a mix of both in scattered moments of self transcendence. Taylor claims that "the coming of modern secularity in my sense has been coterminous with the rise of a society in which for the first time in history a purely self-sufficient humanism came to be a widely available

⁶¹ Browning, *Fundamental Practical Theology*, 202 -03.

option”⁶². He traces this development through two transformations in western culture over the past five hundred years in the human consciousness of time and the cosmos from eternal and or enchanted to quantifiable and material.⁶³ Non-religious yet self transcending options in pursuing the single minded goal of human flourishing are possible in commitments to human rights lived as, for example, in the global advancement of equality for all humanity regardless of colour, religion or sexual orientation; in the pursuit of democracy, of accountability and responsible human governance regardless of culture and history. The same can be said of various forms of environmentalism and animal welfare.

Taylor traces in western culture the pursuit of non-religious selfless goals as a case for exclusive humanism and exclusive human flourishing. He begins with the emergence of a movement referred to as Deism in the eighteenth century which argued that a societal goal of mutual benefit could be grounded simply in a distant yet divinely inspired construct for the organisation of human life. Banished were ideas of a God angry or happy with his creatures located in primitive myths of divine magical powers. The divinely ordained construct for society according to Taylor was what he calls the principle of mutual benefit which gave humankind the capacity to maintain a reasoned balance between individual and collective needs.⁶⁴ Taylor refers to the implications of this vision as the construct of an immanent or closed frame that at its extremis does not

⁶² Taylor, *Secular Age*, 18.

⁶³ Taylor, *Secular Age*, 59. Taylor traces this development in Chapter 1 of Part 1 in four dimensions: disenchantment; sustaining equilibrium; common understanding of time; replacing the cosmos with a modern neutral universe.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 542.

allow for any appeal to a non tangible higher order or authority. He attributes anti-clericalism in France at the beginning of the twentieth century to the apparent conflict between rational ideas about what constituted mutual benefit (which did allow for a transcendent experience embedded in the “earthly sensuality” of human life), and more spiritually expressed expectations of human life which assumed something more beautiful and more real beyond, or higher, than nature.⁶⁵

Similar to Taylor’s concept of human flourishing, Putnam’s reference to happiness in making the connection between social capital and physical and mental health where regular church attendance is studied as a social phenomenon. He refers to American studies in which physical and mental health are closely related to the strength of social networks that provide not only material support and reinforce healthy living norms, but also provide measurable biochemical effects that boost immunities from colds and high blood pressure.⁶⁶ He also feels from various academic studies done on Americans by American researchers that the decline in American social networks is related to the intergenerational increase in depression and suicides. The Organisation for Economic Development (OECD) connects suicide in member countries to rates of local social cohesion. The OECD includes factors such as divorce rates, unemployment rates, levels of trust, membership in non-religious organisations in their analysis. While Canada and the USA have approximately the same suicide rate there are some differences. Canadian suicide rates were higher than the USA rates in the years 1970-2003. Suicide

⁶⁵ Taylor, *Secular Age*, 546.

⁶⁶ Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000), 327.

rates are lower among men in Canada than in the USA; and also lower among the very elderly in Canada than in the USA. The Conference Board of Canada suggests in their report that these latter results could be related to better income security for the elderly in Canada.⁶⁷

1.3.6 Rational Choice Theories and Post Modernism

Rational choice theory begins with the belief that rational agents act according to a consistent set of self oriented preferences. Rational choice theory has been referred to as “a remarkable expression of Western civilization’s ongoing fascination with reason” by S.M. Amadae in her recent history of rational choice theory.⁶⁸ A memorable example of rational choice occurred in October 23, 2008, when Alan Greenspan, Chairman of the Federal Reserve Bank 1987-2006, and a strong believer in rational public policy and acknowledged follower of Ayn Rand’s philosophy⁶⁹ testified before a U.S. Congressional Hearing into the financial institutional crisis that “Those of us who have looked to the self-interest of lending institutions to protect shareholders’ equity, myself included, are in

⁶⁷ The Conference Board of Canada, <http://www.conferenceboard.ca/hcp/details/society/suicides.aspx> accessed 27 October 2013.

⁶⁸ S.M. Amadae traced the importance of rational choice theory as the basis for games theory which was adopted from military strategic thinking in the 1950’s and promoted by the Rand Corporation from the 1960’s in order to introduce rational choice theory for strategic thinking around institutional decision making. *Rationalizing Capitalist Democracy: the Cold War Origins of Rational Choice Liberalism* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2003).

⁶⁹ Ayn Rand’s famous books *The Fountainhead* and *Atlas Shrugged*, made of her an iconic cultural promoter of self interest in the 1960’s and 1970’s. She placed her vision of life in a neo-liberal ideology of personal freedom, personal autonomy and authenticity realised in human faith in the capacity of free markets to self regulate, and in the capacity of individuals to make rational decisions based upon rational consideration of self interest.

a state of shocked disbelief”⁷⁰ Rand’s legacy is cited in factions opposing the interventionist social policies of the current Democratic president Barack Obama.⁷¹

The quantification of public awareness of religious texts and the numbers of participants in institutionalized religious life is an earlier approach to assessing the influence of religion in society according to Hervieu-Léger. Reginald Bibby has used this approach in *The Boomer Factor* to assess the declining influence of religion in the Boomer generation in Canada. Hervieu-Léger finds that qualifying the presence of the religious spirit by the number of traditional religious artefacts in the public place is a reflection of the overly quantitative method of social analysis of the place of religion in society and in culture. She claims that social sciences must now take stock of the disruption that now affects compartmentalization and interdisciplinary relations on account of the pluralisation, subjectivisation and individualisation of systems of meaning”.⁷² While the influence of religious institutions and participation in traditional religious rituals has declined in numeric terms in the late 20th century, the number and variety of seekers of a religious experience of life have increased. This can be observed in the rise in western cultures of the more overtly emotional Christian religious services and the popularity of other personalist, authentic individual religious experiences such as

⁷⁰ Edmund L Andrews, “Greenspan Concedes Error on Regulation,” in the *New York Times* published on October 23, 2008, <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/10/24/business/economy/24panel.html> (accessed August 12, 2011).

⁷¹ According to recent authors of works on Ayn Rand’s life and influence, Anne Heller of *Ayn Rand and the World She Made* and Jennifer Burns of *Goddess of the Market: Ayn Rand and the American Right* a new generation of right wing Americans has taken inspiration from Rand’s radical individualism. I gleaned this insight from a Bloomberg article covering an interview with Anne Heller which appeared in *The Ottawa Citizen* January 24, 2010.

⁷² Hervieu-Léger, *Religion as a Chain*, 30.

Asian meditation practices. The recent cultural impact of a socio-religious fundamentalist interpretation of Islam in western countries as well as in the Middle East may be connected to such an analysis of the presence of religion in culture and memory.

While American, Canadian and European experiences of secularization are each embedded in their own unique histories, contemporary European and English sociologists of religion and religious experience such as Danièle Hervieu-Léger, Grace Davie, Françoise Champion have turned to the cultural affirmation of authenticity and the autonomy of the individual as the source of what Hervieu-Léger refers to as a “*bricolage* of belief”.⁷³ They look upon this religious search as an alternative to collective participation in religious rituals based on a singular doctrine of belief. Robert Putnam accounts for the decline of religious symbols in the public place as the Boomer preference for autonomy. The reasons he gives are connected to loss of trust in institutions that ran the Vietnam War, created the Watergate political scandal, and a growing respect in the post WWII period for individualism, competitiveness and social diversity.⁷⁴

The Deist expectation that humankind has the capacity to control his/her affairs with a quantifiable assessment of reality continues to guide the values applied to contemporary bureaucratic and institutional decision making and modes of communication. In reaction to the Marxist social imaginary of rational material and social progress the post modern world view seeks a new balance in the diversity, contingency

⁷³ Hervieu- Léger, ‘Bricolage vaut-il dissemination? Quelques réflexions sur l’opérationnalité sociologique d’une métaphore problématique,’ *Social Compass* vol 52 (3) (September 2005) 295-307.

⁷⁴ Putnam, *Bowling Alone*, 258.

and relativism experienced in the coming together of cultures through modern communications and international travel. Post modernism rejects certainties of modernism but is located within the continuing modernist foundational, yet abstract, vision of human universality and uniformity consistent with the western post WWII cultural world view.⁷⁵ While postmodernism needs the fruits of modernism to make its cultural and social philosophy credible, post modernism is also a romantic counter-cultural move that rejects mindless rationalism and/or blind belief in rigid rational systems and governance structures. Post modernism's vision of difference as a positive value for its own sake is not necessarily in the interest of equality and fraternity, nor does it promote faith based selflessness for the vulnerable.

The recent discovery of the vastness of space in the decade's long scientific exploration of space can also be viewed as threatening the expectation of an authentic meaningful self identity. Charles Taylor points to the growing awareness of the apparent darkness and endlessness of space and time as a threat to any rational basis for human transcendence, and thus as an impetus for post modern angst over the absence of any intrinsic meaning and purpose in life.⁷⁶ This sense of meaninglessness is not something new. Pope Benedict refers in his encyclical *Spe Salvi* to this eternal human concern by citing a Roman epitaph of the first century A.D. "How quickly we fall back from nothing to nothing".⁷⁷

⁷⁵ Elaine Graham, *Transforming Practice: Pastoral Theology in an Age of Uncertainty*, (Eugene Oregon: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2002), 27.

⁷⁶ Taylor, *Secular Age*, 376.

⁷⁷ Pope Benedict XVI *Spe Salvi: On Christian Hope*, (Ottawa: CCCB Publications Service, 2007). He argues in paragraph 2 argues in paragraph two of his second encyclical *Spe Salvi*; On Christian Hope that

Rational choice theory does not account for the human experience of a sense of the meaningless and hopelessness of life, nor kenotic selflessness, nor even altruism as a self transcending expression of a noble, if not heroic, philosophy and humanist spirituality. This concern is the basis of my “Why Bother?” question arising as it does in the life experience of a generation which has lived, worked, and reproduced in a culture dominated by media generated visions of endless progress, meaningless time, immediate pleasure, faith in rational decisions and quantifiable self interest. By using an analogy of social tribes to describe Canadians, Michael Adams, author of the widely read *Sex in the Snow*, and co-founder and president of the Environics Group of pollsters in Toronto noted these trends in tracking the evolution of social values in the second half of the 20th century in Canada.⁷⁸ Just as Robert Putnam has done on a general level for the loss of social capital in the USA, Adams has done with reference to Canadian culture. He has monitored the evolution in Canada towards ever more autonomy – less reliance for support, guidance and inspiration on family, intimates, the workplace, or institutions such as government, private sector corporations and religious establishments. At the time of writing this book in 1997 he foresaw the children of Boomers as highly individualistic and autonomous with an intuitive sensitivity to the interconnectedness of all human life because of the internet and travel.⁷⁹ Putnam in looking at the culture of the children of

in contemporary life, as in the early days of Christianity in the Roman world from which he cites this epithet, hope is equivalent to a reason for faith that life can/does have meaning.

⁷⁸ Michael Adams, *Better Happy than Rich?: Canadians, Money and the Meaning of Life*, (Toronto: Penguin Group Canada, 2000), Chapter 231-72 and also Appendix A.

⁷⁹ Michael Adams, *Sex in the Snow: The Surprising Revolution in Canadian Social Values*, (Toronto: Penguin Group Canada, 2006), 201. Mary Pipher, an American psychologist, anthropologist and author of several New York Times best seller books on contemporary culture seems to acknowledge this when she

American Boomers observed that this next generation, X Generation he calls it, were less secure about the future yet more individualist with an emphasis on “the personal and private over the public and collective.” This he attributes in part to the absence of collective success as had previous generations in celebrating collective national victories.⁸⁰

Bibby’s research findings indicate that while 80% of respondents in Ontario agreed that care for others was very important, Boomers are in fact opting to experience this care within narrow circles of valued people. In researching membership in groups from 1975 to 2005 Bibby established that Canadian participation had fallen in ten categories of group membership (faith community, sports, hobby and service clubs, private clubs, fraternity/sorority, political groups, farm organisations, ethnic groups, et al).⁸¹ Over the same period he found that formalised images of God and of a personal relationship with such a God have lost their significance in the lives of most Boomers.⁸² As noted above Charles Taylor’s view is that this shift to the autonomous individual can be accounted for by the loss of personal vulnerability to the forces of an enchanted magical world view.⁸³

portrays the world of the children of boomers as a “... sped up, gadget-laden and over-scheduled culture.” This, taken from Pipher’s reflections on the modern imagination in the *Ottawa Citizen* of 20 October 2007 would suggest that the intuition of global interconnectedness will be both a spiritual and a rational outcome of the post boomer culture.

⁸⁰ Putnam, *Bowling Alone*, 259.

⁸¹ Reginald Bibby, *The Boomer Factor: What Canada’s Most Famous Generation is Leaving Behind*, (Lethbridge: A Project Canada Book, 2006)(Toronto, Bastian Books, 2006), 40-41, 44.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 21.

⁸³ Taylor, *Secular Age*, 299-302.

1.3.7 Individualism, Authenticity, Autonomy

Charles Taylor has identified authenticity and autonomy as hallmarks of contemporary culture. While individualism was a significant feature of the culture of the modern period, Taylor has identified authenticity of expression, what he has named “expressive individualism” as the product of the cultural movements of the 1960’s. That decade opened a new period of social history in North America: a period of affluence, consumerism, nuclear double income families, suburban life styles, commuting to jobs in urban centres, dislocated extended families, and more. The growing middle class of the immediate post war generation had enough money to live as they chose in the suburbs. The result was that traditional interdependence within smaller settled communities ceased to be a critical normalising feature of daily life.

The young Boomer generation growing up in the suburbs in this period had access to what had once been upper class life styles – delayed adulthood, university education, world travel, material indulgences. Freedom of expression grounded in the “rights” of the autonomous individual was expressed in the choice of life styles, fashion, studies, political and social engagements and career selection. Taylor refers to this phenomenon as “self determining freedom” which he relates to the freedoms expressed by the cultural elites of the earlier Romantic period. These freedoms were grounded in faith in the innate sympathy within humanity for all that is human, the creative potential of the individual was free to achieve personal goals and lifestyles consistent with the natural striving for good and moral unity within society.⁸⁴

⁸⁴ Seidman, Steven, “Modernity and the Problem of Meaning: The Durkheimian Tradition,” in *Sociological Analysis*, 46 no 3 (Summer 1985), p 109-130.
<http://web.ebscohost.com.proxy.bib.uottawa.ca/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer> (accessed 27 June 2011).

From this perspective personal individual meaning making arose from personal experience and the freedom of the individual to follow his/her individual visions and choices in life. When the less social voice of nature deep within the noble savage legitimised the moral order, then knowledge became personalised and authentic. “Authentic” decisions are those which remain true to one’s innate inner self, unlike those dictated by external sources. Originality of thought and life style become the outward signal of authenticity, which explains the basis of the expression “doing your own thing”.⁸⁵ Authenticity from an another perspective put forward by Taylor suggests self identity is the product of multiple relationships – human and environmental, requiring an “equal recognition” of the other with the result that the denial of equal recognition for reasons of difference can be viewed in contemporary post modern society as oppression.⁸⁶

Autonomy expresses the individualism which Taylor also includes in his definition of authenticity; that is; the right to make and take responsibility for one’s own decisions. These are values of a culture which fall between modernism and post modernism, between collective and individual decision making. While the virtue, if not necessity, of caring for each other became less demanding when the state and large employers assumed financial responsibility for health and social programming, the

⁸⁵ Taylor, *Secular Age*, 27-29. The Canadian author and Maclean’s columnist, Andrew Potter, in his 2010 book *The Authenticity Hoax: How We Get Lost Finding Ourselves* debunked the substance of one’s inner self as the source of authentic self identity writing that authentic self identity amounted to nothing more than “personal choice in the material decorations of one’s lifestyle” This quote comes from a review by Alex Good in *Quill and Quire* March 2010 of *The Authenticity Hoax: How We Get Lost Finding Ourselves* from http://www.quillandquiere.com/reviews/review.cfm?review_id=6819 (accessed August 12 2011).

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 50-51.

decline of the economy beginning in 2009 on the cusp of an aging society has brought forward once again the challenge of care for the frail seniors of a soon to be realised tomorrow.

Equal recognition for difference in a liberal democratic society might suggest two divergent approaches. A relativist would see that aging is one among many equally valid stand alone categories of human existence thus leaving the individual responsible for his or her own care and salvation. The second as implied by Charles Taylor is that equal recognition assumes the collective has the responsibility for ensuring that all sections of society, young and old, strong and frail, have the right to what is necessary for the dignity accorded equally to each citizen. How will this be possible in a society that has valued autonomy and individualism and so witnessed the decline in social capital over two generations? Looking out to a time when social and health services are reduced, the human survival instinct would indicate that the majority of the younger members of society might see what is going on and will create communities of personal long term relationships in new social networks. It is in the interim period during the slow cool down of public health and social services that many Boomers and some aging Pre-Boomers will be caught without the social networks to protect their human dignity.

Taylor attributes the significance of the personal discovery of an authentic identity to the public discovery and exploration of personal sexuality in the 1960's. The discovery of creativity in getting rid of oppression and repression in the social revolution of the 1960's; namely, creating equality between men and women and between students and workers; breaking down the dualities of reason and feeling, of body and mind.⁸⁷

⁸⁷ Taylor, *Secular Age*, 476.

Gender equality in the USA in practical terms according to Putnam meant that when women with career expectations entered the workforce in large numbers beginning in the late 1960's, the social capital they had previously invested in school life, in organising children's after school activities, and in community and church life began to disappear.⁸⁸

The significance of autonomy is attested by the importance of the right to privacy which in Canada has been recognised in the creation of the Office of the Privacy Commissioner of Canada whose mission is to protect and promote the right to privacy of Canadian citizens and residents. This office oversees the application of the federal Privacy Act which determines and monitors the handling of personal information of Canadians by government and the handling of personal information held in the private sector by way of the Personal Information Protection and Electronic Documents Act (PIPEDA). Because this office reports directly to Parliament it is independent of the usual political and bureaucratic internal reporting guidelines within government. This legislated recognition of personal autonomy limits access to care for those who need it. Health and social workers in Ottawa cannot give contact numbers of frail elders to allow community organizations to intervene unless the isolated person first gives permission for an intervention.⁸⁹ This act also renders elder abuse a legally protected hidden crime in Ottawa because those who witness or claim personal knowledge of the hidden abuse of seniors (physical, financial, emotional) cannot help the senior without his/her stated

⁸⁸ Putnam, *Bowling Alone*, 195.

⁸⁹ This topic of the negative effects of privacy legislation has been raised in discussions of public advocacy in the Interfaith Network for Isolated Seniors in terms of frail seniors isolating themselves to the extent that they do not respond to health and social workers attempting to contact them.

agreement which is usually not given by dependent elders for fear of reprisals, often by family members.

1.3.8 Volunteerism

In the history of Ottawa there were many civic and religious institutions such as hospitals, schools for the poor and shelters for the abandoned initiated and often staffed by Christian volunteers. These institutions for social welfare are now largely publicly funded and accountable to the public through volunteer boards of private citizens. Because dimensions of compassion are necessary in volunteering for responsible and/or tedious jobs that serve the common good, the results of recent surveys on volunteerism in Canada provide some quantifiable indicators of the quality of the spirit of volunteering in the 21st century.

Imagine Canada did an analysis using the 2004 Statistics Canada National Survey of Giving, showed that 19% of Canadians attend religious services regularly. This group represents 28% of volunteers in Canada, 35% of the top volunteers, and 35% of total volunteer hours. This contrasts with 43% of volunteers who never attend religious services but account for 36% of volunteers, 32% of top volunteers and 32% of total volunteer hours.⁹⁰ Statistics Canada tracked giving rates in Canada in 2007 and found that while the value of financial donations had increased 12% between 2004 and 2007 the average number of donations decreased. The 2007 survey also characterised the top 25% of volunteers giving over 171 hours as belonging to segments of the population who were more likely to attend religious services on a weekly basis, or have university degrees or

⁹⁰ Canadian Centre for Philanthropy (now Imagine Canada). Citation regarding volunteering from Statistics Canada based on the 2004 *National Survey of Giving, Volunteering and Participating*.

with school aged children living at home. The top three beneficiaries of donations were religious organisations (46%), health organisations (15%) and social service organisations (10%). Most of these dollars given were by 25% of donors accounting for 82% of donated dollars of which the top 10% accounted for 62% of the donations. This same survey indicates that 14% of the population contributed 59% of all donated dollars. Consistent with the limited number of directly engaged volunteers the data in this survey indicate that 14% of the population provides 40% of volunteer hours for charitable and non profit organizations, a number which does not include all volunteering.⁹¹

The federal and provincial governments have recently conducted surveys⁹² to determine the reasons why young seniors are not replacing older seniors in running civic organisations. Volunteers are essential partners in running public cultural, educational, athletic and social programmes with the support of government contributions for programming. Many Boomers in both major studies noted their engagement in part time paid work as a life style choice to remain busy, to remain connected with active people, to feel useful, to learn new skills. These are regarded as alternatives to the social benefits of paid work when earning money is not a critical issue. Privately supported surveys noted below have also been undertaken in Ottawa to test local senior concerns and interests, of which volunteering has been one feature.

⁹¹ Statistics Canada. *Caring Canadians, Involved Canadians: Highlights from the 2007 Canada Survey of Giving, Volunteering and Participating* <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/71-542-x/2009001/summary-sommaire-eng.htm> (accessed 12 August 2011).

⁹² The government of Ontario in 2007 funded *Renaissance 50+*; and the federal agency Volunteer Canada conducted a national one in 2010 entitled *Bridging the Gap* in which I participated in 2009.

1.3.8.1 *The Ontario Government Survey of Boomer Volunteerism*

The “Renaissance 50 Plus” survey in 2007 by the Catholic Immigration Centre in Ottawa was designed to provide some tools to engage the coming Boomer generation of seniors in Ontario for those agencies and non profit organisations that depend on volunteers.⁹³ The tools provided for recruiting volunteers as a result of this survey were booklets entitled “Renaissance 50 Plus Volunteers: A Resource Guide for Agencies” and “Attention Boomers: Change the World –Again! A Toolkit to Meaningful Volunteering”.

The tools focus on ways to appeal to the self interest of the volunteers such as leaving a legacy, harnessing work skills, developing new interests and networks, learning new skills, meeting new people, the need for clear expectations regarding time, tasks and training for volunteer tasks, providing camaraderie, intellectual stimulation and the satisfaction of achieving goals, combining travel with volunteering (“Voluntravel”). The following comment about Boomers which is noted in the guide for agencies is indicative of this appeal to self interest: “Baby Boomers are a gregarious lot and less likely to volunteer out of a sense of duty or obligation, and more likely to volunteer as part of a social interaction.”⁹⁴ If we look at this response in the context of the validity tests of Browning, the vision of these respondents that informs the sense of obligation in this response reflects contemporary values such as autonomy or authenticity. An altruistic reason for Boomer volunteering highlighted in these booklets for recruiting volunteers

⁹³ Catholic Immigration Centre (CIC) Ottawa, *Renaissance 50 Plus* funded by the Ontario Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration led by Dan Dubeau for CIC in Ottawa.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 5.

mirrors the responses of some of my interviewees in the desire to give back to society in gratitude for benefits received from society.

1.3.8.2 *The Volunteer Canada Survey of 2010*

The Governor General, David Johnston, patron of Volunteer Canada, gave a forceful speech advocating the need for greater volunteerism when launching “*Bridging the Gap*”, the report on the results of the 2010 survey on the state of volunteerism in Canada.⁹⁵ This survey was arranged around four separate groups of potential volunteers: families, employer supported volunteers, youth, and Boomers. The purpose of this survey was to determine what was specific in each group that would attract volunteers to supplement what had become an over dependence in civic society on the small group of those referred to as *über* volunteers – the five percent who do more than 65 per cent of the volunteer work. The survey identified the following gaps between the interests of potential volunteers and the needs of volunteer groups: opportunities for volunteers to learn skills or acquire experience for tasks specific to a group mandate; short term tasking when most volunteer groups expect long term commitments; a disconnect between volunteer personal goals and organisational goals.

The Volunteer Canada survey was an attempt to address the need for long term commitments in civic organisations. The survey did not focus on the engagement of one

⁹⁵ Volunteer Canada, *Bridging the Gap: Enriching the Volunteer Experience to Build a Better Future for our Communities*, <http://volunteer.ca/files/English> (accessed November 24, 2011). This survey of volunteering expectations found that the Boomers who volunteer the most time need to feel a real purpose in their volunteer commitments, expect to volunteer in efficient organisations, and are willing to stay in an organisation if they are treated well. They also found that Boomers do not volunteer in organisations where they might be expected to do what the paid staff will not do, or where regardless of their skills or interests, they are expected to do what others do not want to do.

on one volunteers needed to help marginalized people deal with the challenges of every day living. This survey of different social groups who had agreed to come together to attend the workshops and fill in the Volunteer Canada questionnaires, noted that the populations surveyed were mobile, autonomous, enjoy several different interests and roles in their lives, and expect mutual benefits to flow between the individual volunteer and the organisation when they do volunteer. In summary, this reports advises that volunteer based groups need to learn to deal more effectively with the “what’s in it for me” expectation.

The two gaps noted in the Volunteer Canada survey – commitment limits and differences between personal goals and organisational needs - were the subject of an informative exchange between two well-known researchers in the field of volunteering, Linda Graff of Linda Graff and Associates and Paul Reed, the senior social scientist at Statistics Canada and Director of the Centre for Applied Social Research at Carleton University.⁹⁶ In a recorded discussion titled “Who Cares” they exchange ideas concerning the causes and the implications of the current lack of volunteers willing to replace what they refer to as the great civic generation who preceded the Boomers.⁹⁷ They say that volunteers are declining nationally by 2% a year which will amount to a decline of 20% by 2017 around the same time when the Ontario government expects the province to become an aging society.

⁹⁶ Nick Scott (for Paul Reed with assistance from Kevin Selbee), “Secular mobilization? The evolving effects of religion on Canadian civic engagement, 1982-2001,” Carleton University and Statistics Canada, August 2007. <http://www3.carleton.ca/casr/scott1.pdf> (accessed 24 November 2011).

⁹⁷ <http://www.lindagraff.ca/canada-who-cares.html>.

According to Graaf and Reed, the Volunteer Canada survey also found that the number of hours of those who volunteer is also changing from long hours in support of organisations dedicated to the common good to shorter hours on behalf of episodic community projects which tend to benefit the volunteers and their families such as schools, children's sports, and ski clubs. They feel that reasons for the decline are self evident: dual income families, single parent households, government intervention in community care, lengthy commutes to and from work. They also state that the anomie of massive urbanisation has reduced the higher rates of volunteerism to be found in the smaller, more socially cohesive communities outside of the cities. Paul Reed also suggested a link between the decline in religious affiliation among Boomers and the decline in volunteering. All of this complements the research and analysis of Robert Putnam with reference to the declining spirit of community in the U.S.A. One of my interviewees provided a good example of this sense of alienation in a large urban setting of Ottawa when he said that he had not joined a Lion's Club in Ottawa although he had been an active and enthusiastic member for many years when he lived in a small country town on the outskirts of Ottawa. His reason for not joining in the city was that there would not be the closeness among the members around joint community projects which he had experienced in the country chapter of this club. His reason for not joining in the city was that there would not be the closeness among the members around joint community projects which he had experienced in the country.

In the first half of the twentieth century in the USA, Robert Putnam found that a case could be made that the pressures and stresses of war bring people together with a sense of purpose and belonging, a phenomenon that accounts for the creation of social

capital. He based this hypothesis on the fact that those born before 1946 are twice as likely as are the children of Boomers to feel a sense of belonging to their neighbourhoods, church communities and clubs.⁹⁸ The Canadian sociologist, Gerry Veenstra, has studied social capital on the basis of trust in various types of social networks and found in a survey of social capital in the province of Saskatchewan that trust is highest among people who are physically close to each other, and moreover, that trust between people in the same faith community ranked highest, above in descending order, the local community, professional organisations and government.⁹⁹

In summary, the national survey and the one funded by the Ontario government are the result of a decline in volunteering and the need to determine how to encourage volunteering in the Boomer generation. According to the Graff-Reed discussion these are expectations which non profit volunteer groups are not able to offer as they are now organised. One possible conclusion to draw is that serving the community in the interests of serving the common good is no longer regarded as essential as it once was by an earlier generation of volunteers.

The common good as a collective ethical goal needs an articulated familiar framework which in the past was embedded in generally accepted social and religious creeds and norms. In Canada the idea of the common good was accepted in the past in the language of the Christian faith in well known parables such as that of the Good

⁹⁸ Putnam, *Bowling Alone*, 274.

⁹⁹ Gerry Veenstra, "Explicating Social Capital: Trust and Participation in the Civil Space," in *Canadian Journal of Sociology* 27 (4) 2002, 547-572.
<http://web.ebscohost.com.proxy.bib.uottawa.ca/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?sid=5a4c0ff7-e103-4def-8393-765dd715fdc7%40sessionmgr14&vid=2&hid=23> (accessed 29 October 2013).

Samaritan, or references to the Judeo Christian teachings regarding the Golden Rule. If the narrative for volunteer commitment to building and defending the common good in an aging society is self interest, then it can be expected that it will be difficult to recruit people to give their attention to frail elders.

1.3.8.3 Federal Superannuates National Association (Ottawa) 2011 Survey

The third survey cited here, completed in 2011, is one in which I was involved as both an elected board member and the chair of the Membership and Services Committee of the Ottawa branch of the Federal Superannuates National Organisation (FSNA) that conducted the survey. The Ottawa chapter of the FSNA is a volunteer organisation with 32,000 local members and two paid staff. During my seven years on the board I have tried to promote the importance of volunteering in the community as a way of engaging the association in the broader interests of seniors in the city. The purpose of the survey was to find out why our members joined, what their interests were as seniors, and to ask about the use of current services and potential interest in collaborative action with other seniors groups in the city. The chapter represents a sizable local group of reasonably well off, well educated, senior community federal retirees with the potential as a chapter to be an important voice for seniors in the local community. There were 1400 responses to our questionnaire, designed by retired research staff from Statistics Canada.

A question regarding member interest in information on volunteer opportunities with the association and in the city indicated only one third thought this important or very important. What we have learnt from previous experience is that email requests for member participation in specific senior support activities unrelated to the national mandate have registered a response of 10-15 positive responses, considered a good

response rate. The findings on volunteering reflect the findings of the above two public surveys; that is, that Boomers do not want to make long term (one year and more) commitments to volunteer on a regular basis. We received a positive response rate of 73% and 70% respectively to questions regarding the need for information and advice on home health care support and long term care options. This result indicated that many members are considering the availability of adequate options for care as they and their spouses and friends age.

1.3.8.4 Alternative Volunteer Participation in Community Building

The decline of membership in urban areas of secular community based service clubs and fraternal/sisterly societies for friendships such as Rotary, the Lions Club, Kiwanis, Shriners is another indication of reluctance for long term commitments to organisations providing community services. These volunteer based organisations at one time provided much needed continuing financial and physical support to hospitals, family and children's aid societies, and emergency services as well as mutual support and networking opportunities for members to tap into in time of personal need. One reason already cited above suggests that perceptions of exclusiveness and unusual rituals along with the greater role of government in a wide range of social and health services may be connected to the demise of service clubs. If as Gerry Veenstra suggests that the technologies that make globalisation possible are changing relationships of trust by removing the constraints of time and place, then the sense of community could become

less contingent on intimate relationships of participation with family and close friends and more dependent on trust in “abstract and expert systems”.¹⁰⁰

Indirect financial engagement in community building is also an alternative to personal civic engagement. Reginald Bibby, the author and producer of Project Canada surveys related to faith community issues in Canada, has produced data on community building by Boomers. He has concluded that Boomers do not join groups as did their parents’ generation preferring instead to participate in one off activities. His data also indicate that only sixteen percent of Boomers place a high value on community involvement, and finally, that Boomers like their older and younger fellow citizens place less and less value on political involvement. By way of contrast to volunteering as a commitment of time he asked about the importance of relationships in life. The answers in his 2005 survey noted that of the top six wants of Boomers, the second, third and fourth top ranking were family life, being loved, and friendship respectively. In comparing these figures with his earlier research data regarding the fears of Boomers, Bibby found that between 1985 and 2005 concerns about aging increased from 22 percent to 25 percent, concerns about loneliness increased from 20 to 27 percent, and concerns about marriage or committed relationships increased from 18 percent to 23 percent.¹⁰¹ As reported in the next chapter these results support what I found in my interviews; that is, that close personal relationships give meaning and fulfilment, and that fears for the future are the loss of relationships; namely, loneliness, isolation, becoming a burden for family and friends.

¹⁰⁰ Veenstra, “Explicating Social Capital”, 552.

¹⁰¹ Bibby, *The Boomer Factor*, 114, 115.

1.4 Challenges for Boomers in an Aging Society

1.4.1 Moral Choices for an Aging Society

Moral choices to cut medical costs at the end of life are choices between non intervention and physician assisted suicide. As our western society ages, talk of dying with dignity as in physician assisted euthanasia becomes more common. A British Columbia court decision in 2012 upheld for one year (pending federal legislation) an appellant's wish to go to her physician for the means to choose how to end her life. Euthanasia and/or physician assisted suicide have been the subject of several federal private member bills over the past twenty five years. In June 2013 the Government of Quebec presented to the National Assembly Bill 52 that would allow medically assisted death. The Minister responsible referred to the bill as "intended for people at the end of their life to die with autonomy and dignity." Quebec had the highest per capita suicide rate in Canada reporting in the 2006 national census that one quarter of those suicides were in the 50-64 age cohorts, a number that has since declined.¹⁰².

In Ottawa in 2007 the then head of the Champlain Local Health Integrated Network, Dr Robert Cushman, made a publicly reported statement that seniors should have living wills in order to limit the degree and cost of medical effort required to remain alive once death appears imminent. He said this because while only 3 percent of a hospital population is the frail elderly this group consumes 30 percent of hospital resources. The editorial in *The Ottawa Citizen* commenting on Dr Cushman's statement noted that "our best thinkers, our medical practitioners, politicians and the public they

¹⁰² Institut national de la Sante du Quebec, *La mortalité par suicide au Québec : données récentes de 2005 à 2009; Mise a jour 2011* http://www.inspq.qc.ca/pdf/publications/1204_Suicide2005-2009_MAJ2011.pdf (accessed August 11 2011).

represent are afraid to discuss the end of life”.¹⁰³ While the editor’s statements might reflect Dr. Cushman’s responsibility to control health care costs, they are not inconsistent with an important principle in *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* that does not promote unreasonable expectations of individuals for public care at the cost of the common good.¹⁰⁴

1.4.2 Public Elder Care

The future of public health funding for frail seniors invokes attention to a balance in the moral choices facing taxpayers. The extended life spans of today’s seniors result in an increasing occurrence of Alzheimer’s or related dementias. The Alzheimer Society of Canada commissioned a report in 2011 entitled *Rising Tide: Impact of Dementia on Canadian Society*.¹⁰⁵ The report highlights the fact that Alzheimer’s and other dementias have a financial as well as heavy social cost. Between 2008 and 2038, the number of Canadians with dementia is expected to grow from 1.5 percent of the population to 2.8 per cent. People with advanced dementia can still expect to be placed in long term care once their at-home care givers can no longer look after them; however, increasingly they must wait in high cost hospital beds for placement in lower cost facilities for frail seniors once they are no longer able to live alone. These are the people, often referred to as ‘bed

¹⁰³ Editor, “A Debate on Death”. *The Ottawa Citizen*, 2 November 2007, F4

¹⁰⁴ *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*, Section 2, Chapter 2, Article 5 paragraph 2288 states ‘Life and physical health are precious gifts entrusted to us by God. We must take reasonable care of them, taking into account the needs of others and the common good.’

¹⁰⁵ Alzheimer Society of Canada, *Rising Tide: Impact of Dementia on Canadian Society* <http://www.alzheimer.ca/en/on/Get-involved/Raise-your-voice/Rising-Tide> (accessed 18 November 2011).

blockers' by the media, whose needs delay non emergency medical procedures which would allow healthier seniors to live longer in their own homes.

An additional concern for future elder care is the capacity of Boomers to afford private long term care. According to a statement of the Champlain Local Health Integrated Network (LHIN) in 2010 people are living longer and their savings are not keeping up with the increasing costs of private long term care, particularly after the 2008 financial crisis reduced earnings from investment funds. Even before the Boomers began to reach the age of 65, Ontario already had the second highest ratio of seniors to health care workers (fifteen seniors to one worker) among publicly financed institutions in Canada according to a Statistics Canada survey cited by Lise Cloutier-Steele, the Ottawa author of *There's No Place like Home*. Her book is an account of her personal experience and assessment of the quality of care in Ontario when she had to move her increasingly frail father at age 82 out of his home into a public care facility in Ottawa. Her book put a human face on the local impact of what are already overstretched public care resources allocated to frail seniors, their families and friends.¹⁰⁶ At stake in her story is her discovery of the need to have access to private resources (family, friends, volunteers, paid help) with which to supplement public care in a long term care facility in Ottawa. The challenge that she had to deal with was linked to maintaining the human dignity of her father; that is, keeping him and his immediate surroundings clean and odour free, not leaving him alone for hours on end, ensuring that he make it to meals and be given help eating if necessary.

¹⁰⁶ Lise Cloutier-Steele, ed. Ellen Blumin, *There's No Place like Home: a Guide for all Caregivers* (www.Ottawacaregiver.com: Ottawa 2010).

In order to reduce the numbers of elderly patients waiting for long term care spaces the province in 2007 pioneered an *Aging at Home in Champlain* policy and programme¹⁰⁷ for public housing for less well off seniors. This report focussed on pilot projects in subsidized public housing with the intention of expanding this policy later into the wider community.¹⁰⁸ To achieve this goal the report made the following point, “Not only must we re-examine the manner in which traditional health services are coordinated, we must also turn to methods that have usually not been considered components of health care”. The services identified to support aging in place through community engagement include transportation, personal care, meal preparation, home making/home maintenance services and access to health and social facilities. Elder care for frail seniors trying to live successfully on their own in cities will be a compelling challenge in the years ahead. The local Aging in Place initiative is directed to a limited number of public housing units built for low income seniors in which the city provides access to public support services through an *in situ* elder care worker. Independent seniors in Ottawa have access to limited tax payer funded services through privately managed subcontractors to the Community Care Access Centres (CCAC) which report to the Local Health Integrated

¹⁰⁷ Champlain Local Health Integration Network, *Aging at Home in Champlain, 2006*
http://www.champlainhin.on.ca/Page.aspx?id=3960&ekmense1=e2f22c9a_72_192_btnlink, (accessed 3 August 2011).

¹⁰⁸ In assessing the long term impact of the Aging in Place social and health policy on Ottawa seniors it is significant that seniors living alone do not have the emotional and physical support of those who are married or otherwise share their lives with someone else. The numbers of those 55-64 reporting in as never married increased from 12% to 19% between 1981 and 2001. Also in that age group in that same survey the divorce rate tripled from 1.7% to 5.1% overall with a higher proportion in the 55 to 64 age cohort from 4% in 1981 to 11% in 2001. 54% of the 55-64 cohort reported living with a spouse, an increase of 3% over 1981. The percentage of women aged 75-84 living alone in 2001 was more than double the number of men which is explained in part by the fact that men in that age category were more likely to have a spouse, a percentage which increased dramatically for those over 85 where 38% of men had a spouse and only 7% of women. Statistics Canada, General Social Survey 2006.

Network (LHIN). Basic publicly funded help must come from these private sub-contractors or through volunteer services, friends and usually nearby family members if such exist. The Champlain LHIN considers these services could be delivered by care givers, senior and dementia support groups and faith based organisations among nine possible community partners. In respect of the latter the challenge in Ottawa for the faith communities is that most members are themselves composed largely of aging Pre-Boomers.

Better off frail seniors can always supplement their limited access to public support care through personal contracts with these same private elder care service companies. The balance between public and private care through private health care providers is sustainable only as long as low cost immigrant labour, largely female, is available. At the time of writing, private services cost between two and three times the minimum wage paid by the service companies to non unionised, largely new immigrant workers who must be available on unpaid stand by and do not receive any benefits or fixed hours. Since 2007 several commercial companies have opened private elder care businesses whose preferred employees are healthy young seniors supplementing their retirement finances with part time work.¹⁰⁹

1.4.3 Aging in Place Alone

In order to put my contextualised research question in dialogue with Christian tradition, a rich understanding of some qualitative factors embedded in these socio-

¹⁰⁹ As chair of the Seniors Committee of the Centretown Citizens Community Association I covered this topic in an article 'Buying Caring Services in the City' for the October 2010 edition of *The Centretown Buzz* based on an interview with Lesley Anne Sullivan, the owner of a private one-on-one service provider Home Instead Senior Care (HISC).

economic facts is essential. Loneliness is a significant feature in the lives of today's elderly, one that often leads to illness and the need for attention by publicly funded social and health services. The social reality of loneliness is the result of the accumulating losses of aging: loss of energy; the death of spouses, close family members and old friends; the loss of access to family and friends through relocation; the loss of mobility and usually good health (sight, hearing, memory); marginalisation from the high paced, costly, modern, daily urban living.

Loneliness is not necessarily a phenomenon of social isolation quantifiable in numbers of social interactions and relationships. Loneliness applies to perceptions of social isolation and is therefore linked to the quality of relationships rather than the number.¹¹⁰ This point is supported by the work of the American psychologist John Cacioppo¹¹¹ at the University of Chicago. He distinguishes quality from quantity of relationships in proposing that the physical and existential nature of humanity requires relationships of mutual value rather than sheer number. Such relationships he says entail values such as trustworthiness, creativity, confidentiality, shared interests and projects for survival and effective reproduction. Awareness of loneliness for healthy humans who are social animals is a biological signal to strengthen social relationships. An interesting

¹¹⁰ Christopher M. Masi¹, Hsi-Yuan Chen¹, Louise C. Hawkey¹, and John T. Cacioppo, "A Meta-Analysis of Interventions to Reduce Loneliness," *Personality and Social Psychology Review* 15(3) 219 citing the work of Peplau, L. A., & Perlman, D. *Loneliness: A sourcebook of current theory, research, and therapy*. New York, NY: John Wiley. (1982), and Wheeler, L., Reis, H., & Nezlek, J. (1983) "Loneliness, social interaction, and sex roles," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 45, 943-953 <http://journals1.scholarsportal.info.proxy.bib.uottawa.ca/tmp/12770246770255899510.pdf> (accessed 4 August 2011).

¹¹¹ Director of the Centre for Cognitive and Social Neuroscience in the Faculty of Psychology at the University of Chicago.

corollary suggested by Cacioppo in other research is that the behaviour of lonely people removes them from the very social networks that provide the means of survival and flourishing.¹¹²

In this respect it is worth noting for the aging Boomer population in Ottawa the existence of Canadian statistics demonstrating changes in male and female relationships in the lives of those 65 to 74 and those 75 and over.¹¹³ In assessing the long term impact of the Aging in Place social and health policy for Ottawa seniors it is significant that seniors living alone do not have the emotional and physical support of those who are married or otherwise share their lives with someone else. The numbers of those 55-64 reporting in as never married increased from 12 percent to 19 percent between 1981 and 2001. Also in that age group in that same survey the divorce rate tripled from 1.7 percent to 5.1 percent overall with a higher proportion in the 55 to 64 age cohort (4 percent in 1981 and 11 percent in 2001). 54 percent of the 55-64 cohort reported living with a spouse, an increase of 3 percent over 1981.¹¹⁴ The percentage of women aged 75-84 living alone in 2001 was more than double the number of men while in the cohort of men

¹¹² Cacioppo, J. T., Fowler, J. H., & Christakis, N. A. (2009), "Alone in the crowd: The structure and spread of loneliness in a large social network," in *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 97, 977-991.

¹¹³ Data from the General Social Survey of Statistics Canada in 2006 reported that 82% of older Canadians (75 and over) claimed they had at least one close friend whereas 88% of those between 65 and 74 reported having only one close friend. This is a decline in both groups of 3% from the 1990 survey. Between 1990 and 2006, the latter survey also reports that the proportion of women aged 65-74 who claimed at least one close friendship rose from 86% in 1990 to 90% in 2006. The percentage of men claiming a close friend in that same age bracket rose from 84% to 86% in the same years. The story is different for those over 75 where the numbers of men claiming two or more friends rose from 68% to 74% between the years 1990 and 2006 yet friendships claimed by the women in that cohort dropped from 76% in 1990 to 71% in 2006.

¹¹⁴ Statistics Canada, *A Portrait of Seniors in Canada 2006*, Chapter 4, 137-205, <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/89-519-x/89-519-x2006001-eng.pdf> (accessed 4 August 2011).

and women over 85 years of age, 38 percent of men had a spouse compared to only 7 percent of women.

A General Study on urban and rural social relationships was done by Statistics Canada in 2005. The study reported that 33 percent of residents who have lived in a rural area for five or more years expressed a strong sense of belonging to their community as opposed to only 20 percent claiming a sense of community in cities with 500,000 to 1 million residents and 19 percent in those living in cities of over 1 million. While rural neighbours report greater trust in each other, that trust did not translate into receiving help – 20 percent of rural residents vs. 16 percent in cities, although 23 percent of rural people stated they had offered help vs. 17 percent doing so in the largest cities.¹¹⁵ It is very difficult to guess the numbers of Boomers who will be living alone past the age of 65 from 2012 going forward although one indication from the 2001 Statistics Canada census estimated there were more than 1.1 million mature singles in Canada in 2001. Of those, about half, or 550,000, did not expect to marry.¹¹⁶

From all of this data a picture begins to emerge that a higher percentage of aging Boomers will live alone than has been the case in previous generations. While Aging in Place can be a choice, it is one that complements an Ontario provincial policy to make services available at home so that seniors will age at their own expense rather than expecting a publicly subsidised place in a seniors' residence. In an article for the Canadian website, *The Mark News* in March 2010, Alex Himmelfarb, retired Clerk of the

¹¹⁵ Statistics Canada, "The Daily" June 21, 2005 Study: Social relationships in rural and urban Canada (<http://www.statcan.gc.ca/daily-quotidien/050621/dq050621b-eng.htm> (accessed August 4 2011)).

¹¹⁶ Statistics Canada, "The Daily", June 7 2005, <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/daily-quotidien/050607/dq050607a-eng.htm> (accessed August 4, 2011).

Privy Council of Canada, named the restructuring of “health and social programs in the face of the demographic crunch” as one of the challenges on which the federal government had failed to engage Canadians. The public debate he states should be about “what should be private and what should be public” on as sensitive a subject as an aging society at a time of recession when pension funds are performing poorly.¹¹⁷ My research question at the level of rational public policy is therefore rooted in the practical cultural challenge of senior mutual care for this generation of young seniors in the likely event that the economy is not able to sustain current levels of public care for growing numbers of frail seniors living on their own.¹¹⁸

1.5 Summary and Conclusion

In this chapter I selected cultural perspectives, demographic facts and some quantitative analyses regarding the material, social, cultural and spiritual frameworks of the Boomer demographic cohort in Canada. The socio-cultural assessments of various

¹¹⁷ Alex Himmelfarb. ‘Canada’s Silent Transformation,’ www.themarknews.com/articles/1029-s-silent-transformation (accessed 21 November 2010). *The Mark News* was launched in May 2009 by CEO Jeff Anders and Ali Rahnema, who is now a Senior Executive at Torstar and former Vice President of Strategy and Marketing at The Globe and Mail.

¹¹⁸ Canada shares with several other countries the same demographic and thus future socio-economic challenges and policies with countries such as the UK, the USA, Australia, north European societies. For example, in 2002 the Commonwealth (federal) treasury of the Australian government issued the *Intergenerational Report 2002* that indicated by 2042 8% of GDP would go to health care compared to 4% in 2002. This amount was specifically attributable to the quadrupling of the population of those over 85 in need of residential care. The UK became an aging society in 2009. George Magnus, author of *The Age of Ageing*, wrote that in the UK by 2035 the 65 and over age group will have grown to 4 million while the 14 and under age group would have reached only 500,000. In the UK the severe budget crisis of 2011 means that government will be looking to individuals and their social structures including the faith communities to respond to the financial and physical needs of the older people. A recent article in *The American Journal of the Geriatrics Society* by Dr Zhanien Feng suggests that there appears to be a very limited public health and social net for frail seniors in China where the numbers are expected to rise from 112 million in 2012 to 329 million in 2040.

social science researchers, data from public and private surveys, the works of authors and journalists, and the philosophical and spiritual reflections of Canadian academics such as Charles Taylor have provided insights into the significance of many dimensions of human relationships in Canada.

Canada will soon be one among several aging societies of Europe and Asia, each of which will meet the challenges ahead according to its own vision embedded in the traditions and culture regarding obligations of care for the vulnerable. The vision that created the European founding social institutions and social policies of Canada was Christian. In the Ottawa Valley the majority rural population was of French and Irish ancestry which has meant a Christian vision was embedded in French and Irish Catholic sensitivities regarding communal obligations of caring for each other. The institutions and practices of Catholicism in those traditions in the context of the social and economic conditions of those people created the environmental context and defined the rules and roles of the Christian contribution to the common good of long time residents of this area of the country.

As the national capital Ottawa had a much broader culture in which the British Protestant traditions and culture of collective responsibility held significant sway in the early and mid twentieth century among the federal politicians and public servants who came from across Canada to serve in the federal government and its institutions. English speaking Ottawa in the working lives of today's young seniors; that is, early and mid Boomers, was an Anglo Saxon culture slowly integrating French Canadians and career women into the government beginning in the 1970's. The following chapter contains the research sample I constructed from thi broader national population that now resides in

Ottawa. The two groups on which I focussed were a mix of Canadians, a few from the local area and others from across Canada.

Chapter 2: Research Methodology and Findings

2.1 Introduction

This chapter is a continuation of research in theory laden practices in contemporary culture that constitutes the first movement of Don Browning's hermeneutical cycle of four movements. My focus will be on the research I have undertaken to explore dimensions of compassion in the context of the contemporary culture of Boomers in English speaking Ottawa. In the previous chapter I presented information describing the impending socio- economic challenges of an aging society in the context of the contemporary culture surrounding the lives of the English speaking Boomer generation in Ottawa. The purpose of this chapter is to develop a grounded theory of the sources of inspiration for compassionate commitments in the Boomer demographic in English speaking Ottawa.

Boomers as young seniors are needed to take up the civic duties of aging seniors in order to maintain our civil society as we know it; however, young seniors, the Boomer generation, in general have not yet made such commitments of their free time. The large government funded studies at the national and provincial levels as described in Chapter One have identified various incentives such as educational, travel or social opportunities that might be used to entice young seniors to volunteer. Except for a brief mention of altruism, these studies did not probe participants regarding spiritual sources of inspiration for engaging in civic volunteering.

In the next chapter I examine a selection of sources of inspiration and faith that have informed a Christian understanding and practice of compassion in Christian communities since the early days of ministry patterned after the life of Jesus Christ of Nazareth. While some of the themes of contemporary culture presented in the preceding

chapter appear in the research findings of this chapter, an analysis and assessment of this research is brought into conversation with Christian tradition in Chapter Four.

As indicated in chapter one there is an important public policy discussion just beginning now concerning the needs of the frail human person in an aging society. This discussion leads to the question of the sources of compassion of younger seniors who have the time and financial security to ensure the dignity of the frail old. Compassionate action, the action of responding to suffering in the spirit of suffering with the Other, is the result of perceptions of, and reactions to, suffering together. For this reason I selected to research through interviews and observation the significance of peoples' stories in looking for references to the spiritual resources that might explain why young seniors make the choices they do with their free time and the satisfaction or sense of fulfilment they derive from that choice.

2.2 Method

2.2.1 Qualitative Research

This is a dissertation in Practical Theology that in the words of John Swinton and Harriet Mowat, attempts “to examine the theories and assumptions which underlie current forms of practice as well as to contribute to the development and reshaping of new theories which are then fed back into the practices of church and world”.¹ They address here the important question of epistemology in practical theology by referring to assumptions underlying practice. The qualitative research methodology followed in this dissertation accepts that perceptions of truth and knowledge are largely constructed by individuals and communities, such that social phenomena in particular can be interpreted

¹ John Swinton and Harriet Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research*, (London, SCM Press, 2006), 26.

in many ways.² In order to understand what is really going on in a particular situation, the task of qualitative research according to Swinton and Mowat is to seek an understanding of the reasons and meanings underlying the actions of the players, and so “...with that new understanding of the world so to act differently”.³

From the perspective of social science researchers who use qualitative research methods, there is a difference in epistemologies between quantitative and qualitative research accounted for by Roy Suddaby, Professor, Strategic Management & Organisation, University of Alberta. What is rejected in qualitative research he says is “the notion that scientific truth reflects an independent external reality”.⁴ Suddaby makes the case that qualitative research is an “interpretive process” looking for concepts located in real life circumstances, “The reality of grounded theory research is always one of trying to achieve a practical middle ground between a theory-laden view of the world and an unfettered empiricism”.⁵ The qualitative research method is contextual in which studies explore human and social problems occurring in natural settings. This method requires a rich background story in order to investigate many dimensions of a problem.⁶ Qualitative research as it developed from its first iteration in 1967 by B.G. Glaser and A.

² Swinton and Mowat, *Practical Theology*, 35.

³ *Ibid.*, 46.

⁴ Roy Suddaby, “From the Editors: What Grounded Theory is Not,” in *Academy of Management Journal*, (2006, Vol. 49, No.4, 633-642) 633. Suddaby is responding to R.P. Gephart’s 2004 article “Qualitative Research and the Academy of Management Journal,” in *Academy of Management Journal*.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 635.

⁶ John W. Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Traditions*, (Thousand Oaks, Sage Publications, 1998) 15.

Strauss⁷ is sensitive to the evolving cultural context and relationship between researcher and interviewee. These factors are important in my research given that the population under consideration reflects many of the values of contemporary culture reflected in the epistemologies in use in the latter half of the twentieth century.⁸

2.2.2 Grounded Theory

I selected the grounded theory method of qualitative research because it is a reflexive model which allows the researcher to go between different sources of data as they develop during the course of the study in pursuit of connections that might shed light on the possibility of an underlying theory that can then be used to propose new practices to respond to the current problematic. My research intends to respond to the paucity of specific references in recent public surveys and announcements to spiritual/ethical/religious narratives as sources of inspiration for selfless volunteering in the Boomer generation. Public surveys serve the creation of rational public policies which are based upon the language and methods of scientific research. Such policies can limit the quest for deeper insights by merely citing data emerging from self evident quantifiable research data. The intention of such research is to avoid any suggestion of hidden personal biases or underlying references in the questions. Within public utterances by the faith communities in Ottawa for example there are exhortations in favour of helping others that do not refer to any faith narrative, such as support for the food banks

⁷ B.G. Glaser and A.L. Strauss, *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research*, (New York, Aldine, 1967).

⁸ Jane Mills, Ann Bonner and Karen Francis, "Adopting a Constructivist Approach to Grounded Theory: Implications for Research Design," in *International Journal of Nursing Practice* (Australia, Blackwell Publishing Asia Pty Ltd., 2006)
<http://journals1.scholarsportal.info.proxy.bib.uottawa.ca/tmp/2656622426744679801.pdf> (accessed 7 October 2013).

and the Roundtable on Homelessness which are largely the initiative of the faith communities. This omission can be related to the rational public policy belief in the complete separation of church and state.⁹ The interactive research model in grounded theory research designed by Joseph Maxwell is consistent with the intent of the qualitative research I have undertaken. Maxwell's model complements the approach I bring to the research question in studying the connection between compassion and human relationships.¹⁰ As indicated in Figure 2.1 below, the visual hourglass model for interactive research design created by Joseph Maxwell has four outer points in two equilateral triangles named purposes, conceptual context, methods and validity which connect through the research question. Two lines connect each point to signify the most important (but not all) interactions. The goals, experience, knowledge, assumptions and theory of the question located in the upper triangle are studied according to the research methods and validity tests of the lower triangle. All points of the two triangles can be related, some more than others.

⁹ A symbolic iteration of this belief occurred on Parliament Hill soon after 9/11 in a public expression of memory by official Canada for the lives lost in the terrorist attacks in the USA. While leaders of the faith communities were invited to stand with the politicians they were not invited to offer any prayers for the dead and suffering on this momentous occasion overshadowing a turning point in contemporary history.

¹⁰ Maxwell Joseph, *Qualitative Research Design: An Interactive Approach*, (Thousand Oaks, Sage Publications, 1996), 4-7.

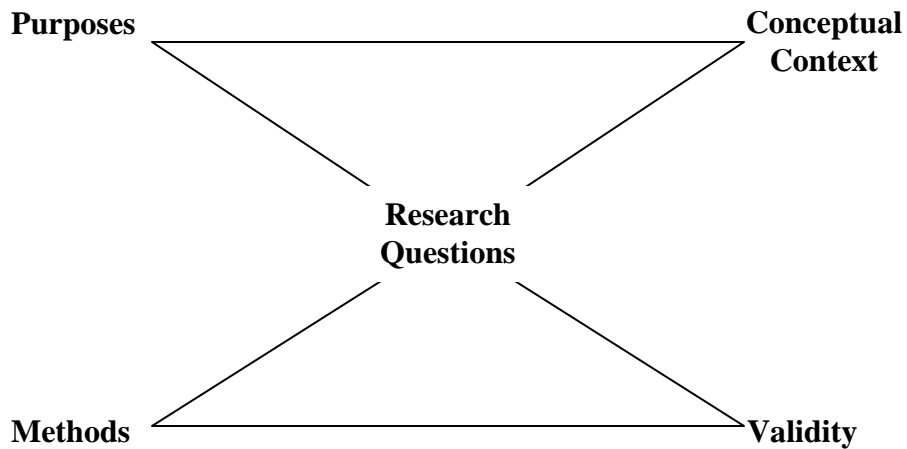


Figure 2.1 Maxwell interactive model

I selected this research design because it works well with the four interactive movements of Don Browning's hermeneutical cycle and reflects in some respects his concepts of inner and outer envelopes of practical reason when he includes the guiding inner core of person's culture in the outer envelope of the surrounding culture. In terms of the points of the diagram the purposes of my research are to define a grounded theory regarding the contemporary cultural context and social implications of dimensions of compassion in the Boomer culture in respect of the challenges ahead of aging in an aging society. These findings come into conversation with dimensions of compassion in Christian tradition that will inform a transformed practice of caring for frail seniors by young seniors. The creation of the grounded theory reflects constant interactions between what Maxwell calls the external and internal aspects of the design around the research question.¹¹ By this is meant that the method used to define the conceptual context of the situation under study can be validated according to the five validity claims for truth communication used by Don Browning. The purpose of the study would be located in the descriptive theology movement, in the empirical research and in the research question.

¹¹ Maxwell, *Qualitative Research*, 6.

The conceptual context would bring this analysis into conversation with the movement of historical theological and the research question. The research methods would involve the literature and empirical research resources in respect of the research question and these findings would then be tested against Don Browning's five validity claims for practical moral reasoning. The final movement, strategic practical theology, would go back and forth from the validity tests through the research question and finally, back to the purpose of the study.

Maxwell uses the concept of the external aspect of his research design to distinguish the outer envelope of the research question from the inner aspect of the rigorous methods and validation of the external aspect. Similarly, Browning uses a concept of inner and outer envelopes to distinguish between tradition saturated practical reason about every day life and the inner core of Christian saturated practical moral reasoning to understand the transformation required of a social crisis. The outer envelope in Browning's concept could refer to the external purposes and conceptual concepts in Maxwell in as much as all people live consciously or not in a tradition saturated environment (outer envelope) that informs their practical reasoning. People of faith also more consciously have an inner reflective core of reference that is an articulated faith structure. This in Maxwell's model would reflect the inner aspect of the methods and validity tests (inner core of the Christian tradition) in what is a conscious assessment of the purposes and conceptual context (outer envelope) of the research question. The unexpected alignment of Don Browning's method of practical theology with Joseph Maxwell's model for research design argues in favour of working through the four movements of practical theology with the interactive dynamics of the external and internal aspects of a design that keeps the research question in the forefront.

2.2.3 Ethical Considerations

Given that a productive relationship between the researcher and research participants in interviews requires trust, the issue of ethics for researchers becomes an important consideration in grounded theory research. My research challenge in using the qualitative method for the in depth oral interviews was critical self awareness of my influence on the participants as I walked with them through the questions. This was not the case for the limited number of the written interviewees I met in person as none of them asked about the intent or purpose of the questions.

As the researcher, I was particularly drawn in the oral interviews to participant self revelation regarding existential questions that inspire personal action as this was key to my research question. In this respect Swinton and Mowat refer to the significance of an ethical relationship in emphasizing the importance of the element of trust in the power relationship between participant and researcher. They refer to this power as a form of “colonization,” that is embedded in the expectations of the researcher reflected in the wording and degree of intrusiveness of the questions. Having amassed my data I found that I had to be aware of maintaining an ethical posture in my use of the data. This was clearly the case in respect of classifying the responses of participants once I sensed that a new unexpected interesting pattern was emerging in respect of the gap between acts of compassion that did not appear to have a moral or religious reference point. A closely related ethical concern was the transformation of that material into theory.¹² Maxwell also confirms that ethical concerns must guide each step of the research project; that is, in the

¹² John Swinton, *Practical Theology*, 61-65. The term colonization is found on page 61.

purpose of the research, in the choice of questions, in the assessment of the data and the articulation of an emerging theory.¹³

My research proposal was examined by the Research Ethics Board of Saint Paul University in respect of the intent and expectations of the research project, the selection of participants, and their informed consent in respect of the understanding and acceptance by the researcher regarding his/her responsibilities for the research participants. The interview questions were submitted to the Research Ethics Board along with a model of a letter from me to the interviewees stating they could withdraw whenever they chose. I also provided a model of the form to be signed by the interviewee indicating their understanding that the researcher would respect their privacy and their right to withdraw. The research questions, the form letter and signature form for the interviewees are included in Appendix 1 of this dissertation along with the letter from the Research Ethics Board authorising the research project.

2.3 Methodology

2.3.1 The Research Questions

The research questions for this study follow the advice of John Creswell; namely, that there should be one overriding question followed by related questions.¹⁴ My intent for the oral and written interviews was to discover among a selection of Boomers and young seniors the stories, if not the structured narratives¹⁵, underlying the satisfaction or sense of fulfilment experienced with activities chosen to fill discretionary free time. The

¹³ Maxwell, *Qualitative Research*, 7, 134-135.

¹⁴ Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry*, 99.

¹⁵ I have differentiated stories and narratives in the Glossary in order to distinguish between a structured story (narrative) and an informal accounting of an event or emotion (story).

open-ended non-directional questions were designed to allow my selection of interviewees to express themselves without guidance or bias on the part of the researcher. While the in-depth oral interviews in the first stage of my research explored this central question through eight sub questions, two questions were added in the eighteen written interviews for further clarification in respect of a sense of satisfaction and fulfilment with life. The questions for the oral and written interviews are located in Appendix B. At the end of the interviews I also asked all interviewees for a brief comment on the contemporary culture of Boomers including any advice he/she they might have for future retirees. This question for my grounded theory was asked in order to cross check the value attached to helping others as a source of fulfilment in retirement.

The findings of the oral and written interviews reflected the experience I was gaining from observing Boomer engagement in the many different groups in which I was involved; that is, the Interfaith Network for Isolated Seniors (IFN), the Emergency Spiritual Care Assistance Team (ESCAT) of The Ottawa Hospital, the Seniors Committee of the Centretown Citizens Community Association (CCCA), the Centretown Churches Social Action Committee (CCSAC), the Catholic Womens League (CWL), the Ottawa Council on Aging (COA), the Ottawa Chapter of the Federal Superannuates National Association (FSNA), the Retired Heads of Mission Association (RHOMA). The attitudes and intentions of the members of the Interfaith Network for Isolated (Frail) Seniors whose purpose was the care of frail seniors in the community was the most significant of the groups, and the one on which I focussed my field notes.

2.3.2 The Research Sample for the Interviews

Table 2.1 Research Sample – 8 Oral Interviews

Gender	3 Male	5 Female		
Marital Status	2 Female married	3 Male married	1 Female Single	2 Female Divorced
Canadian Born		5		
Foreign Born	3			
Education	8 tertiary level			
Age	1 Pre Boomer	7 Boomers		
Religion	Christian 4	1 Buddhist	3 None	
Work Life	7 full careers	1 short career		
Years Retired	2 > 2	3 between 2-5	1 between 6-9	2 < 10
Income	7 own pensions	1 spousal pension		

Table 2.2 Research Sample – 18 Written Interviews

Gender	7 Male	11 Female		
Marital Status	Married: 8 Female 6 Male	Divorced: 3 Female	Single/never married: 1 Male	
Canadian Born	15			
Foreign Born	3			
Education	3 Secondary level	15 tertiary level		
Age	15 @ 70 or less	3 @ 71 or more		
Religion	12 Christian	4 Jewish	1 Buddhist	1 None
Work Life	24 full careers	4 short careers		
Years Retired	2 >2	2 @ 2-5 yrs	4 @ 6-9 yrs	10 < 10
Income	15 own pensions	3 spousal pensions		

Both the in-depth oral and briefer written interviews were restricted in all but one case to Boomers who were either retirees or dependent spouses of retirees living comfortably in Ottawa. My city is the seat of the national government and the principal employer with a population that is generally better educated than is the case in other cities of Canada. The mandatory Statistics Canada 2006 household census for the

Statistics Canada survey confirmed the positive health and income of young seniors in Ottawa and the high level of public awareness of the importance of domestic social issues and citizen engagement.¹⁶ I sought to do this research in a sample of those able to give their free time to the challenging needs in the community, for if this community could be engaged the results would suggest how to engage other able young seniors in selfless care giving.

The in depth oral interviews were the first set of interviewees. The sample of participants for the oral interviews was built around main stream English speaking Boomers with tertiary education who had come to Ottawa from across Canada in the 1960's and 1970's. My selection was influenced by Edward Farley and Charles Taylor's descriptions of the contemporary social values of authenticity, individualism and autonomy which I confirmed by my own observation of these same values shared by people in my socio-economic class.¹⁷ For this initial research project my emphasis was limited to researching one aspect of what could be defined as a homogenous main stream culture in North America thus eliminating a sampling based upon the culture of educated French speaking Quebecers who were just entering the hitherto English speaking world of official government offices.¹⁸ For these interviews I sought out a range of people that

¹⁶ Statistics Canada, *A Portrait of Seniors in Canada 2006*, Chapter 4, 137-205, <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/89-519-x/89-519-x2006001-eng.pdf> (accessed 4 August 2011).

¹⁷ I have focussed on Boomer values in my subsections 1.3.5 page 48 entitled Human Flourishing noting on page 49 immanent and self transcending value of self sufficient humanism; and 1.3.7 pages 57-59 entitled Individualism, Authenticity and Autonomy in addition to a description on pages 215-219 of the socio-economic context of the values of my sample that allow these values to flourish and how this correlates with compassion and relationships.

¹⁸ Given the changes in the Canadian population in Ottawa since the 1960's and 1970's I have proposed as topics for future research on page 250 the impact aging in an aging society of massive social changes in religious practice in French speaking Quebec, and on page 251 I suggest that another topic for research on aging in an aging society would be the practices of care for frail seniors in the immigrant communities of Canada.

at one end of a scale would be considered religiously informed people committed to the needs of the other; and at the other end of the scale were those who claim to be atheist and yet are compassionately conscious and engaged with the needs of others. In between these extremes I expected to find the majority grouping indicating some acts of compassion and some faith in some vague vision of the meaning of their lives. The in depth oral interviews included a former board member of the Retired Heads of Mission, a retired government policy analyst now a political activist, a retired former translator in the federal government who now has a hobby business, a board member of the federal retirees association, a board member of the local community association, a social activist from an interfaith community welfare group, a retired teacher active in local choirs, and a retired government economist who volunteers in a soup kitchen.

Once I had completed the transcription of the oral interviews I undertook the written interviews. These interviews followed the oral interviews and included additional questions in order to confirm answers arising in the oral interview format. In both interview formats I was looking for indications of references to the life stories and faith narratives, or simple rationales supportive of the significance the interviewees assigned to their volunteering commitments. Consistent with my theoretical sampling method I looked for interviewees representing a wide variety of community engagements. This group enjoyed varying levels of higher education and solid work experience as well as reasonable but varied sources of retirement income. The broader scope of participants for the written interviews were identified in order to balance findings between community activists whose commitments are directly engaged with the marginalized, and those whose commitments are somewhat removed from direct contact with the marginalised.

Three of the written interviewees were early retirees who had taken up early retirement buyouts for federal employees in the mid 1990's. As this research project is on the sill of the aging Boomer population it made sense to broaden the sample to include those slightly older who spent the principal years of their working and social lives in the culture dominated by the Boomer cohort in the years 1960-2010.

In both interview formats I was looking for indications of references to the life stories and faith narratives, or simple rationales, supportive of the significance the interviewees assigned to their volunteering commitments.

2.3.3 Steps to Collect the Interview Data

The interview process was in two stages – a one and half hour oral semi-structured interview with eight participants. On the basis of my experience and increasing sensitivity to the varied quality of the responses to the key questions I then expanded my data collection to eighteen additional participants using a briefer written questionnaire. The oral interviews were undertaken and transcribed before I began the written interviews. I saved the responses on a dedicated flash drive, and kept at my home the hard drives of two old computer systems I had used. Before undertaking the written interviews I had colour coded the eight oral interviews to identify and verify key categories and sub categories. I offered interviewees the choice of meeting at a place in Ottawa – at home, over coffee in a restaurant, or over the internet in the case of some of the written interviews. While the oral interviews of one and a half hours were interactive, recorded and then transcribed by me, the written interviews were done as much as possible by the interviewee once I was assured that they understood the protocol for the interview and had signed the permission form. In respect of the written interviews I met most of the interviewees with the forms, explained the forms and offered to answer any

questions they might have during the process of completing the form. I was very careful not to influence spontaneous responses of these interviewees which I did by having a book with me that I read while they completed the questionnaires. This studied non intervention reflected my intent in the oral interviews that I replicated in the written questionnaires not to influence the responses of the interviewees and thus maintain integrity for the sample as a whole.

2.3.4 Field Data Collection

At the beginning of my research I joined in several groups as “participant as observer” (that is, more observer than participant) but over time because of the need for all participants to accept some responsibility I found I had become an “observer as participant” (more participant than observer) in several seniors’ groups.¹⁹ Because my research question concerned engagement this evolution occurred naturally. The real action and engagement in any volunteer group is with those who have the most vested in the outcomes of the group activity. I started off as “participant as observer” in some volunteer groups for seniors which were clearly secular – the Federal Superannuates National Association (FSNA), the Retired Heads of Mission (RHOMA), the Centretown Citizens Community Association (CCCA) and the Seniors Committee of that association. In my volunteer occupation as Social Justice Coordinator of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Ottawa I participated as the diocesan representative in other secular groups such as the Ottawa Poverty Reduction Network (OPRN), and faith groups such as the Catholic Women’s League (CWL), the Multifaith Housing Initiative (MHI), the

¹⁹ Richard Osmer, *Practical Theology; An Introduction*, (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2008), 60-61 citing the distinctions made by Danny Jorgensen in *Participant Observations: A Methodology for Human Studies*, Applied Social Research Methods Series, vol.15, (Thousand Oaks, Calif., Sage, 1989), 55.

Operational Team of the Emergency Spiritual Care Assistance Team of The Ottawa Hospital (ESCAT), and the Interfaith Network for Isolated Seniors (IFN).

While my one-on-one interviews researched indications of faith narratives across a wide range of young seniors with time and financial security to volunteer more generously, my field notes focus on faith based action in two groups, the CWL (Catholic Women's League of Canada) and the IFN (Interfaith Network for Isolated Seniors). While many people of faith volunteer in the work of secular civic groups, the CWL and the IFN became the focus of my field notes because faith, compassion and caring for others were significant overtly acknowledged realities in the lives of the members.

The CWL is a historic Canadian organisation located in parishes in English Canada for women to show their support for their parish and community. The CWL attracts Pre-Boomers (those born just before and during WW II), a fairly traditional Catholic population for which prayer and Catholic spiritual practices are clearly accentuated. The work of the CWL at the parish level is largely given over to helping with parish hospitality, fundraising in support of the local church and local charities, and participating by choice in some national campaigns managed by the National Office such as local advocacy in respect of the right to life and family related matters. The CWL group in my parish provided insight into a traditional Christian practice of female church volunteering appears to be similar to ladies' church committees in the Christian community in Ottawa.

The Interfaith Network for Isolated Seniors (IFN) attempts and succeeds in attracting younger seniors as volunteers from all faiths. This group is mindful of contemporary societal concerns regarding faith in the public space and so prefers to reference spirituality around the concept of a Creator God over names for God and Christ

in any specific faith community. I chose to observe and later to participate in these two faith based groups in order to appreciate the significance of faith in the commitments of faith based groups.

2.4 Research Findings

2.4.1 Overview

Following are the research findings from the oral interviews, the questionnaires and my field notes. My post retirement experience in several secular and faith groups concerned with seniors provided the network I used in creating my research sample and identifying appropriate groups for participant observation. The open ended nature of the questions for the interviews provided a wide casting of the net across the lives of many young seniors. It became clear in this process that all seniors are engaged in varying levels of social, economic, political, spiritual and physical activities on a daily basis. Their lives are structured around activities that indicate consciously or not the source of meaning they find in their lives and their sense of fulfilment and satisfaction in life. This approach is consonant with practical theology as theology within the context of experience of the events and feelings of everyday life.²⁰

In the preceding chapter the case was made for the impending social challenge facing Boomers in their aging. The research question was tightened to focus on empirical factors that influence compassion and responsibility for the common good in the Boomer generation; namely, demographics, public financial resources, and secularisation. In this respect the question regarding the use of discretionary free time was a key perspective around which to ask about fulfilment or satisfaction with life. My research is concerned

²⁰ Elaine Graham, *Transforming Practice: Pastoral Theology in an Age of Uncertainty*, (Eugene Oregon: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2002), 10.

with what drives people to make the choices they do, the choice of words or images they use to express satisfaction and fulfilment rather than the more philosophical language about what was meant to give meaning to life. This approach provided the interviewees the opportunity to mention without deep reflection (and possibly the use of unfamiliar words) the sources of their sense of well being in their daily lives.²¹

It was my expectation that this particular approach would provide the essential data with respect to why Boomers might care for those less fortunate. The following categories of essential information located in the interviews for this research were: types of activities; time dedicated to these activities as an indication of their significance to the individual; experience with aging; importance of relationships in daily life; and some indication of what made their lives satisfying. The field notes are more specific than some interview findings in that they focus on faith-based choices for action in the senior years of people of faith. In selecting the categories in the data from both the interviews and the field notes I am mindful of my own predilection to interpret data in respect of the existentialist anxieties which begin to concern many, but not all, people as they age. I have attempted to avoid this tendency by working with the language of the interviewees and those observed in the field notes.

2.4.2 Findings from the Interviews

The interviews provided interpretative data for the more focussed findings in the field notes. The two sets of research findings complement each other in some respects and not in others because of differences in the focus. For example, questions in the interviews regarding perceptions of free time and/or freedom from work elicited mixed

²¹ Swinton and Mowat, *Practical Theology*, 39.

responses. The more recently retired responded with the memory of their initial feelings leading up to or immediately following retirement, while those who had retired earlier responded with more awareness of what retirement meant for them now. Because qualitative research often concerns questions about why people make the choices they do, the data collected also reflects “soft truth” about the context of decisions; namely, narrative, experience and emotion.²²

Most interviewees were comfortable revealing their feelings about volunteering and the sources of personal satisfaction they derived from the use of their free time. I noticed that those whom I had never met previously and completed the questionnaires outside my presence tended to be more restrained about the amount of background data they provided about their feelings. The first questions did ask for an indication of emotion to the questions: namely; can you recall how you felt about retirement before you retired? Followed by can you remember how you felt after you left your place of work? Those who recalled a positive emotion regarding their impending or immediate retirement responded frequently “looking forward”. This phrase was followed by explanations such as: “being able to determine what I want to do”; “I was ready to move on to others things”; “free”; and “like the weight of the world had been removed from my shoulders”. There were also mixed and even negative emotions expressed by a small number such as: “pretty happy”; “looking forward but then later felt relieved and sad to miss the people and professional engagement”; “felt something of a void”; “never thought about it and then became bored”; “felt guilty about being paid for doing nothing”; “felt like a bad person not going to work”; “felt I had lost a lot” (from someone who had to leave work through illness). Some expressed their initial fear of retirement as

²² Swinton and Mowat, *Practical Theology*, 39.

a fear of not being busy such as in “My God, I don’t want to be retired and I can’t support myself emotionally just skating in the winter and swimming in the summer.” Only two reported that they had made plans such as continuing to work as consultants in their career fields, or expanding a pre-retirement engagement.

In my research sample there was a range of positive to negative feelings concerning the shift from full time employment in a structured social environment to freedom to choose with whom to spend free time. In spite of their language regarding freedom to do what they liked, what had also happened at retirement was that many suddenly found themselves responsible for their own happiness. Retirement for those without set post-retirement plans meant the loss of identity and purpose within the structure of work with goals and recognition determined in large part by the employer. Because work had defined so much about the meaning of life for the retired interviewees what if anything replaced that comfort became important to find out.²³

2.4.2.1 Categorising the Data

Using Maxwell’s hourglass model of for research design, I needed to find out for purposes of learning more about how to engage Boomers in caring for each other, what retired Boomers actually chose to do with discretionary time and why. I was looking also for indications of a range of priorities people of this age might have at this stage of life, the answers to which would respond to the research question (the centre of the hour

²³ This same demographic was surveyed about the same time in a government funded project in Ontario, Renaissance 50+, to determine how Boomers felt about volunteering. Respondents from across the full age range of Boomers, many still in the workforce, were asked what they were looking for in retirement. The answers covered a wide range of reasons and emotions such as personal growth, ego fulfilment, increasing intimacy and connectedness, continued learning, autonomy, optimal health, sustaining a sense of achievement, fun and adventure, and leaving a legacy. The reasons given for volunteering in this survey reflect some of the findings in my interviews; namely, social interaction, feeling useful, being asked, passion about a cause, being affected personally by an issue.

glass) and provide the information needed (the conceptual context) to structure a new approach to recruiting and inspiring volunteers from this particular demographic (the purpose of the research). The questions asked were: what new life commitments have you taken up since retiring? What insight or circumstances led you to choose these commitments? What new insights about life have these opened up for you? The answers to the first of those questions regarding a new commitment or challenge (rather than doing more of something from the past) was as follows for those who did take up something entirely new:

New commitments

Table 2.3 Specific new commitments from oral and written interviews

community engagement in community associations, private sector boards	9
making time for new friends,	5
protecting pension rights,	2
looking after grandchildren or aging family members	3
engaging in regular exercise	2
giving service within faith communities	6
delivering services to shut ins	2

Insights about life as reasons for choices

Table 2.4 Frequent reasons for volunteering in a sample of 26 participants

the need to be busy	5
sustaining career skills	4
choosing to be with like minded people	7
living out ethical or faith principles.	5
the need to be social (without specifics)	5

Table 2.5 Awareness of new priorities in a sample of 26

personal development	5
building & sustaining relationships	4
being available to help people	4
Engaging in hobbies for income	1

(N.B. Not all 26 provided specific answers)

The principle behind most of the new activities identified in Tables 2.3 and 2.5 imply different or new relationships in people's lives. For those who identified exercise as their new priority, that exercise is done in relation to maintaining the family structure and also meeting new people who also like physical activity. Another perspective worth looking into in respect of compassion as a concept is the dimension of the source of the inspiration to engage; that is, was the interviewee asked to help out or did the interviewee see a need and then initiate a response. I did not ask this question specifically but indications of this direction were available in some of the responses. As indicated in Table 2.6 below self initiated care includes responses such as engagement with others as a factor of the need for companionship, personal development as in exercising, social awareness of a community need affecting one's personal security and well being; maintaining career skills, living out faith or philosophical principles. Other-initiated categories of care indicate: relationships established in response to others such as the overt needs of family and friends; being asked or invited by someone to do something; empathy for human suffering; awareness of a community; that is, political reform, poverty reduction, child welfare, and hospice care.

Table 2.6 Reasons for New Relationships

Reasons for New Relationships (26 participants)	Self Initiated	Other Initiated
Responding to needs of family and friends	1	6
Reforming community structures	2	
Empathy for human suffering		2
Religiously inspired Caring	2	
Exercising Career Skills	2	1
Helping out in the community	3	
Advocacy support for former colleagues	2	2
Self Development	3	

Satisfaction with Commitments

The research question in the centre of the hourglass model for research design connects what people on pensions choose to do and the degree of satisfaction or sense of fulfilment they achieve in that choice. Answers to this question test the validity of the choices (lower right hand corner of the Maxwell interactive model) and thus answer the research question (centre of the model) of why young seniors choose to do what they do when they have free time for new commitments.

The question regarding a sense of wholeness or completeness of life regarding satisfaction or fulfilment with new engagements was deliberately open ended to encourage both a wide range of activities and provide some indication of the degree of commitment. The responses in Table 2.7 below indicate the range of concepts of what might be meant by satisfaction and fulfilment. In order to confirm a sense of satisfaction I then asked in a later question regarding fears for the future (more specifically in the written than the oral interviews). There is some connection between satisfaction now and future fears; however my sense was that these were understood as two very separate

ideas. Three of the eight oral interviewees responded to that question within the context of their train of thought in the in depth interview. These three as indicated below in Table 2.9 responded in terms of hope for the future.

Table 2.7 Expressions of Satisfaction in Life

Expressions of satisfaction or fulfilment with life (26 interviews)	Number of Responses
being appreciated gives a sense of wholeness to life	3
meaning making in focussed activities of family care, gardening, intellectual and physical development	3
Busy with personal accomplishments	9
Ability to engage in community and family life	4
“the realisation in spite of the present world we are truly blessed; to be engaged in life as it unfolds”	1
Deepening one’s faith in life	3
Contented and happy	2

Table 2.8 Fears for the future

Fears for the Future (18 written responses with several entries)	Number of Responses
losses – spouse, family and friends, physical and mental health, independence, the will to live, adequate health care, financial security, isolation	16
ageism “getting rid of seniors by putting them in homes”	1
“ensuring I have the calm and emotional stability required to help others”	1
fears for the next generation “in a world gone mad”	1
“not having given back sufficiently given my good life” and “not having enough money to support noble causes”.	2

Table 2.9 Hopes for the future

Hopes for the Future (from 3 of 8 oral interviews)	Number of Responses
finding my passion in life	1
faith and hope and believing that God is going to make everything right because there is so much injustice	1
“faith in God’s promises”	1

Comments on contemporary culture

A second specific written question was added to the eighteen interviews to enhance the more open ended oral questions, and this one was to ask interviewees to provide some adjectives for the Boomer culture. The answers varied from the positive such as engaged and fortunate (11 responses), to the negative such as self absorbed, unaware of good fortune (7 responses). The negative responses come from interviewees who earlier in the interviews had said they were engaged in either personal development or available for community and family building. In cross checking I noted that these same people claimed to be contented with their daily lives.

Public Service

Ottawa is the seat of the federal government where the public service is the main employer. There are approximately 100,000 retired public servants from all branches of the federal government living in the national capital. An interesting observation arising in the interviews is the link between a career in public service either in government administration, teaching or health care and an individual sense of accepting responsibility for the public good in retirement. Although I did not ask specifically what jobs or positions the interviewees had in their working lives, approximately sixteen or seventeen had worked in public service and at least two of the women were married to public servants and had briefly worked in some form of public service.

Table 2.10 Volunteering

Volunteering (28 retired public servants 2 of whom are spouses)	Responses
volunteering in community action	7
service to retired colleagues through organisational support	6
volunteering in organisations that provide one on one care	4
spouses of former career public servants engaged in direct care of seniors	2
Faith community engagement	5

Of the twenty-six interviewees three made a clearly stated connection between volunteering and regular religious practice. Another interviewee referred to a saying of Christ “do unto others as you would have them do unto you” but stated unequivocally that she was a former Christian. Of the first three, one was a retired civil servant, one a retired teacher, and one a working church pastor. One response that triggered my focus on the relevance of faith narratives as references for volunteering came from a recent retiree who volunteers two days a week directly helping people, accepts tasks in the administration of his church and yet made no connection between his faith, his choice of activities or his satisfaction with life.

Overall while there is some correlation between career public service and volunteering in community building in retirement, the numbers above suggest that a conscious acceptance of responsibility in retirement for the common good might be somewhat limited.

2.4.3 Findings from the Field Notes

The field notes focus on my observations and reflections as both observer participant and participant observer in respect of people acting with dedication over a long period of time. I have introduced in italics my observations and reflections based on the field notes. The purpose of the field notes was to throw additional light on faith in action and on spirituality in volunteering. The field notes concern my participation in two groups composed largely of seniors in the local faith communities. One group is the Interfaith Network for Isolated Seniors (IFN) that defines its mission as “A network of faith communities in Ottawa that collaborates with Help Aged Canada to meet the spiritual and social needs of isolated seniors.” The second is the local parish council of the Catholic Women’s League of Canada (CWL). The national goals of the CWL are “to

unite Catholic women of Canada: to achieve individual and collective spiritual development, to promote the teachings of the Catholic Church, to exemplify the Christian ideal in home and family life.”²⁴ The local parish group reflects the active membership of the CWL across Canada; namely composed of Pre-Boomers with a very small number of recently retired active young seniors. A recent example of the small number of Boomers in the parish community concerns the parish CWL as it may soon cease to exist without younger seniors willing to manage the activities and administration. Observations of my participation in these organisations are supplemented with a few notes on my experience in other seniors’ organisations in which seniors are helping seniors.

Ad hoc volunteering preferred over leadership

When I first met the Interfaith Network for Isolated Seniors in 2007 at the request of the Archdiocesan pastoral office I joined a volunteer group of young seniors beginning to wind down a major collaborative project with the city health department. This project was Reaching Out to Isolated Seniors project (ROTIS) in collaboration with Help Aged Canada. Together they were attempting to recreate a city wide network of non-profit groups and public agencies providing social services to frail and isolated seniors. The next project that engaged the IFN directing group was Faith Links. This is a socialisation project to help neighbourhood churches work together in creating a sense of community among neighbourhood seniors. The goal is to promote a neighbourhood culture of mutually supportive seniors coming together in the neighbourhood churches for afternoon tea or lunch, to sing and be sung to, to learn about and share information regarding public and private services for seniors.

²⁴ Catholic Women’s League of Canada website <http://cwl.ca/?cat=64>, (accessed 21 October 2013).

Inward looking Christian communities

The Faith Links project was initiated in 2008 with its first experience in the Carlingwood area of Ottawa, the city ward that appears to enjoy the highest percentage of seniors of any city ward in Canada. The goal of Faith Links is to create mutually supportive communities of elders through the volunteer efforts of seniors active in the churches. The IFN learnt from this first project that a major obstacle to moving quickly was the lack of commitment by neighbourhood church leaders to support work outside of their congregations; that is to act together as an ecumenical pastoral presence in the neighbourhood.

My emphasis as a participant observer was on the creation of two Faith Links projects in local church communities in Centretown where I live. One was a project in south Centretown and the other, a project for seniors in a section of Centretown known as the Golden Triangle, often referred to as East of Elgin. The former began as a project led by an Anglican church for local seniors already connected through the Centretown Community Health Centre; however, it soon became apparent from the mix of guests that a greater pastoral need was towards the older single men, often ill or unemployed, living in the nearby YMCA.

The second project was in my home parish East of Elgin that included the local Presbyterian, Anglican and Catholic parishes. This Faith Links project was a success with ten or more volunteers and thirty-six or more guests for a neighbourhood seniors' monthly lunch over the April to November months when the sidewalks were not covered in ice. Several volunteers and a few guests are members of the local parish CWL. They also participate in the Senior Fellowship at the nearby Anglican Church. Another Faith Links project, led by the Presbyterian representative on the IFN, is run in west Ottawa in

collaboration with a Catholic church with the moral support of nearby United and Anglican churches. In 2013 the Catholic parish in Sandy Hill began to initiate an interfaith senior's ministry with the support of the female pastors of the nearby United and Anglican churches. Support for this project grew out of an earlier collaboration on social justice and anti poverty issues through a group calling itself Interfaith Sandy Hill.

Leading Faith in Action

Over the course of three years I kept notes on aspects of faith community support for seniors by seniors of faith out of which are some observations that pertain to faith in action. The IFN had hoped that Faith Links projects could be initiated by members of the IFN directing group and then passed to a coordinator and team from neighbourhood churches as each project stabilised. In spite of considerable inter church support by older women for events in the pilot project in the Carlingwood area, the project died once the emerging coordinator, a young female senior, from the Salvation Army Temple, left when that church relocated. In this case the IFN followed up with personal letters to the pastors of churches in the catchment area asking them to encourage church members to take on the neighbourhood coordinator role. None of the pastors acknowledged the letter, including those with church members who had been willing to help out. Some of the IFN directing group then met with a recently ordained pastor, a young senior himself, to see what more could be done in finding a project leader in the Carlingwood area. We went to him because he ministered to many elderly congregants, including several living in a nearby rental apartment complex. While he appreciated what the IFN was trying to achieve given the aging congregation he led, nothing more happened beyond his moral support for the IFN.

Meeting Needs for Socialisation

The parish Faith Links project just like the annual bazaar at the East of Elgin church attracts many elderly CWL members as volunteers. When asked why they volunteer they said they help out because they enjoy working with the other volunteers on a worthwhile community social project. This confirms a survey finding that volunteers engage when the task and/or the initiating group whether secular or faith community responds with leadership to a specific need in their day to day lives. For example, the Council on Aging of Ottawa with which the IFN works in a committee concerned with spirituality and aging, can call on many volunteers to help out hosting ad hoc events that coincide with personal interests such as health, housing, travel, education in retirement, etc. The same is true of the office operations of the Ottawa chapter of the Federal Superannuates National Association which can call on up to fifty members, often young seniors, for administrative tasks as well as being available to provide advice on pensioner health benefits and pension rights for members whose spousal member has passed away. Recruiting volunteers to run the organisation of the local FSNA chapter does not get the same response because of the commitment to regular meetings of the board and committee work throughout the year.

Women in Ecumenical Pastoral Work

The role of volunteers in faith communities in addressing social challenges in the community such as those anticipated in an aging society, throws a light on aspects of faith in action. I observed that women in faith communities are significantly more engaged in hands-on pastoral care than are the men. The lesser personal engagement of men in pastoral care includes many pastors who in Ottawa are still largely male. The result is that the women in the faith communities who are comfortable with the

engagement of their church communities in social outreach feel held back by the lack of active engagement of male pastors. Another related observation is that women do not seem to have the same hesitation working ecumenically on pastoral care as do male congregants and pastors. A conclusion to be drawn from these two observations would suggest that greater ecumenical cooperation can be achieved by encouraging the women in the various church communities to do pastoral work collectively, particularly at the neighbourhood level. I have seen this happen in my local Faith Links project where senior women in my parish have slowly engaged themselves with the social and pastoral work of the neighbourhood Christian churches, such as helping out at hospitality events for seniors in various churches, supporting food collections for the neighbourhood food bank run by neighbourhood churches, and helping with hosting Out of the Cold suppers for the homeless in the neighbouring Presbyterian church. This indicates that faith is in action in the population of Christian women who are regular churchgoers; however at this stage, this population does not include many Boomers. This finding suggests the possibility of an ecumenical group of women pastoral workers inviting non church-going young seniors to help with ecumenical outreach work with frail seniors living alone in local neighbourhoods.

Multi-faith sharing and spirituality

The Interfaith Network for Isolated Seniors is a multi-faith organisation which although mainly Christian, includes Muslims, Buddhists, Unitarians and Sikhs as members of the directing group and as members at large. The focus is on aspects of spirituality that sustain caregivers and frail seniors. An annual city wide conference for seniors and caregivers of seniors is a recent yet very successful initiative of the IFN with the Council on Aging. This conference enjoys completely booked events on topics

covering many aspects related to the spirituality of aging. The selection of speakers as well as the identification of faith communities as members of a Faith Links project raises the difficult contemporary issue of inclusivity, particularly when the expected participants at this early stage of an aging society in Ottawa will be traditional Christians. The selection of key note speakers and even songs for Faith Links events entails identifying speakers and music that appeal to every one of faith and no faith. Inclusivity issues were highlighted one year within the IFN discussions regarding a controversial key note speaker from a Muslim Family Care Services Centre in Canada. The speaker's decision to focus on aging and not a grounded spirituality set the precedent to avoid direct references to faith beliefs in this conference with a focus on spirituality in aging. The success of the IFN group over time will likely depend on accepting that colleagues are people of a faith choosing to live their faith in helping others without sharing the language of a common source of inspiration. Observing first hand this disconnect between spirituality and the words and symbols of a faith tradition, my interest was directed to the significance of narratives that inform and inspire spirituality in faith, hope and action.

Assuming collective responsibility

The challenge of who accepts collective responsibility for caring was evident in my role as participant observer. In keeping with the research of Robert Putnam, Reginald Bibby and Statistics Canada, older Pre-Boomer church goers (those whose adult working lives began before 1960) represent the largest number of volunteers in the churches, synagogues, and not for profit social welfare groups, as well as in the population at large. The volunteers who took command in the two faith related groups in which I was a participant observer were largely Pre-Boomers with a few very early Boomers.

This demographic pattern is clear in the research on philanthropy in the USA and Canada. For example, while churches ranked number one in volunteering and philanthropy in the United States in the immediate post World War II period when 57 percent of the American population was involved in the secular community chest (United Way) fundraising and distribution.²⁵ Putnam gives the date of 1960 as the “high noon” mark for the influence on politics of those born between 1910 and 1940, the demographic he refers to as the “long civic generation” for their voluntary contribution to nation building. That date also marks the debut of the next generation into political life, a generation he refers to as “post civic”.²⁶

Michael Adams created a Canadian perspective on the value of collective responsibility in his breakdown of the donation priorities of the population of Canada in the year 2000. He did this by categorizing social characteristics of the population of Canada into thirteen tribes and sub tribes.²⁷ The Elders Tribe (the Pre-Boomers) at 19 percent of the population specified giving to church/synagogue/mosque as their choice for donations. The Boomers in four separate sub tribes comprising 27 percent of the population identified “religious organisations” as the preferred recipient of their donations. By the next generation, Generation X, (the children of the Boomers) comprising 24 percent of the population, the preferred recipients for donations ranked from none to a variety of popular secular groups. What this study seems to indicate is a generational shift in Canada of public perceptions of those who act for the common good

²⁵ Putnam, *Bowling Alone*, 117.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 255.

²⁷ Michael Adams, *Better Happy than Rich?: Canadians, Money and the Meaning of Life*, (Toronto: Penguin Group Canada, 2002), 190-204.

of society. This may be explained in part by the increasing role of the state in public welfare during these years, reflected perhaps in the attitudes the Boomer generation has passed to their children regarding who is expected to be responsible for caring for the needy in society.

2.5 Summary of the Findings

The importance of various aspects of relationships whether self or other initiated is a unifying concept in the context of the research question in respect of data gathered in the interviews and field notes. Compassion, which is engaging personally with and in the suffering of others, is both an immanent and transcendent dimension of relationship and therefore amplifies the research question, the purpose of which is to develop a theory of the sources of inspiration for compassionate commitments in the Boomer demographic.

Relationships are characteristic of the interdependent social nature of the human person. Volunteering to help others or oneself either directly or through others is consistent with the reasons given for choices in volunteering whether in the community, in one's own circle of family and friends, or whether expressed as a concern in respect of sustaining good relationships and health in the family and among friends, or participating in activities within faith communities. The written interviews reflect the significance of these relationships in that sixteen of the eighteen written interviewees identified the impact of the loss of various relationships as their greatest fears for the future. In spite of their affirmations regarding freedom to do what they liked in pensioned retirement, some retirees were brought up short in finding themselves suddenly responsible for their own happiness. Daily paid work defined the parameters of life, particularly for those who spent hours commuting, those who worked significant overtime. For these people the loss

of self identify with work amounted to the loss of the narrative of work, as one interviewee put it so simply, “I found initially that I had lost my identity”.

Interviewee reasons for choosing a volunteer activity as noted in the charts above were: the need to be busy, the need to be with people, choosing to be with like minded people, and engaging with ethical or faith principles. Fourteen responses indicating self initiated care are those where engagement with others is a factor of the need for companionship, personal development as in exercising, social awareness of a community need affecting one’s personal security and well being; living faith or humanist principles; or the desire to maintain one’s career skills. Twenty-three of the twenty-six interviews could be said to indicate a difference between activities that were either self initiated (fourteen) or other initiated (nine). In the category of other initiated relationship building (nine) are those where reaching out is initiated by others whether in response to the overt needs of family or friends, being asked or invited by someone to do something; awareness of a community matter call upon personal skills such as political reform, poverty reduction, child welfare, hospice care. In response to questions concerning satisfaction with one’s life I had expected that many people would refer to a narrative or image beyond the importance of intimate relationships or personal success story in order to capture a feeling of participating fully in life. Only three of the interviewees referenced a faith narrative whereas as a participant observer in faith groups I noted that among the volunteers engaged in groups, there was recognition of faith narratives in the use of prayer as a way of focussing everyone on the spirit of working together on the task at hand.

Various community interests attracted the voluntary efforts of eleven of twenty-six people in civic community building and three of twenty-six in faith community

building. The response as to what advice to give future Boomer retirees, answers offered by sixteen of these written interviews highlighted deciding to make a difference (seven) and volunteering for social connections (six). The second large cluster of responses was around the question of a sense of wholeness in daily life of which ten said they were contented and another eight claimed to find self worth in daily routines. Eighteen of the twenty-six interviewees expressed various forms of satisfaction with their lives.

Buried in these open ended questions is the opportunity for references to living out the teachings of faith narratives; for example, the Christian narrative is named by only four practicing Christians and one agnostic of the thirteen who claim to be either affiliated Christians or no longer affiliated Christians (five). Buddhist teachings and practices were referenced by one of two Buddhists, *noblesse oblige* by one of two humanists, and support for their synagogue by one of three Jews. Only one person of the eighteen answers to the written question concerning fears for the future named fear of death, while four Christians named their faith in the future as reason not to fear. Given that my letter requesting the interview was written on University of Saint Paul letterhead and indicated theology as my subject I assumed that references to faith narratives and traditions might have been forthcoming as reasons by interviewees who were not afraid to provide their faith affiliations. Can values of authentic autonomous choices explain the absence of references to any religious beliefs? An answer to this question would require a sample of intensely self-aware reflective people, who might be able to demonstrate that the narrative source of their actions is in the formation of their character, that it is their *habitus* to act in certain manner such that the expression of their learned values is autonomous and authentic.

The observations in the field notes are that traditional civic and faith organisations are failing to recruit new volunteers to maintain the traditional programming of these organisations. The positive factors attracting older seniors to faith organisations are their contributions to the common good, the attraction of fellowship and hospitality in activities where the seniors see their need for socialisation is met through working with others to help others, and sharing with others an articulated hope and vision about life. My observation from the women pastoral workers and volunteers among whom I am a participant observer, is that many of these women of faith are comfortable acting as witnesses of Christ's compassion in ecumenical settings, but if asked would say that their actions are authentic and autonomous rather than dutiful.²⁸

2.6 Validity Claims for a Grounded Theory

Don Browning has set out five claims to be addressed in a complete system in order to validate the work of practical theology such as the grounded theory in this research; namely, vision, the obligations which flow from that vision; the pre-moral tendencies and needs of actors, the environmental context of the vision and obligations, and the rules and roles of those living the vision and obligations in a given context. The vision or world view of the English speaking Boomer generation in Ottawa has been formed by a wider societal vision in this generation. A pragmatic, immanent, publicly acknowledged vision has avoided great ideological or religious confrontation and thereby healed the historic strife between Irish and French by focussing on the greatest good for

²⁸ Graham, *Transforming Practice*, 91.

the greatest number of people.²⁹ This utilitarian approach to governance has been formed in respect of a very scientific epistemology in which the foundation of reality is “public truth”; namely, a truth that can be determined through a process of deductive reasoning and observation. What the interviews and field notes have revealed is that building and nurturing good relationships is of fundamental importance in the lives of the sample of Boomers, the young seniors, whom I interviewed and observed in their volunteer activities in Ottawa. Because the research question looks at dimensions of compassion in the Boomer culture in Ottawa on the basis of what people had to say about what they do with their free time, this research concerns the phenomenology of “soft truth” in practical theology. This is a truth that says human stories are narratives of knowledge and thus become “important sources of knowledge” alongside what has been more highly regarded scientific evidence based knowledge.³⁰

Staying with relationships as the inspiration of dimensions of compassion, the obligations which flow from that vision or world view are embedded in a related world view – the sources of knowledge that inspire the visions of the various relationships. In the preceding chapter I noted that the vision and epistemology of the Enlightenment supported a rationalism that created the outlines of the contemporary world of science, technology, and modern liberal governance in the Western world of today. The Romantic vision of elite artists of mid-nineteenth century northern Europe reacted to the utilitarian interests of the merchant classes of the new industrial age. This Romanticist vision heightened human sensitivities and appreciation of creative individualism in a slowly

²⁹ Browning, *Fundamental Practical Theology*, 101. “The Kantian principle of universalization and the utilitarian principle of the aggregate good seem to be useful neutral courts of appeal for people who begin their moral disputes with vastly different presuppositions.”

³⁰ Swinton and Mowat, *Practical Theology*, 38-39.

emerging respect for individual human rights. Out of this and the dislocation of industrialism, war and urbanisation there arose a populist strident autonomy and determination to live a unique authentic life which would eventually transform class differences to matters of free choice in relationships and lifestyles.

In the economic boom times of post WW II in Canada this vision implied that today's young seniors could say they were not constrained by age in their right to "find my passion" as one interviewee put it. Sources of inspiration for finding one's passion have several sources. One is clearly a reflected philosophical conviction arising from a rational reflection on life experience, another personal honour as in the rationale of *noblesse oblige*. Another traditional source of inspiration for compassion is duty; that is, respecting or acting according to values of relationships embedded in one's social environment of upbringing, social class, or usefulness in meeting personal needs such as companionship in life. In Christian tradition to be explored in the following chapter, God's love as a source of personal and collective inspiration can be located in a mystical experience, divine revelation, a deep spiritual insight, simple acceptance of what others say, and/or religious rituals and traditions. Practical theology captures this alternative source of inspiration for compassion as the many ways of God's redemptive mission to the world.³¹

Obligations in this sense have become for the Boomer generation what one chooses to do when one has the good fortune to make such choices as did those who agreed to participate in my interview sample. Thus, the free choices of both my interviewees and of those I observed were most frequently expressed as building and nurturing relationships with oneself, one's life partner, family and friends and then within

³¹ Swinton and Mowat, *Practical Theology*, 24.

community groups. The pre-moral good underlying this orientation for obligations is the importance of socialisation for human survival in what Abraham Maslow refers to in his hierarchy of needs going from the most basic of human needs (physiological) to the highest (self actualisation).³² Satisfying the need for pre-moral goods such as shelter, security and food is also determined by vision and obligations such as we see in Jewish, Christian and Islamic rules and practices of fasting.

The social, geographic, political and economic environments of the Boomer generation have been historically very fortunate. In my interview sample and field notes Boomers found that jobs were readily available for early Boomers and taxes supported generous social programming which benefited early and mid way Boomers and late pre-Boomers. The abundance and availability of goods and services resulted in a vision or false sense of control over the environment, a result that can be linked to what is now viewed as a failure of stewardship for the natural world. This sensitivity to, and sense of responsibility for, damage to creation as I noted in the previous chapter, is the basis of a relationship with creation which is explicable as either an immanent practical practice or a transcendent understanding of God's relationship with creation.

Finally the rules and roles of the young seniors in my research have been determined in great measure by both the universalising ideal and utilitarian pragmatism of the world of work and government. With modern communications the Romantic ideals of freedom to choose what and who to love, and the assumed human right to be autonomous in choosing one's unique authentic destiny, have penetrated all levels of society.³³ These themes are found in the life choices of many of my interviewees but less

³² Abraham H. Maslow, *Motivation and Personality*, (New York: Harper and Row, 1954), chapter 5.

³³ Charles Taylor, *Secular Age*, 473.

so in the older generation of pre-Boomers that I observed, for example, in the parish CWL. This Romanticist inspired theme might also be said to continue to inform the openness to interfaith experiences among the younger seniors in the Interfaith Network.

In Chapter Four the findings in these two chapters and the next on dimensions of compassion in Christian tradition will come together in a new horizon of compassion around which to structure a strategic practical theological response in the wider community. As Don Browning describes them “These new horizons transform our fundamental visions and narratives that provide the envelope for practical reason.”³⁴

2.7 Diagram of Compassion, Relationships and Sources of Inspiration

Figure 2.2 below sets forth an approach to understanding sources of inspiration as dimensions of compassion in contemporary everyday life. This chart is based upon the results of the literature survey, the interviews, and my field notes as a participant observer. Human beings survive and flourish because they are social, because their relationships provide the material and emotional substance and meaning of life. The dominant culture assumed in this diagram, captured within an immanent framework of meaning making, is a constructed social space reflecting a natural order; that is, an immanent and not transcendent world view.³⁵ In this framework concern and engagement in one’s own immediate welfare, and that of one’s family and friends, one’s community whether local, distant or personal social is the context for taking any collective responsibility. This is looked upon as rational, if not merely instrumentalist behaviour,

³⁴ Don Browning, *Fundamental Practical Theology*, 285.

³⁵ Taylor, *Secular Age*, 542.

one of many relationships necessary for an ordinary, everyday, self sufficient life of production and reproduction.³⁶

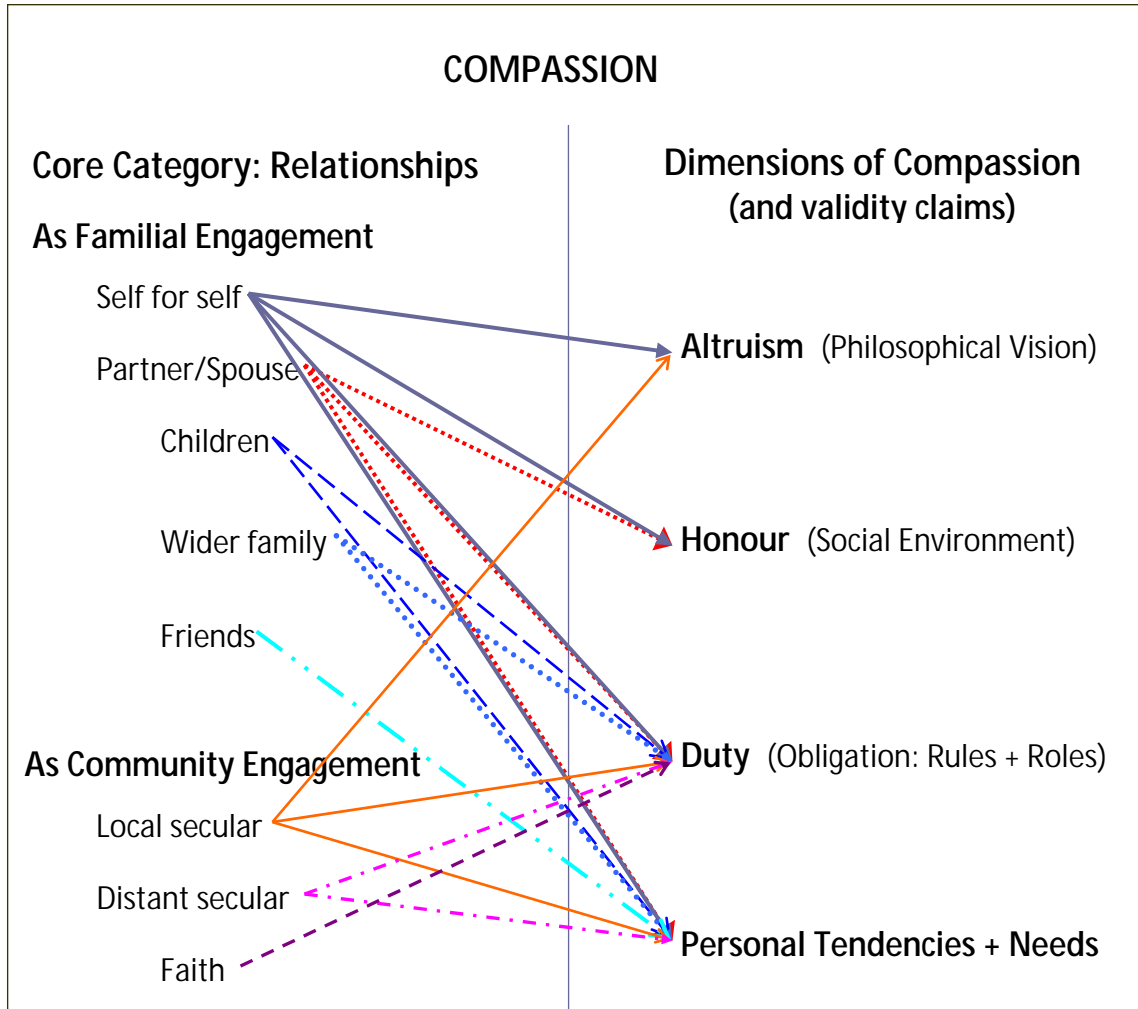


Figure 2.2 Dimensions of Compassion in Contemporary Culture

Compassion is a function of a relationship as we learn from Christ’s story to illustrate the meaning of neighbour. He referred to the compassion of a Good Samaritan who went out of his way to restore life to an unknown person lying half dead in a ditch by the side of a road. In the context of the immanent frame of life the definition of

³⁶ Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989) 211.

neighbour in this case could be interpreted as taking responsibility in the community as a community leader (honour) or acting out of a principled intellectual lifestyle (altruism). In a Christian hermeneutic this is a story that inspires a responsibility of relationship that mirrors Christ's presence among those who suffer. Either way this is a story in Christian tradition which uses a relationship to demonstrate the meaning of empathy and compassion.

In the diagram are two major sub categories of immanent relationships. The first relates to familial personal engagement with five sub categories of the objects of compassion: self, spouse or partner, children, wider family and friends. The second sub category of relationship is communal, that is, engagement in the local community, in a more distant community, and in personal self selected groups. In the second column the sources of inspiration for relationships are altruism (as philosophic principle), honour (protecting one's place in a social hierarchy), duty (as in the obligations defined by one's world view), and pre-moral goods (as in the tendencies and needs experienced in daily life ordered by and for society).

Presented in the two columns by connecting lines are the dynamics of compassion in the ordinary immanent life world view. The centrality of relationships is in one column and the sources of inspiration for those relationships in the other column. Compassion is the product of a relationship. Relationships just like inspirational resources encompass the good and the bad in all aspects of human life; for example, a positive relationship can be inspired by need, duty, honour, self transcending love and a relationship of hate can be inspired by envy, fear, murder, jealousy, lies, theft. The lines connecting items in the two columns also reflect the fact that compassion as a general category engages many of the same inspirational resources as do positive relationships. The lines connecting the source

of inspiration for a particular relationship, as for example, does duty inspire relationships of compassion in caring for oneself, one's partner, one's children and wider family and even friends; personal tendencies and needs inspire a relationship of compassion towards oneself, children, partner, friends, and local community. In the latter case one could say that personal needs and tendencies inspire relationships of compassion more clearly in one's local community than in distant communities. Thus the dimensions of compassion in the immanent framework are sources of inspiration for a variety of relationships.

2.8 Conclusion

This chapter concludes the descriptive task of the first movement of Don Browning's hermeneutical cycle of practical theology, the purpose of which has been to examine with a critical eye current social, cultural and ecclesial practices. Maxwell's model of an interactive research design using external and internal aspects of the research question guides the movements of the research question concerning dimensions of compassion in contemporary culture. By focussing on the interaction of the purpose of the research with the concerns, facts and assumptions I bring to the research question I have identified a method of interviews and notes from participant observation that can be tested using the validity claims for truthful communication set out by Don Browning.

The task in this and the preceding chapter has been to highlight underlying themes in a grounded theory of dimensions of compassion in the current culture that will be brought into dialogue with dimensions of compassion in Christian tradition in the following chapter. The grounded theory emerging from the research in this chapter and illustrated in Figure 2.2 above illustrates the significance of relationships in dimensions of compassion in the Boomer culture of Ottawa. The analysis of tradition saturated practical reason in chapter one is congruent with sources of inspiration for compassion

such as duty, honour, tendencies and needs, and altruism. This theory could serve to keep the Church aware of the ways Christian tradition differs and yet complements the world.³⁷ This aspect of the potential for dimensions of relationship to overlap in dimensions of compassion between contemporary culture and Christian tradition becomes at a later point in the thesis the point of fusion between the horizon of contemporary culture and the horizon of Christian tradition.

The grounded theory emerging from this research indicates that dimensions of compassion in the contemporary boomer culture are inspired by relationships that once articulated can sustain sources of inspiration for compassion. The sources of inspiration for relationships in a culture of immanent values as noted in the above diagram are relationships in varying orders of importance in individual lives; that is, by degrees of kinship, by levels of friendship, by distinctions in relationships between local, distant and faith communities. References to these relationships by young seniors indicate the satisfaction and meaning they bring to everyday life. The relationships are either self or other initiated which the research showed fourteen of twenty-six participants could be considered self-initiated and nine were other-initiated. Of five possibilities given for self-initiated relationships only one reflected a narrative of faith or a principle-based inspiration for compassionate action, while the most important category reflected the emotional experience of personal relationships. These relationships in an immanent culture inspire compassion as acts of altruism, duty, honour, or in most cases, reflect tendencies and needs as basic as pre-moral goods such as physical security or emotional ties of close family and friendship. If one were looking for immanent articulations of the importance of sentimental ties then a reference for those could be said to be located in

³⁷ Swinton and Mowat, *Practical Theology*, 9.

Hallmark cards and mementos such as ghost bikes located where cyclists have been hit and died.

The benefits of relationships for the individual are significant because they provide a sense of identity, accomplishment and self worth. Fears of losses expressed now by young seniors for later in the aging process validate the significance of meaningful relationships in everyday life and possibly also indicate lack of knowledge about, or reflection on sources of hope that make life meaningful.

This first movement of the hermeneutical circle has examined the tradition saturated practical reasoning of contemporary culture that has guided the Boomer generation through the years of plenty. A crisis unique in history is now looming in respect of the physical, mental and social tendencies and needs of this generation as they age in an aging society. Christian tradition provides a practical moral reasoning of the significance of transcendent relationships that enlightens practical reason in respect of the meaning and purpose of life. The following chapter, the second movement in the hermeneutical circle of Browning, identifies certain dimensions of compassion in relationships in Judeo Christian tradition that will later in Chapter Four correlate the practical reasoning of relationships in contemporary culture with practical moral reasoning of relationships in Christian tradition.

Chapter 3: Historical Theology: Compassion in Christian Tradition

3.1 Introduction

This chapter explores selected dimensions of compassion in Christian religious faith and tradition in the sacred writings of the people of the Old and New Testaments. The grounded theory based emerging from my empirical research in the previous chapter is that relationships are a key dimension of compassion in the contemporary culture of the Boomer generation in Ottawa. The immanent framework of meaning of contemporary culture focuses on utilitarian values that bring the greatest good to the greatest number of people in the short term. This chapter is a selection of dimensions of compassion in the Christian tradition, that compose what Browning refers to as the normative texts that exist in this culture and that are embedded in our local and national history.¹ Don Browning refers to these normative texts as the “tradition-saturated and historically located beginning points” which inform vision, the first of five claims he uses to determine the nature and validity of truthful communication.²

The texts selected reflect the fruits of communal dialogue out of which arose the original texts and practices of Judaism and Christianity. This hermeneutical perspective allows that each cultural context marks the ways in which the scriptural texts and religious practices guide human knowledge of God’s presence in human history. For example, Don Browning has picked out three metaphors for God that provide for him a North American hermeneutic of the Bible: God the Creator (human divinity, human finitude; basic goodness of human needs); God the Governor (divine impartiality, equal

¹ Don Browning, *A Fundamental Practical Theology: Descriptive and Strategic Proposals* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996) 51.

² *Ibid.*, 69.

regard, congruence of virtue and happiness) and God the Redeemer.³ In addition to reflecting the value of these same metaphors I have also attempted to integrate the critique of feminist theologians who argue that because the inherited Judeo-Christian tradition is andocentric the practical wisdom located in “theological truth” must be cognizant of the culture of the time and place in which it arose.⁴ While Browning proposes a very organized and consistent pattern of questions for his analysis of the nature and practices of a particular congregation of faith, Elaine Graham puts a greater emphasis on the wisdom of the surrounding culture in assessing the character and practices of a particular faith community. Paul Ballard and John Pritchard in the method used in the case studies in their book *Practical Theology in Action* reflected Browning’s cycle of practice-theory-practice in dealing with pastoral concerns of individual members of a city parish. Similar to Graham they are actively engaged in a theological reflection grounded in the social structures of the immediate surrounding culture. Their vision is of a loving God constantly renewing and redeeming creation, hence “The *missio* Dei is of the essence of the church”.⁵ Metaphorical language is often the language used to speak of

³ Browning, *Fundamental Practical Theology*, 193-199.

⁴ Elaine Graham, *Transforming Practice: Pastoral Theology in an Age of Uncertainty*, (Eugene Oregon: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2002), 91. Graham has critiqued Browning’s validity tests for knowledge from a feminist perspective, saying that practical/pastoral theology must embrace more than what she refers to as an andocentric rationality of a canon of belief and moral reasoning embedded in “. . . Protestant individualistic ascetic-rational tendencies” She argues that because truth incorporates practical wisdom, the power relations and diversity within a congregation must be located in a correlation between the world view expressed in theological and devotional materials, and the contextualised practices and ministry of that same congregation.

⁵ Paul Ballard and John Pritchard, *Practical Theology in Action: Christian Thinking in the Service of Church and Society* 2nd ed. (London: SPCK, 2006) 162. The four movements of their approach to what they refer to as pastoral theology are named descriptive, normative, critical and apologetic and so the orientation tends to defending normative values of Christian tradition in the context of the wider community.

God's relationship with humankind in sacred scripture.⁶ The parables told by Christ are a good example of the function of metaphor in linking everyday practical knowledge and wisdom to the less familiar metaphysical knowledge communicated by Christ. From this perspective Wendy Farley, a theologian at Emory University in Atlanta, Georgia, has drawn the conclusion that if the disposition to compassion is regarded as holistic communication, then a well chosen metaphor can reflect a holistic vision of life.⁷ Thus the transmission of the Christian story to the contemporary world can be found in the real everyday lives of outstanding Christian disciples and thinkers in the millennia since the death of Christ. My empirical research explored visions of the good life that inspire what Boomers and late pre-Boomers in English speaking Ottawa do with their increased leisure time. In these interviews I looked for metaphors of the good life that inform meaning and purpose in life that explicitly or implicitly are embedded in our Judeo-Christian tradition. In the next chapter the metaphors of contemporary culture and the normative metaphors of this chapter will come together in a correlation which will guide a critical theory laden new practice in the final movement of practical theology; namely, a strategic practical theology.

⁶ Richard Osmer, *Practical Theology; An Introduction*, (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2008), 113-128. Osmer wrestles with the same problem of truthful communication which he attempts to resolve in his communicative model of rationality by working with a metaphor as the link between the familiar (moral reasoning) with the less familiar (practical wisdom). This approach involves identifying, analysing and arguing various theories which can be used to bring into dialogue differing perspectives of a given phenomenon.

⁷ Wendy Farley, *Tragic Vision and Divine Compassion: A Contemporary Theodicy*, (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1990), 73. Farley's teaching and research interests include women theologians, religious dialogue, classical texts, contemporary ethical issues, and contemplative practices.

3.2 Dimensions of Compassion in Judeo-Christian Tradition

Christians, who believe that Christ is the son of God, also believe as did the Jewish people of the Old Testament, that a relationship with God defines and sustains life and death. As Stephen Bevans claims there must be an acceptance that the divine will is located in the history of humankind's search for, and relationship with God over time, space and language in the component parts of tradition: culture, historic data as in writings, legends and myths, physical remains.⁸ This hermeneutic assumes faith in divinely inspired human insights which make sense of life.

Effective communication of Christian discipleship in contemporary society must meet validity tests to be granted the status of true knowledge. To meet this challenge I have studied contemporary accounts and assessments of the texts of the Old Testament and of the life of Christ which can be shared with contemporaries curious to know who Christ was and what is meant by Christian compassion in the context of our Judeo-Christian tradition. First, I have used the 1968 UK Standard edition of the *Jerusalem Bible* for my scriptural references. This English language edition reflects the contemporary language and scholarship of the School of Biblical Studies in Jerusalem in the wake of the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls. I have referred to the *Anchor Bible Dictionary* for insights into what the original Hebrew and Greek texts meant in the choice of certain English words with multiple meanings; for example, the English word compassion has at least five Hebrew words to express situation specific meanings of the English word compassion. My supervisor recommended the writings of the Old Testament scholar Walter Brueggemann for a contemporary understanding of the social

⁸ Stephen B. Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, (New York: Orbis, 2002), 21-22.

context and universal appreciation of the stories of the Old Testament.⁹ A recent popular book, *Desire of the Everlasting Hills*, by Thomas Cahill tells in contemporary language and writing style, the life story of Christ and his social and political milieu. I put Hans Küng's book, *On Being a Christian*, in the same category of a widely read contemporary interpretation in the 1970's of what it meant to be a disciple of Christ in the cultural world of the Boomers. These latter two books are introductions to the Christian story for those with little or no appreciation of the person of Christ and his place in Judeo-Christian history and Western culture.

3.2.1 The Divine Relationship

God of Tenderness and Compassion

The Old Testament history of the people of Israel is the record of a long dialogue of faith and human hope in diverse circumstances between God, the power beyond all human knowledge, and the powerless yet free-willed human person. From specific experiences of God's presence and faithfulness with the descendents of Abraham throughout their long turbulent history, the writers of the Old Testament drew general conclusions about God's relationship with Israel according to their particular circumstances¹⁰. The tone of the writers in this light would indicate that the Bible is a

⁹ Walter Brueggemann has provided my starting point in understanding compassion in the Judeo-Christian tradition as *hesed*, a covenantal relationship. From this beginning I researched differing understandings of dimensions of compassion over the Christian millennia in the works of Walter Kasper (143, 144, 146, 151, 154, 165) Jürgen Moltmann (140), Wendy Farley (148-9), Jon Sobrino (149-150, 152), Cynthia Crysdale (147), Henri Nouwen (157-159), Hugh St Victor (163-164), Thomas a Kempis (164-165) and here I also include Dorothy Soelle's understanding of apathy and confrontation in respect of alternative responses to suffering.

¹⁰ Walter Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, (Minneapolis, Augsburg Press, 1997), 63. Brueggemann reminds readers in our globalising culture that contemporary hermeneutics recommends and lends itself to many different interpretations of truthfulness depending on the lens through which the text is read (liberation, feminist, canonical, historical-critical) "We now recognise that there is no interest-free interpretation, no interpretation that is not in the service of some interest and in some sense advocacy."

series of competing rhetorical claims reflecting human expectations that God, not only can, but will, respond in some fashion to physical, social and spiritual human needs. The role of the prophets in foretelling doom as a consequence of humankind's wilful ways is recorded in the books of the Old Testament well after doom has befallen the people of Israel. The telling of these stories of prophecy relates two things about the experience of faith in the Old Testament; namely, that the writers have faith in God's watchfulness over the people whether they listen or not, and that the writers themselves believe that humankind has the freedom to choose to obey or not when God speaks through his prophets communicated as deep insight into the mystery of God.

Israel's experience of God's compassionate relationship is located in stories of miraculous and/or long awaited redemption from what seems divine abandonment to natural disasters or crushing military defeats. The act of memorialising complaints of abandonment might also be read as signals of a firm expectation of the chosen people that God is faithful and compassionate in good times and bad. By observing the laws God handed to Moses and the prophets, by keeping alive their traditions and history in rituals and written texts, the Jewish people remember that they are God's chosen people.¹¹ Their stories act as metaphors to remind them that not only are they the receivers of divine compassion but in return are also instruments of divine compassion.

Hesed is the Hebrew word which best describes the contemporary expectation of compassion. This word applies to both common and theological relationships in which help from one unique capable source is essential in preventing something terrible happening to someone in need. The one in a position to help must be completely free to

¹¹ Walter Brueggemann, *Old Testament Theology: Essays on Structure, Theme, and Text*, (Minneapolis, Fortress Press, 1992), 78.

respond or not, but if help is given, a new committed relationship arises for the receiver. A sense of this word used for a political relationship is found in 1 Samuel 18:1 “After David had finished talking to Saul, Jonathan’s soul became closely bound to David’s and Jonathan came to love him as his own soul.” This relationship resulted in Jonathan, the son of King Saul, freely choosing to protect David from the subsequent jealous rage of Saul.

The covenantal implication of a *hesed* relationship between Israel and God is located in God’s response to Moses when Moses came upon his followers in a time of need, choosing to adore the Golden Calf as a better alternative for immediate salvation than a distant God. God is recorded through Moses as reacting to this insult by defining his (God’s) relationship with Israel as “a God of tenderness and compassion, slow to anger, rich in kindness and faithfulness; for thousands he maintains his kindness, forgives faults, transgression, sin;” (Exodus 34: 6, 7). This testimony of the nature of Yahweh’s *hesed* relationship uses the adjectives: merciful, gracious, abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness.¹² A counter testimony of Yahweh’s commitment in the words of Brueggemann is one story of God’s relationship with David in which God orders David to take a census, a census for which David is subsequently punished by a pestilence (2 Samuel 24).¹³ The Psalms address both testimonies – Yahweh who is abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness (Psalm 86) and Yahweh who is neglectful “O God, you have rejected us, broken us” (Psalm 60:1). “You cannot mean to forget us forever? You cannot mean to abandon us for good?” (Lamentations. 5:20).

¹² Walter Brueggemann, *Theology*, 226.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 372.

Rich in Kindness and Faithfulness

This “counter testimony”, for the inconsistency of Yahweh according to Walter Brueggemann¹⁴, thus describes in terms of *hesed* a sense of God’s compassion as a reciprocal relationship of commitment between persons and God in which the human call for divine help can also be unheeded as we learn from the story of Job. Equally in the Old Testament we learn that God’s offer of communication with humans is often ignored or deemed ineffective by the Jewish people; as for example was the case in the worship of the Golden Calf. In the book of Hosea, the warning of the prophet Amos regarding the imminent fall of the Northern Kingdom went unheeded when the Israelites were feeling that their accumulated wealth and power would be sufficient to defeat an enemy threat. The frequent retelling of on-again off-again instances of communication with and by God confirms the expectation of fidelity and hope which the Israelites had of this relationship with the God of Abraham.

Walter Brueggemann refers to a “gap of discontinuity” in the history of the faith of both Christians and Jews¹⁵; however the word faith in the Old Testament may also be more suggestive of trust in God’s fidelity rather than faith in any articles of belief.¹⁶ The gap of discontinuity applies to the recurring cycles of loss and destruction suffered by the Jewish people such as the following stories: the lengthy passage of the Israelites in the desert on their way from slavery in Egypt to the Promised Land; the Babylonian exile; the dispersion in 134 AD; the European pogroms. A contemporary experience of the gap

¹⁴ Walter Brueggemann, *Theology*, 373.

¹⁵ Walter Brueggemann, “Prophetic Ministry in the National Security State”, *Theology Today* Volume 65 (2008): 289, <http://web.ebscohost.com.proxy.bib.uottawa.ca/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer> (accessed April 10, 2011).

¹⁶ *The Anchor Bible Dictionary II*, (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 744.

of discontinuity was the Nazi Holocaust which was believed by many Jews to have been reversed with the victory over Egypt in the Seven Day War of 1967.

Blind expectation of the promise of God's steadfast love and faithfulness may have been nurtured by Jewish writers as a consequence of bountiful agricultural cycles upon their arrival in the Promised Land. For these generations, unlike their forbearers of the nomadic past, this natural bounty fed the expectation of a settled life. This assumption was tested from time to time with prophetic warnings and occurrences of drought, pestilence and military defeat; however, in spite of recurring disasters, stories of God's presence with the Israelites were held in memory to remind them that God could and would raise righteous, triumphant leaders from among them.

Christ proclaimed a new reading of the Deuteronomic Law when he addressed the crowds concerning the Kingdom of Heaven. While the beatitudes (Matthew 5:1-12) complement each other in expressing the interrelationship of many dimensions of the spirit of compassion, some can be identified as being specific to acts of selfless compassion: to be merciful, to engage in peacemaking, to act in the cause of right. The beatitudes, read as either a sermon or a collection of sayings, can be considered Christ's terms for a covenantal relationship between humans and his Father in heaven. The eight beatitudes pronounced by Christ in his first public address, the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew) or the Sermon on the Plain (Luke), are rooted in the Old Testament but are presented in the New Testament in the context of the personal humility and love enacted and taught by Christ in respect of what he lived in his practice of compassion. His instructions speak to humility of spirit and the expression of loving God through love for his creatures: love your enemies and do good, do not judge, do not condemn, grant pardon, and give in full measure. This enumeration of the nature of acts of mercy can be

read as a theological reflection on the nature of God's love and relationship as mirrored and illustrated in the human life of Christ.

The corporal acts of compassion (unlike the spiritual acts) as reflected in the volunteering interests of my target research sample are differentiated by those who are inspired by the narratives of faith and those inspired by a humanist need, if not desire, for immanent self transcendence. I feel that Taylor makes this distinction in terms of the beneficence of exclusive humanism and the religious spirit of self transcendence inspired by an eschatological vision of human fulfilment.

Keeper of Promises

For believers among the people of Israel and later for Christians, knowledge concerning human meaningfulness and hope about life are provided in the Covenants and commandments as divine revelations. Promises in the Old Testament are prophetic promises of liberation from suffering imposed by the status quo.¹⁷ These promises take the form of poetic metaphors creating imaginative commitments to redemption from suffering. One such early promise of purpose for the chosen people begins with Abraham's story after the battle of Chedor-laomer when the King of Sodom asked Abraham to return stolen tribute which Abraham swore before Yahweh he had not taken (Genesis 14:24). It is after this confrontation that the Old Testament records a vision in which Yahweh said to Abraham "Have no fear, Abram, I am your shield; your reward will be very great." (Gen.15:1). As time passed Abraham queried Yahweh about the promised reward of an heir and descendents "as numerous as the stars" (Gen. 15:3-8),

¹⁷ Walter Brueggemann, *Old Testament Theology*, 83. Brueggemann offers his impression that "religionists" read the promises as fulfillments and historical critical theologians read the promises for their time and the place of the promises. To read the promises on their own terms he says is to understand God's promises as challenges to the status quo and thus as messages of hope.

until Yahweh made a covenant of his promise in the traditional form of a burnt offering (Gen. 15: 18-21). Yahweh fulfilled Abraham's need for heirs and land which is recorded as proof for all time that "Abram put his faith in Yahweh, who counted this as making him justified" (Genesis 15:6). This ancient human experience of wavering faith in Yahweh and then of Yahweh's ultimate fulfilment of his promise relates the human side of faith in the unseen God of Israel. The record of this dialogue has provided Judeo-Christian tradition a reference point and metaphor to justify faith in Yahweh.

The God of the Old Testament encountered in the Psalms is most often just, merciful, and benevolent. In Psalm 145:9 we read "God's tenderness embraces all his creatures", who dwells with his people wherever they are, who is in partnership with humankind to establish moral order in the world, who is the heavenly judge biased in favour of humankind, who has limits on his chastisement of humankind's evil doing.¹⁸ Yahweh's promises in the Old Testament are captured in covenantal eschatology which anticipates a meaningful history for the chosen people, fulfilment of the expectations of a peaceful prosperous kingdom under the rule of a righteous leader, while also reminding the people of Israel of their destruction at the hands of their own unjust leaders. The eschatological expectation is bound up in destruction and redemption; "Well then, since you have trampled on the poor man, extorting levies on his wheat – those houses you have built of dressed stone, you will never live in them;" (Amos 5:11) later reversed as in "I will plant them in their own country, never to be rooted up again out of the land I have given them, says Yahweh, your God" (Amos 9:15).

¹⁸ Abraham Kaplan, *The Judaic View of God in Judaism*, 33 no 4 Fall (1984) 410-411, <http://web.ebscohost.com.proxy.bib.uottawa.ca?ehost/pdfviewer> (accessed 19 March 2011).

Walter Brueggemann's perspective on the recurring periods of destruction at the hands of unjust leaders, suggests for him a concept of the God–Human relationship which is "the costly reality of human hurt and the promised alternative of evangelical hope;"¹⁹ For Brueggemann the many diverse voices of hurt and hope linking earth to heaven are characteristic of the Old Testament. They are also found in the New Testament for those who set aside their Enlightenment practices of rational discourse and reflection in favour of listening to the emotions in the voices of the writers of the gospels and epistles. The Gospel of Luke records in a metaphor attributed to one of Jesus' first sermons that the promises of God the Father are for those who are compassionate, "Be compassionate as your Father is compassionate. Do not judge and you will not be judged yourselves; give, and there will be gifts for you because the amount you measure out is the amount you will be given back." (Luke 6:36-38).

As a Jewish convert to God's promises realised in Christ, Saint Paul spoke to non Jewish peoples (whom he referred to as "aliens with no part in the covenants with their promise;") as a people "immersed in this world, without hope and without God" (Ephesians 2:12). This understanding of God's presence in Jewish history encouraged Paul to bring the new covenant to the Gentiles. Saint Paul's conversion to Christ as the Messiah was a profound personal recognition of God's love for him, "The life I now live in this body I live in faith: faith in the Son of God who loved me and who sacrificed himself for my sake. I cannot bring myself to give up God's gift:" (Galileans 2: 21) God's compassion, understood by Saint Paul in terms of God's love for him and for those who respond to God's call, was the basis of Paul's mission as, "a servant of Christ Jesus who has been called [...] to preach the Good News that God promised long ago"

¹⁹ Brueggemann, *Old Testament Theology*, 70-77.

(Romans 1: 1-2), that “nothing that exists [...] can ever come between us and the love of God made visible in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 8: 38-39). In believing this he lived and died according to what seems to be the paradox of Christian compassion - which he himself would have to die violently in Christ in order to have fullness of life “All I want is to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and to share his sufferings by reproducing the pattern of his death. That is the way I can hope to take my place in the resurrection of the dead” (Philippians 3: 10-11).

According to Pope Benedict²⁰ the political goals of the state religion of Rome had, by the second century AD, rendered virtually meaningless whatever it had originally offered for personal spirituality. Many people were looking for more in alternative secret religions, one of which was the Christian narrative first heard in the synagogues of the Jewish Diaspora, the only non-state religion allowed in the public square.²¹ The message of Christ’s disciples was that Christ had come to liberate the Jewish people from “the hostility caused by the rules and decrees of the Law” (Ephesians 2:15). To the curious looking for some new form of spirituality, he said that Christ had come to rescue the pagans from their hopelessness.

The members of the small Christian communities composed of Gentiles and Jews came together around Paul’s call to show each other mutual physical and spiritual support. The social dynamic was intimate, demanding trust, solidarity and mutual generosity of the “socially vulnerable”; characteristics quite distinct from the social

²⁰ Pope Benedict XVI, *Spe Salvi: On Christian Hope*, (Ottawa: CCCB Publications, 2007), paragraph 5.

²¹ Paul Johnson, *A History of Christianity*, (New York, Touchstone, 1976), Part 1. This history reflects the author’s perspective on the relative significance of the primitive Roman state religion and the dispensation for the Jews to worship publicly.

norms of the surrounding pagan cultures.²² Out of this intimate social circle and growing sense of difference arose norms of interpersonal relationships in the early years of Christianity that followed Christ's teachings and practice – regular communal gatherings to break bread and pray, observe faithful marriages, and provide mutual economic support. These habits were gradually thought of as normative social values within Christian communities at the time of the Edict of Milan in 312 A.D. with official recognition of Christianity as the new state religion.

Bishop Augustine in the Western Roman Empire and John Chrysostom in the Eastern Roman Empire used the passion of Saint Paul as their personal guide and teaching model for Christian discipleship.²³ Paul's compassion was evident in the courage, commitment, energy and love for friend and foe which characterised his mission to tell the story of Christ in the countries of the Mediterranean. In imitation of Paul's faith and his compassion for the souls of those he met, Saints Augustine and John Chrysostom energised and expanded the Christian communities in the fourth century. The dimension of compassion expressed by these saints in their preaching and pastoral leadership communicated the inspiring message of Christian hope which could transform the vision of both the inward person (the focus of Saint John Chrysostom) and the outward world (the focus of Saint Augustine).

²² Peter Brown, *Late Antiquity* (Cambridge Mass., Harvard University Press, 1998) 25, 27. see also Martha Nussbaum, "Upheavals of Thought", 304-27; also her "Compassion: The Basic Social Emotion," *Social Philosophy and Policy* 13 (1996): 27-58 as cited in *Paul M. Blowers*, "Pity, Empathy, and the Tragic Spectacle of Human Suffering: Exploring the Emotional Culture of Compassion in Late Ancient Christianity," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* Volume 18, Number 1, Spring 2010, 3 <http://web.ebscohost.com.proxy.bib.uottawa.ca/ehost> (accessed 19 March 2011).

²³ Brian Daley, S.J., "Saint Paul and the Fourth Century Fathers: Portraits of Christian Life," in *Pro Ecclesia* Vol. XVIII, No.3, 315-316 <http://web.ebscohost.com.proxy.bib.uottawa.ca/ehost/pdfviewer>, (accessed 1 June 2011).

This act of compassion and commitment was grounded for all three saints in the love of God and of neighbour in imitation of Christ.²⁴ The early disciples of Christ were drawn to follow in the footsteps of a humble, charismatic preacher whose miraculous healing power had been revealed in one-on-one encounters with those who put their trust and ultimate hope in him. According to this writer the validity of this dimension of compassion was expressed as evangelisation in the lives of Saint Paul and his disciples, Saints John Chrysostom and Augustine.

Don Browning's tests for a valid claim to truth are met in these acts of witness that bring together faith, the action which it inspires, and a lively example recorded in the lives of Christians through history. Witnessing in the time of the very early Christian communities meant that a deep personal faith in Christ answered an existential angst of those who chose to follow him; it was only under the Constantinian church did Christianity become the norm in the later Roman Empire. The trust in Christ's promises witnessed in the lives of the early Christians gave a new vision of life which inspired new interpersonal obligations, a new perspective on human needs and tendencies, and strength in diverse cultural environments to challenge normative rules, regulations and socio-political roles. This was a new value upon which to claim leadership that did not require either a successful military conquest or a claim of divine right.

Dialogue Partner

Brueggemann claims the hope that suffering will be overcome is the "peculiar" way of God in the world for this implies the belief that He binds himself to the needs and

²⁴ Daley, S.J., "Saint Paul and the Fourth Century Fathers", 317.

hopes of humanity.²⁵ In the Book of Exodus Yahweh apprehends the hurt “the sons of Israel, groaning in their slavery, cried out for help [...]God heard their groaning and he called to mind his covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob” (Exodus. 2:23-25). He uses the word compassion to describe the intent of God’s promise to Moses in which Yahweh has promised to be with Moses in liberating the Israelites from their suffering in Egypt²⁶, “I have heard their appeal to be free [...] I mean to deliver them out of the hands of the Egyptians.” (Exodus. 3:7-8). Brueggemann bases his thesis on the intent or revelation of the Old Testament which according to him is “the costly reality of human hurt and promised alternative of evangelical hope”.²⁷ The Exodus story has endured in human memory and sacred ritual for thousands of years as the narrative of humankind’s reasoned and intuitive expectation that God will deliver his people from suffering, that is, that the God of Israel is compassionate.

The story of Job however, puts this expectation in perspective. God does not act as humans either command or expect of God because humankind cannot know the ways of God. In the long dialogue of the righteous man who fervently believes he has followed God’s commands and yet suffers, Job blames God for his sufferings and concludes “I cry to you, and you give me no answer; I stand before you but you take no notice” (Job 30: 20). The human experience of God articulates a response from God, “Who is this obscuring my designs with his empty-headed words?” (Job 38: 2) “Where were you when

²⁵ Brueggemann, *Old Testament Theology*, 71. Brueggemann writes in this reference that “Hurt and hope are pervasive theological claims in the text. That is, the text discloses that the humanly experienced realities of hurt and hope not only matter to the experiencing human community, but matter decisively to the God of the Bible.”

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 72.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 70.

I laid the earth's foundations? Tell me, since you are so well informed!" (Job 38: 4) at which point Job finally understands "I have been holding forth on matters I cannot understand, on marvels beyond my knowledge." (Job 42:3) and then concludes "I retract all I have said, and in dust and ashes I repent." (Job 42: 6) In response God restores Job's fortunes twice over.

Jürgen Moltmann's concept of the human apprehension of promise and hope reflects an expectation of God's compassion when he refers to Job's suffering as a contradiction of the reality of a promised future.²⁸ In this same vein Brueggemann apprehends the paradoxical nature of God's compassion in the lives of the Minor Prophets who lived through cycles of political over-confidence, subsequent abyss, and recovery once again. He sees in their prophecies the self revelation of God, as "the God of the abyss is the God of utter newness".²⁹ It can be argued alternatively that God's compassion was expressed in his deafness to, and silencing of, the cries of the prophets in the stories when God withheld telling the Israelites about the scale of the impending disasters brought on by their sins.³⁰ God's dialogue with the Israelites about himself thus uses suffering as a dimension of God's justice, just as is compassion also a dimension of God's justice.

²⁸ Jürgen Moltmann, *Theology of Hope: On the Ground and the Implications of a Christian Eschatology*, (Minneapolis, Fortress Press, 1993) 86.

²⁹ Brueggemann, "Prophetic Ministry in the National Security State," in *Theology Today* Volume 65 (2008) 285-311. <http://web.ebscohost.com.proxy.bib.uottawa.ca/ehost> (accessed 10 April 2011) 306.

³⁰ Tiemeyer, Lena-Sofia. 'God's hidden compassion' in *Tyndale Bulletin*, 57 no 2 2006, 191-213. <http://web.ebscohost.com.proxy.bib.uottawa.ca/ehost/folder> (accessed 19 March 2011). In this article Tiemeyer argues that the divine declaration in Amos 7:8 and 8:2 is motivated by prudence: after having succumbed twice to Amos' intercession, God forestalls intercession a third time as a means to protect himself and his justice rendered in his plans of punishment. Likewise, God declares his intention to disregard any dissenting views that Jeremiah may have concerning God's planned punishment of Judah in order to ensure its execution. Lastly, God renders Ezekiel mute and confines him to his home so as to hinder him from interceding on behalf of the people.

Moltmann looks at the pattern in the Old Testament of *hubris*, destruction, and recovery not as the illumination of the reality of the world and human nature, but as an ancient Jewish understanding of God's revelation of divine intervention and promise. Brueggemann refers to the rhetorical style of the Old Testament as witness to being, to living the relationship with God in action and recording that action as speech. He argues that because speech constitutes reality, the character of God in the Old Testament depends upon the courage and imagination of those who speak about God.³¹

The nomadic experience of dependence upon and expectation of green pastures is looked upon by some scholars as the inspiration for the sacred biblical narrative of expectation. Moltmann refers to metaphors for hope with which to illuminate the tension in Judaism between the spirit of expectation of God's faithfulness in caring for nomadic herders in search of green pastures versus the expectation of cyclical renewal in the natural world for the settled agrarian Jews. Such expectation creates "not the religious sanctioning of the present but a break-away from the present towards the future".³² This break-away he goes on to say defines Yahweh not as a mythical god who appears to be worshipped and appeased at various times and locations, but as a god who appears as the God of promise and future. With this reading of the tension between nomadic and agrarian life experience underlying the prayers, lamentations, praise, stories of victory and defeat of the Old Testament, Moltmann sets out his theology of hope in the biblical promises and expectations of God.

God's revelation of his mystery, freedom, and attentiveness is recorded in the form of a dialogue based as Walter Kasper states, on man's pre-apprehension of "the

³¹ Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 65.

³² Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, 101.

absolute mystery of an unconditioned, perfect freedom”; being as it is a pre-apprehension that “sets the mark of freedom on his knowing and acting.” This perspective in the thought of Kasper is the basis of dialogue – according to which man is in a quest for signs in which this “unconditioned freedom addresses him and communicates itself to him.”³³ Unlike the Old Testament quest for God’s presence recorded in the form of a rhetorical dialogue, the words of God in the human person of Jesus Christ are captured as direct quotes by the writers of the New Testament. Both Testaments offer narratives of expectant knowledge of an indwelling compassion in human history. Such narratives should correlate with contemporary narratives of acts of human compassion in which God reveals himself through the acts of those who could be thought of as witnesses of God’s love. One such witness is found in the works of Mother Theresa and those she inspires.

3.2.2 Suffering and Liberation

Human Suffering

Human suffering creates the hope for wholeness in an appeal to a supernatural power for relief from what is experienced as evil. In the New Testament Christ’s fear of human suffering before the Passion was the reason he beseeched his Father in the Mount of Olives before his arrest, “Father if you are willing, take this cup away from me.” (Luke 22:42).

The story of Job in the Old Testament memorializes suffering as a path to awareness and knowledge of God, while for western atheists suffering is “the rock upon

³³ Walter Kasper, *The God of Jesus Christ*, (New York, Crossroad Publishing Company, 1984), 115.

which atheism stands”.³⁴ For the Jewish people God is a very real partner in daily life. He is the One who is entwined with the Israelites in a relationship of faithfulness, loyalty, triumph and suffering as interpreted in the biblical life story of Israel and of the followers of Christ. From a Jewish perspective grounded in the Old Testament, Martin Buber³⁵ explored the human “world of relation” as a life shared with: fellow humans, nature, and “intelligible essences”. Human life with the world Buber believed is life in relationship with the world, in what he referred to also as the “world of relation”. Buber looked upon life as not life with an object, “It”, but life with a subject, “Thou”. He interpreted the commands recorded by the prophets of the Old Testament as the fruit of God’s revelation of Himself with presence and power in a meeting with humankind. The revelation of that meeting according to Buber is a “calling and a mission”; not a meeting in which information is rendered into an “It” or cold object and then dispensed with.³⁶

In the Old Testament, Walter Brueggemann refers to the dialogue with God in the act of suffering as a “theodic testament” in respect of the covenantal relationship.³⁷ He looks into the story of Job’s great suffering before an unmoved God from which he concludes that at its most dramatic the holiness of God trumps justice even when

³⁴ G Buchner, *Dantons Tod*, Act 3, cited from J Moltmann’s *The Trinity and the Kingdom of God* (London and New York, ET M. Kohl, 1981) in Walter Kasper, *The God of Jesus Christ* (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, Eng. Trans.) 159.

³⁵ Maurice S.Friedman, *Martin Buber: The Life of Dialogue* (New York, Harper Torchbooks, 1960), 74.

³⁶ Martin Buber, *I and Thou*, trans. Walter Kaufmann, (New York, Simon & Schuster, 1970), 164. Martin Buber and Emmanuel Levinas have both written extensively on various aspects of the divine presence existent in human relationships. These are important contributions to an understanding of the presence of God in human relationships which would be worth drawing upon in a text dedicated to this specific focus.

³⁷ Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 385.

humankind must remain committed to seeking and making justice.³⁸ The God of the Bible is not conceived by any of the writers of the Old Testament as a philosopher.³⁹

The Old Testament expectation of faith in, and hope for liberation from suffering under the leadership of a just king who will guide with compassion and power, is one of many threads which tie the Old Testament to the Messiah of the New Testament. This expectation of a powerful earthly Messiah is belied by the fact that the king of the New Testament declared himself not to be a king of this world. This New Testament Messiah was one who cried out in his own terrible suffering “My God, my God, why have you deserted me?” (Matthew. 27:46). The logical question to ask is how can Christians in the light of so much human suffering, including that of Christ, say that the world has been redeemed. Walter Kasper citing the work in 1966 of R. L. Rubenstein suggests that in the light of the Holocaust it is “now impossible to speak responsibly of a God who is both omnipotent and good.” The corollary which Kasper posits is the alternative which is to put faith in what he calls self redemption of the material sort proposed by Karl Marx.⁴⁰

Can one rationally communicate self redemption as a dimension of God’s compassion? Richard Osmer identifies three necessary elements⁴¹ of what he called his communicative model of rationality in order to achieve this. He referred to the necessity of the selection of an appropriate metaphor to act as the model.⁴² The appropriate

³⁸ Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 392.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 225.

⁴⁰ Kasper, *The God of Jesus*, 159.

⁴¹ These three necessary elements are: assessing the relative strength of all arguments; using reasons grounded in a specific perspective; and accepting that theories can be fallible.

⁴² Richard Osmer states that the metaphor must be appropriate to the subject of the theory; the level of reality invoked must be appropriate to the theory, and the argument around the theory must be strong.

metaphor for such a communicative model of rationality in the case of Christ's self redemption is the cross which communicates God's incarnation in Jesus whose suffering, death and resurrection were witnessed and recorded by humans. Theology of the cross using the cross as the metaphor of God's compassion acknowledges evil because ultimate good exists; that is, there would be no evil if good, as witnessed in Christ's resurrection, did not triumph. This is the faith of Saint Paul as expressed in his letter to the Ephesians cited above.

Feminist theologian, Cynthia Crysdale, uses an argument for suffering akin to Osmer's model of metaphor as the means of rational communication. For Crysdale the metaphor of the suffering and resurrection implicit in the historically situated narrative and cross of Christ reveals that the omnipotence of God's goodness overcomes evil. She claims that suffering is an interpreted event through which suffering can be the site of God's presence.⁴³ Crysdale writes that a theology based on acceptance of the foretelling and narratives of the historic suffering, death and resurrection of Christ as symbolised in the metaphor of the cross, communicates rationally a theology of human hope⁴⁴ in which compassion is at the heart of solidarity, both of which entail risk. She sees in our inherited narrative of Christ's fear filled acceptance of the cross, the ultimate metaphor of risk taking in acts of solidarity with the suffering of humankind.⁴⁵ In the following chapter I draw upon these elements of suffering and risk taking to relate the life

Richard Osmer. *Practical Theology; An Introduction*. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2008), 114-115.

⁴³ Cynthia S.W. Crysdale, *Embracing Travail: Retrieving the Cross Today* (New York: Continuum International Publishing Group Inc., 2000) 32.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 31-33.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 66.

experience of our traditioned Christian past with a contemporary perception of compassion in post modern society.

Liberation from Evil

Human suffering is a cry for liberation from evil. To regard compassion as “an enduring disposition” of self transcending suffering with the one who suffers, then compassion means active engagement. This engagement with the one suffering must be more than “an accidental response to a particular event of suffering” as Wendy Farley writes.⁴⁶ This disposition arises from the relational nature of the human person and of God (consistent with Walter Brueggemann’s insight) which suggests that the human capacity for self transcendence endows humanity with the capacity to be “the servant of compassion’s care for the world” in which the pain experienced for the suffering of others can be “closer to love than moral obligation”.⁴⁷ The love associated with this perspective on compassion is not affective love but intentional love in which affective sympathy might be the trigger to engage one’s compassion. This sympathy within compassion responds to the overt violence of social and political injustice as it happens, or threatens to happen. The paradox of compassion in this instance is that compassionate resistance is non-violent, it does not seek to respond to oppression with oppression, and so we have praxis of the command of love of enemy. Such a response calls for risk taking, great personal courage and self transcendence.

Circumstances of violence offer the freedom to judge and choose between good and evil. According to Saint Paul (Romans 8: 37) in choosing the good one accepts God’s

⁴⁶ Wendy Farley, *Tragic Vision*, 73.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 74-75.

love “As scripture promised: “For your sake we are being massacred daily, and reckoned as sheep for the slaughter” (Psalm 44:11). These are the trials through which we triumph, by the power of him who loved us. This view of evil raises the question of assuming that good can control evil in the world of mankind where culture defines values and the relationship of good and evil in specific circumstances. Rather than good dominating evil, the good can also be thought of as transforming evil. For Christians such a transformation is understandable according to Cynthia Crysdale “because God was and is willing to risk entrance into a finite world tainted with evil”.⁴⁸ Her argument is that Christ sustained his resistance to the evil done to those he healed and also to himself by living both the conflicting values and praxis of his Jewish faith and his human experience in the oppressive culture of his time and place.⁴⁹

Liberation theology was the product of a twentieth century search in Latin America for a contemporary compassionate Christian theology and praxis with which to address the multi-generational oppression of the powerless by small overbearing elites. Christ died at the hands of self interested jealous political and theocratic powers that were frightened by the threat of powerless mobs seeking their liberation from Roman oppression and marginalisation by the Jewish religious elite. In a related expression of a contemporary Christian liberating theology, Jean Vanier and Mother Theresa both in very different cultures sacrificed their lives to liberate those considered sub standard humans. In the home culture of liberation theology, Archbishop Oscar Romero of El Salvador is deemed by Jon Sobrino SJ to be a martyr for having “got in the way” of power in the struggle to liberate the poor in El Salvador from the oppression of the local rich and

⁴⁸ Crysdale, *Embracing Travail*. 61.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 58-59.

powerful ruling elite.⁵⁰ As Sobrino writes, the actions (and not thoughts and prayers) of mercy, which he equates with compassion, is central for Jesus. Jesus' response to suffering removes the source of suffering and restores the full human dignity of the one who suffered."⁵¹ A compassion that resists evil and violence must necessarily act to liberate those suffering from evil.

The theology of compassion as liberation is contextual and therefore must be informed by the philosophic and political currents of its time and place. Stephen Bevans situates liberation theology in what he refers to as the Praxis Model of theological reflection because it expresses "faith from the perspective of social location".⁵² In this respect Christian movements of charity and solidarity with the marginalised are the traditional Christian response to the scriptural account of Christ's mission. In Christian tradition religious orders and lay associations as well as individuals sprang up to care for the sick, to house homeless children, to provide education to the illiterate. The Young Christian Workers movement in Europe in the 1930's articulated the theological basis of Catholic social action in the practical principles of see-judge-act.

Many Christian communities from the late eighteenth century onward were aggressively engaged in political movements to liberate those who had lost their freedom for example, the 19th century anti slavery movement in the UK, the repeal of unjust laws and institutions in order to protect children, the reform of penal laws. In the 20th and the

⁵⁰ Jon Sobrino S.J., "Jesus of Galilee from the Salvadoran Context: Compassion, Hope and Following the Light of the Cross," trans. Robert Lassalle-Klein with J. Matthew Ashley, *Theological Studies* 70 (2009) 437, <http://web.ebscohost.com.proxy.bib.uottawa.ca/ehost> (accessed 31 January 2011).

⁵¹ Jon Sobrino S.J., "Jesus of Galilee", 454. As Sobrino wrote, "When Jesus acts with mercy, persons in need not only receive help but also recover their dignity. He says to those who were healed: "Your faith has healed you" which is to say, "You have helped cure yourself"."

⁵² Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, 78.

21st centuries local Christian social activists: work on issues related to laws and institutions in order to improve working and living conditions; lead anti war demonstrations and civil rights movements; support and work in soup kitchens; lobby for poverty reduction and affordable housing. These engagements are consistent with Bevans' reference to praxis theology as a theology of "personal and communal experience"⁵³ that complements the teaching model of Paulo Freire. Freire began with the personal and then moved to collective transformation with exercises of reflection grounded in personal experience and observations on the sources of oppression in one's own every day life. In Latin America the context of Paulo Friere's model as described in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, was self liberation from mute suffering and poverty arising from social inequality, and political oppression.⁵⁴

The corollary of Freire's epistemology for self liberation according to Bevans would be "the unity of knowledge as activity and knowledge as content"⁵⁵ which is guided by right acting (orthopraxis) and not merely right thinking (orthodoxy).⁵⁶ According to Bevans "faith seeking intelligent action" replaces the more traditional understanding of theology as faith seeking understanding. He cites Sobrino⁵⁷ as the Latin liberation theological thinker who appropriated for theology the Marxist insight that

⁵³ Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, 78.

⁵⁴ Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. 30th Anniversary Edition (New York: Continuum International Publishing Group Inc., 2007) 54.

⁵⁵ Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, 72.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 79.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 77.

humankind should see itself as the maker and not the object of history.⁵⁸ Praxis theology according to Bevans citing Leonardo Boff, another liberation theologian, is a method of liberation theology that is about “seeing analytically, judging theologically, and acting pastorally or politically”⁵⁹ and is therefore transformative. This theology speaks to a belief in God’s presence in human history. God can be present in Marxist, Romanticist or existentialist world views if there is hope in God’s future in a world of possibilities “open for loving, ministering self-expenditure in the interests of a humanizing of conditions and in the interests of justice in the light of the coming justice of God”.⁶⁰

Jon Sobrino considers that in Latin America orthopraxis means that “The cross of Christ specifies the nature of his mercy”, that active engagement in the defence of victims is the right practice, the practical moral reasoning of Christian faith.⁶¹ As noted in an earlier paragraph, risk taking in the spirit of Christ, in living in solidarity with oppressors and the oppressed, is a dimension of compassion in liberation theology. In contemporary culture dimensions of compassion such as those expressed in liberation theology cannot be expressed without reference to the teleological hope of Christian tradition.

⁵⁸ Kasper, *The God of Jesus Christ*, 58. According to Walter Kasper contradictions in the incorporation of this insight attributed to Karl Marx into theology are expressed in the theology of both the early Karl Barth writing in 1918, and to some extent even Dietrich Bonhoeffer writing in the 1930’s. These two Protestant theologians like many other Christian thinkers across the centuries approach God as the wholly other as Rudolph Otto so explicitly described his vision of the human encounter with God.

⁵⁹ Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, 77.

⁶⁰ Moltman, *Theology of Hope*, 338.

⁶¹ Sobrino S.J., “Jesus of Galilee”, 455. In a footnote of this text Jon Sobrino critiqued the mercy of two compassionate Nobel Prize nominees, Archbishop Romero and Mother Theresa, saying that because Romero’s martyrdom occurred in circumstances of political conflict, his path to sainthood by the Vatican, unlike that of Mother Theresa, has been stalled.

3.2.3 Paradox as a Dimension of Compassion

The paradox of good and evil, the experience of compassion and suffering, in a world created by God is the subject of sacred scripture because earthly good does not exist without earthly evil. Does love need suffering to be love? Is compassion a reflection of God only because God has ordained human suffering? Dorothy Soelle, a post WW II German theologian and philosopher deeply concerned with fascism, refers to such questions as speculative rather than existential. She looks upon the cross as a concrete historical symbol of the world's response to attempts at liberation, and thus links the human fate of Christ in liberating humankind from the oppression of human life.⁶² In her best known work, *Suffering*, Soelle explores the relationships of compassion and suffering from a perspective which accepts that while love is not the cause or product of suffering, the concern of love is liberation from suffering. She speaks of compassion as love expressed as liberation flowing from confrontation. For Soelle confrontation is an act of compassion that makes suffering visible and thus the necessary political step needed to initiate liberation. This is the basis of her argument regarding the responsibility for suffering brought on by apathy and appeasement that occurs when the sources and causes of suffering are not named and confronted.⁶³

The God ordained freedom to choose good or evil is yet another biblical expression of the paradox of Judeo-Christian faith in the nature of God's compassion. The Old Testament is replete with stories of these choices and their consequences. The

⁶² Dorothee Soelle, *Suffering* (trans. Everett R. Kalin, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975) 164.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 73. Soelle lists three phases of moving from apathy to confrontation: for example moving from isolation, through expression and communication to solidarity; and moving from powerlessness through acceptance and conquest in existing structures to acceptance and conquest of powerlessness in changed structures.

early Church fathers offer their insights into the paradox of God's faithful relationship with humankind. For example, the biblical story of Job is a powerful reminder that humans cannot fathom the will of God. A paradox for believing Jews, Christians and Muslims is that while knowledge of divine wisdom is believed to be attainable in sacred writings, humankind has the freedom to choose good and evil.

If the radical, raw compassion of the divine and human Christ is the narrative of the New Testament, is not Brueggemann's theory that divine and human compassion in the narrative of hurt and hope in the Old Testament a misunderstanding? Alternatively, the paradox in Christ's words and actions to love the enemy could deepen human understanding of the freedom and mystery of God while at the same time affirming human freedom.

According to Kasper, the great paradox for Origen, a controversial third century theologian from Egypt, was that God's love for humanity accounted for God's acceptance of the human condition of suffering and ignoble death.⁶⁴ Specific paradoxical sayings of Christ as recorded in the gospels include the idea of losing one's life to save it (Luke 9:24), and, that the greatest among you are the least (Luke 9:48). The paradox of many of Christ's words and actions give insight into the continuing revelation of the mystery of God. While Christ knew he was the Son of God and a King not of this world, the New Testament records that he himself as a human being felt abandoned by God in his own human trial of great physical and emotional pain. Again we know that Christ's friendship with people regarded as sinners is fundamental to the narrative of paradoxical human-divine relationships in the gospels. These teachings were climaxed by Christ's

⁶⁴ Kasper, *The God of Jesus*, 191.

own words from the cross asking God's forgiveness for those who made him suffer, another expression of divine paradox.

3.2.4 Intra-Human Relationships

Love of Enemy

Love of enemy is a metaphor for the paradox located squarely in the metaphor of the cross. William Klassen in his review of recent research on biblical teachings regarding the love of enemies writes that this insight in Old and New Testament theology has only come to the fore as a result of the terrible suffering across all social classes of western Christian countries during and after WWI.⁶⁵ Exhortations in respect of love for the enemy appears in some texts in the Old Testament, other texts call for justice in terms of the visitation of God's holy wrath on the enemy. The New Testament speaks frequently of forgiveness for the trespasses of others.

In Saint Luke's gospel stories about Christ's miracles of healing are paradoxical admonitions of Jesus such as "Instead love your enemies and do good, and lend without hope of return" (Luke 6:35). The paradoxical metaphor of love of enemy is a fundamental element of the meaning of neighbour in Christ's parable of the Good Samaritan. Klassen writes that the counterintuitive nature of love in biblical stories indicates that love is an act of the will and not of the emotions.⁶⁶ Another dimension of the paradox of compassion explored by Dorothy Soelle and Cynthia Crysdale is self

⁶⁵ William Klassen, "'Love Your Enemies': Some Reflections on the Current Status of Research," in *The Love of Enemy and Nonretaliation in the New Testament*, (Louisville Ky.: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992), 1-4.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 5.

abandonment for love of enemy, a love calling for risk taking in solidarity with those in need of help.

Love of Neighbour

While love of enemy is a paradox highlighted in the New Testament, the command of love of neighbour is explicit in both Testaments. “You must love your neighbour as yourself. I am Yahweh.” (Leviticus 19:18) This phrase might also be interpreted as self love or self assertion.⁶⁷ The testimonies recorded in ancient Jewish sources combine love of God with love of neighbour without placing limits on who constitutes a neighbour.⁶⁸ The Deuteronomic Code spells out some practices of neighbourliness for every day agrarian people, for example, leaving fields fallow in the third year in order to provide food for the landless poor (Deuteronomy. 14: 28-29); provision of the third year tithes for the Levites; the remission of burdensome debt once in every seven years for those in debt (Deuteronomy. 15:1, 2). These practices spell out in precise details the overall early tradition and command in the Old Testament regarding compassionate behaviour, “Of course there will never cease to be poor in the land; I command you therefore: Always be open handed with your brother, and with anyone in your country who is in need and poor” (Deuteronomy. 15: 11). The Sermon on the Mount in the New Testament is consistent with such divine laws for human relationships. The Beatitudes are not laws over which to quibble and seek exceptions, they are God’s demands for the total heart and mind of the total person, as Hans Küng rephrases

⁶⁷ *Anchor Dictionary IV*, 389 citing Michel, 1947.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 386, 387, 389.

Matthew 7: 16-18 “(God) wants not only good fruits, but the good tree”.⁶⁹ The Beatitudes are part of Christ’s new covenant for the divine human relationship.

Saint Augustine’s treatise *On Christian Doctrine* focuses on the significance of one’s neighbour in achieving wisdom regarding the will of God.⁷⁰ Of seven sequential steps to achieving knowledge of this wisdom, it is only through the accomplishment of purity of heart and mind in the practical exercise of compassion in the sixth step that one can arrive at the wisdom of God’s will in the seventh step. The important understandings which emerge from the thinking of Augustine are that the material love of neighbour is commanded by Christ in order to understand the love of God, and secondly that such love is essential in arriving at wisdom regarding the will of God. Compassion for each other is the spirituality of a purifying practice of the love of God. This love can be viewed as proof of the realism of the spirituality of Augustine according to Pamela Bright. In the next chapter I correlate the teaching of the inherited religious tradition of love of neighbour with contemporary non religious language for actions of neighbourliness expressed as volunteerism, *noblesse oblige*, community building.

3.2.5 Displacement as a Dimension of Compassion

Consistent with Christian tradition, reflection on the meaning of compassion in the gospels in respect of contemporary society continues. Henri Nouwen and two friends set aside time in Washington D.C. to reflect on Christ’s compassion as the metaphor with

⁶⁹ Hans Küng, *On Being a Christian*, trans. John Bowden 1995, (New York: Doubleday Dell Publishing Ltd., 1984), 246.

⁷⁰ Pamela Bright, “Augustine and the Counsel of Compassion in the Spiritual Life” (Concordia University, Montreal, 1995,) <http://www.cecs.acu.edu.au/wprp/papers/Bright.pdf> (accessed March 24, 2011). (ed. This source is likely taken from *De Doctrina Christiana: A Classic of Western Culture*, eds. D. Arnold and P. Bright, Notre Dame Press, 1995).

which to comprehend the suffering caused by loneliness, alienation and separation in modern cities.⁷¹ Aging in the cities of contemporary western aging societies is regarded as a significant and growing health issue because loneliness is the cause of medical depression leading to increased reliance on public and private health insurers. Many Ottawa Boomers first encounter the societal ill of loneliness when caring for distant elderly parents and relatives.⁷² Nouwen finds in reflection on the compassion of God as Father (Luke 6:36), the basis for his belief that compassion is the radical challenge of the Christian faith. He concludes that the Christian act of breaking bread in community as a prayerful act expresses “in the most succinct way” the mystery of Christ’s life with humanity. Nouwen feels that the symbols evoked in this act recognise the life experience of being created, blessed, and broken.⁷³ To achieve this vision he put his focus on the discipline and compassionate decision of the will to remove oneself, to displace oneself, from the goals of individual success. Such personal displacement into a community grounded in faith in the promises of Christ, counters, if not triangulates, the cultural forces creating the isolation of the modern autonomous urban person.

Nouwen saw in God’s decision to live and die an ignoble death as a villager from Galilee in the far seat of priestly power in Jerusalem, the theocratic capital of Judaism. His signature act was to displace his divine power into everyday human life which was later described in the metaphor of a sacrificial lamb; that is, “Jesus Christ is the displaced

⁷¹ Henri J M Nouwen, *Compassion: A Reflection on the Christian Life* (USA: Doubleday, 2005).

⁷² I know this from personal experience having engaged from Ottawa in the last years of my parent’s lives moving them from their retirement home on the coast of British Columbia into a seniors’ residence near their old home in Vancouver. My mother at the age of 94, having broken her hip, could no longer put up with the daily loneliness of looking after my father who was suffering from a form of dementia.

⁷³ Nouwen, *Compassion*, 111.

Lord in whom God's compassion becomes flesh."⁷⁴ The Christian community of those who follow the displaced Lord is not what Nouwen refers to as "the soft part of an essentially competitive life" in forms such as donations or occasional volunteering, but rather a call to "solidarity with the millions who live disrupted lives".⁷⁵ In this context Nouwen and two co-authors understood better the contemporary meaning of Christian compassion in the courageous decisions of Dietrich Bonhoeffer to return home to Germany from the United States of America in order to fight the materialist power of Nazism; that of Simone Weil to leave middle class comfort to share her life with factory workers; and also that of Martin Luther King to leave the ranks of oppressed working blacks to take up the role as their leader against racism. Displacement for Nouwen is also the decision to live and work as a simple humble neighbour within the community for the benefit of the community as he did at Jean Vanier's project L'Arche, in Toronto. For him this was a choice he likened to that of the simple hospitable lives of the early Franciscan communities.

While Nouwen in his time in Washington determined that displacement was a discipline at the micro personal level, Gregory Baum in Montreal began a public and political critique in the 1960's at the macro level around the failure of Canadian society and the Catholic Church to displace itself in championing the preferential option for the poor. This preferential option he believed was about taking action both in guiding a public socio-critical perspective and engaging personally in social transformation. "What the option for the poor asks of middle-class people is to abandon their own class perspective and read society from below, through the eyes of the people at the bottom and

⁷⁴ Nouwen, *Compassion*, 63.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 62.

in the margin”.⁷⁶ This dimension of social displacement is a challenge for middle class Boomers who have the financial freedom and physical strength to engage freely in transforming society. Recent studies such as those cited by Robert Putnam in *Bowling Alone* and anecdotal evidence from my own observations in respect of volunteerism reveal that while some limited volunteer engagement is usually the norm for retirees, the heavy lifting of long term commitment is rare.

3.2.6 Hope as a Dimension of Compassion

The sustaining constancy of hope in the writings of the Old Testament according to Walter Brueggemann, takes the rhetorical form of dialogue around the hurts and hopes of the Israelites.⁷⁷ This dialogue can be in the form of the Law understood as an ongoing commitment to, and enactment of, a guiding reason for faith and hope located in the vision of the Exodus.⁷⁸ In the New Testament the mystery of hope as hope in God’s compassion and faithfulness is confirmed by the recording of the teachings and acts of Christ. The religious hope expressed in sacred scripture is the fruit of faith in God’s faithfulness and promises that have been disclosed in history.

For Moltmann history is meaningful time rather than time as an ever circular present going nowhere. He refers to God’s embedded presence in human history as his “epiphany in an eternal present”.⁷⁹ The testament of the Bible is that time is meaningful history, and that the interpretation of that history is prophecy. Jürgen Moltmann writes in

⁷⁶ Gregory Baum, *Compassion and Solidarity: The Church for Others*, (Toronto: Anansi Press Ltd., 2006), 29.

⁷⁷ Brueggemann, *Old Testament Theology*, 78.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 78.

⁷⁹ Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, 109.

Theology of Hope that the religion of Israel is a religion of “of expectation of the manifestation and fulfilment of a promised future.”⁸⁰ The hope in Christ’s promises for Moltmann is hope in a future and not the realization of Christ’s presence in time as in the sacramental life of the Church.⁸¹ Edward Farley refers to what he calls the god-term hope as the core of Christian faith, and the reason for action.⁸² He writes that when this god term hope declines in a community it is replaced by anxious beliefs. For Farley the deep symbols of the god-term hope must be kept alive from the past in the community in order to support a sense of communal courage and active waiting.⁸³

Christian hope in God’s promises is sustained by sacred scripture and Christian tradition because without language there is no act of faith with which to sustain hope in God’s promises.⁸⁴ If compassion is an enduring disposition and way of organizing the world then compassion must have a sustaining hope arising from the past and moving to a certain future.⁸⁵ *Carpe diem*, capture the day as in today is all that is, is an ancient response to the failure to find meaning and purpose in life and in history. The fate of eschatological hope in post modern culture is irrational for the rationalist and a paradox, for most non-religious people who hope without reason to overcome the suffering of

⁸⁰ Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, 109.

⁸¹ Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, claims on p 159 that the “not yet” has become the Hellenistic “now only” which to him means that “The old apocalyptic dualism which distinguished the passing aeon from the coming aeon is transformed into a metaphysical dualism which understands the coming as the eternal and the passing as transience. Instead of citizens of the coming kingdom we have a people redeemed from heaven.”

⁸² Edward Farley, *Deep Symbols: Their Postmodern Effacement and Redemption*, (Harrisburg: Trinity Press, 1996), 95.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 107-108.

⁸⁴ Paul Tillich, *Dynamics of Faith*, (New York: Harper & Row, 1957), 24.

⁸⁵ Wendy Farley, *Tragic Vision*, 73.

humanity.⁸⁶ The paradox of hope in the paradox of compassion enlightens our acceptance of God's relationship with humankind. Pope Benedict XVI in his second encyclical *Spe Salvi* suggests that those who have always lived with the concept of God have almost ceased to notice this dimension of hope in their spiritual lives.⁸⁷

Unexpected manifestations of altruism and selfless behaviour in contemporary culture may exhibit a contemporary hope in the future. A spiritual experience of hope and compassion for the future of creation could be alive today in a wide spread preoccupation to protect the natural world from the ravages of industrialisation, urbanisation, and unbounded faith in human progress. Thousands of ordinary people have dedicated themselves to an immanent vision of what could be referred to as humankind's sacred trust for the sustainability of the natural world. This vision can be demonstrated as a moral commitment to stewardship of the environment, with obligations of self sacrifice and evangelisation. The priorities of a spirituality arising from this new ecological vision of humankind's place in the natural world may have the power to transform the needs, behaviours, rules and roles of communities in response to fear for the future of a natural world on the brink of implosion unable to sustain itself without self sacrifice and long term commitment. Those who consider themselves with a moral responsibility for good stewardship of the natural world hold in this vision the obligation to be partners of creation, and thus view their responsibilities and role in society as prophetic in response to an intuitive call to the wholeness of the human and natural world.⁸⁸

⁸⁶ Farley, *Deep Symbols*, 108.

⁸⁷ Pope Benedict XVI, *Spe Salvi*, para. 3.

⁸⁸ Pope John Paul II and the Ecumenical Patriarch His Holiness Bartholomew I, "Common Declaration on Environmental Ethics" The Vatican Website, Monday, 10 June 2002. (accessed 18.December,13).

Emotion in Hope

Hope experienced and expressed as an emotion embedded in a mystical experience of God is a dimension of compassion. This deep experience of a personal relationship with God is recorded by holy people such as St. John of the Cross in phenomena of ecstasies, visions, and stigmata. Can we say that this experience of God is willed by God? The language used in three scriptural texts from the epistles of Saint Paul appear to have been the focus of this dimension of compassion for western medieval writers who were seeking to explore the affective and psychological make up of the human Jesus.⁸⁹ These three texts are: Philippians 1:8: "You have a permanent place in my heart, and God knows how much I miss you all, loving you as Christ Jesus loves you"; (Hebrews 4:15): "For it is not as if we had a high priest who was incapable of feeling our weaknesses with us; but we have one who has been tempted in every way the way we are, though he is without sin." and Hebrews 5:2: " and so he can sympathise with those who are ignorant or uncertain because he too lives in the limitations of weakness."

According to Boyd Taylor Coolman, Hugh St Victor explored the insight into affectivity in the mid 12th century in *On the Four Wills in Christ* in which he studied the nature of Christ's human compassion. The first will about which he wrote in relation to Christ's death was the divine will that this historic event of Christ's Crucifixion would take place. The other three wills of Christ identified by Hugo are human: the rational will of Christ to be obedient to the Divine will; the pious will (Hugo described as a will of tender pity) of Christ to suffer with humanity; the fleshly will of Christ which feared his own physical suffering. The argument for Christ's divine-human compassion for human

⁸⁹ Boyd Taylor Coolman, "Hugh of St. Victor on 'Jesus Wept': Compassion as Ideal Humanitas," *Theological Studies* 69 (2008) 531, <http://web.ebscohost.com.proxy.bib.uottawa.ca/ehost> (accessed 21 March 2011).

suffering focuses on the will of Christ addressed in a description of the suffering which he prophesies will befall Jerusalem when “those in Judea must escape to the mountains, those inside the city must leave it, and those in the country districts must not take refuge in it” “For this is the time of vengeance when all that scripture says must be fulfilled [...] For great misery will descend on the land and wrath on this people”. (Luke 21: 21-24) With these words Hugh St. Victor makes the case for Christ’s human compassion on the basis of Christ’s co-suffering with humankind in the fall of Jerusalem. In what was a more innovative argument by Hugh at its time is the example of Jesus’ co-suffering in expressing his own human fear for his personal physical suffering.⁹⁰ Until the Counter Reformation, the humanity of Christ, his suffering and exaltation fed the medieval religious imagination of Europe with a high emotional content. Illiteracy of most of the population meant that metaphors using dramatic and sometimes gruesome symbols and practices related to faith in Christ were the means of communicating religious expression and faith formation.⁹¹

An interesting contrast to compassion as Christian discipleship is found in a popular medieval guide to the spiritual life, *The Imitation of Christ* written by Thomas à

⁹⁰ Boyd Taylor Coolman, “Hugh of St. Victor”, 537.

⁹¹ John Huizinga, *The Waning of the Middle Ages*, (London: St Martin’s Press, 1954), 138-176. This relatively light consideration of practical compassion as forbearance might be explained by the fact that the average life span at this time was short, illness was rampant, and early childhood death the norm. The proximity of death was a regular event of everyday life and fear of decay gave spice and meaning to the pleasures of everyday life. Unlike contemporary times, this search for the spice of life also entailed both a heightened fear of damnation upon death and a predilection for a variety of strange religious practices at the popular level.⁹¹ These medieval expressions of fear about, and courage in the face of decay, death and divine judgment are replaced in our contemporary rationalist age with fears of meaninglessness, loneliness, and physical suffering giving way to growing support for physician assisted suicide as the means to escape the challenges of late aging.

Kempis in the fifteenth century.⁹² The focus of the guide is the development of the ascetic self as the form of imitation of Christ. In chapter XXV Thomas à Kempis approached the subject of preparing for a meaningful death in terms of one's interior life with some reference to good works; however, the lesson of love of enemy exemplified in the gospels is presented in this guide as forbearance of others. Chapter XVI states "Nevertheless thou oughtest, when thou findeth such impediments, to beseech God that He would vouchsafe to sustain thee, that thou be able to bear them with a good will."

Hope of Intentional Infinity

Intentional infinity is the experience and expression of living God's way of love in God's time. Walter Kasper's theology favours an understanding and experience of a personal relationship of love rather than a relationship as a metaphysical idea. Such a relationship entails the experience of fulfilment as self emptying in love "so as to realise our own intentional infinity."⁹³ A good example of such a relationship is Madonna House which was founded in 1947 in Combermere, Ontario, by a Russian immigrant, Catherine Doherty, and her husband, Eddie. When asked to describe Madonna House Catherine Doherty replied that this was a very simple thing – a cup of tea or coffee, good and hot; an invitation to work for the common good.⁹⁴ The "Little Mandate" describes the work of those who live in community in Madonna field houses around the world taking up tasks for the poor in health, good food and material goods as well as the poor of spirit who seek encouragement about life. This little mandate states that the Golden Rule to love God,

⁹² Thomas à Kempis, *The Imitation of Christ* <http://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/1653/pg1653.html> (accessed 17 December 2013).

⁹³ Kasper, *God of Jesus*, 155.

⁹⁴ The website: <http://www.madonnahouse.org/about/index.html> accessed 26 October 2013.

each other and neighbour is the rule of Christ whose life was as simple as this. The rule is to preach the gospel “with your life, without compromise. Listen to the Spirit. He will lead the way.” While the motherhouse is in Combermere, the movement has grown to a membership of 200 lay people and 125 priests associated with the way of life of Combermere, living promises of poverty, chastity and obedience while engaging in the needs in the immediate neighbourhoods of nine field houses in Canada and eight elsewhere around the world. Although the field houses run soup kitchens and related services for the materially poor, Catherine Doherty identified loneliness as one of the key needs in urban neighbourhoods because as she observed about modern urban life, many people do not have anyone to listen to them. This task is a priority for some houses where it is referred to as prayer listening in sympathetic company over a cup of tea or coffee.⁹⁵

In Ottawa the Shepherds of Good Hope bring together volunteers from all faiths and no faiths to run a soup kitchen serving three meals a day to hundreds of needy people, to grow vegetables for the soup kitchen in a local community garden, to provide shelter for the homeless, to give food, toiletries and clothing from their generously stocked cupboards, and to bring in interim medical support for those who are alcoholics and drug addicts. The mission statement of the Shepherds of Good Hope includes the following: “Our belief in the power of love and prayer guides all our actions. In providing support our intent is to ease suffering with gentleness and compassion, to restore dignity and to connect individuals with a feeling of home, inside themselves where they can experience safety, inner peace and self love.”⁹⁶

⁹⁵ Madonna House website: <http://www.madonnahouse.org/about/index.html> (accessed 26 October 2013).

⁹⁶ The website of the Shepherds of Good Hope http://www.shepherdsogoodhope.com/SOGH_Prospectus_En.pdf. accessed 26 October 2013.

Groups of volunteers from many faith communities as well as individuals on their own volunteer (such as do two of my interviewees) on a regular basis to cut up vegetables, make sandwiches and do the housekeeping in the kitchen and dormitories of the shelter. Everyone in the city is welcome as clients and volunteers with support coming in from across the community as well as from the city coffers. The spirit of simple living and simple generosity offered directly to those who need companionship, dignified reassurance and often the basics of life inspire the volunteers to experience life at a higher level outside of their daily concerns. This is an entry point or affirmation of what Charles Taylor would refer to as the open framework of contemporary life, even if for many the generosity of time is as much or as little as two or three hours once a week.

3.3 Summary and Conclusion

In this chapter I have explored dimensions of compassion in the Bible and Christian tradition that indicate that *hesed* is the appropriate metaphor for a dialogue engaging dimensions of compassion in the Boomer culture. Sustained metaphors can bring together two fields in which to locate what Richard Osmer refers to as “similarity-in-difference”.⁹⁷ The dimensions of compassion in Christian theology and tradition identified in this chapter provide a conceptual framework for dialogue and correlation with some of the dimensions of compassion located in my empirical research on the aging Boomer culture of Ottawa.

Some of the dimensions of compassion selected in this chapter, particularly those from the Old Testament, affirm a two way relationship between God and humankind. Building on Brueggemann’s selection of words defining the God human relationship

⁹⁷ Osmer, *Practical Theology*, 114-116.

evoking the power and faithfulness of God and the human cries for help after turning against God's love,⁹⁸ I have conceptualized elements in the dimensions of compassion in which God appears to be reaching down to humankind and humankind reaching up to God. These two movements are triangulated by the expectation in the biblical stories that humankind will reach out to one another in compassion such as the expectations for sharing in the jubilee year, and God's demand that humankind love his/her neighbour as he/she loves God. In this regard humankind intentionally can choose to seek a personal infinite relationship with God and his incarnation in the human Christ; to resist evil; and to choose voluntarily personal displacement in order to live in the presence of God.

I have looked for dimensions of compassion around three consistent themes in the Bible: namely, humankind's helplessness before nature; the potential for evil in the free will of humankind; and faith in the power of God's love. These are themes I have pulled from the prophets, the psalms, the gospels, and the stories of holy people through the ages. Because authentic relationships are all important in the flourishing of daily life, relationship with God in the Bible is expressed by humanity in both the voice of individuals and that of a multitude calling upon a monolithic God. The subjects of communication between God and humanity are either about human needs and tendencies or in recognition and praise of a vision of the God of promise. A rhetorical device of paradox is used in both the Old and New Testaments as an expression of humankind's experience of the mystery of a God thought of as rich in kindness and faithfulness.

Rather than philosophical or intellectual, biblical language is emotional if not hyperbolic on occasion given that the text is humankind's testimony across time and in a

⁹⁸ Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, Chapter Five "Adjectives: Yahweh with Characteristic Markings", 213-228.

place regarding the all powerful one the Abrahamic faiths call God⁹⁹. The Bible is not to be read as a hegemonic philosophical thesis, text or law book, but rather a book from a variety of voices and styles relating the Israelite experience of God.¹⁰⁰ Each writer has a clear vision of his/her relationship with God and the obligations which come with that relationship. Emotive logic of testimony appears for example, in the case of Saint Paul in his account of a personal encounter with the power of God's love which he first experienced in a moment of dramatic insight into the meaning of the self sacrifice of Christ.

In the following chapter the findings of dimensions and themes of compassion in our contemporary culture and in the Christian tradition come together in the third movement of the hermeneutical cycle of Don Browning. This is the movement that fuses the horizons of compassion in our culture and our Christian traditions for a new theory laden critical praxis of Christian witness in the context of aging in the aging society of Ottawa. What will emerge from this fused horizon is a praxis of Christian witness guiding reasons for acting in a certain way in an aging society. This praxis must be validated for the ethical claims of the vision and the obligations it raises. These claims must be supported by underlying claims about human nature and environmental claims that constrain human tendencies and needs and therefore define the rules and roles in our local context.

Don Browning has created five tests for the validity of truth. Four of these are included in linkages between sources of inspiration for intra-human and divine human

⁹⁹ Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 119 with footnote 6, "Appeal to testimony as a mode of knowledge, and inevitably as a mode of certainty that is accepted as revelatory, requires a wholesale break with all positivistic epistemology in the ancient world or in the contemporary world."

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 64.

relationships. What is missing is the difference in vision which inspires the two sources of inspiration. God's love for his creation inspires intra human relationships but without a relationship with God a transcendent vision arising in the sources of inspiration for relationships in Christian tradition is not present. This is the difference between the open (transcendent) and closed (immanent) frameworks¹⁰¹ for practical moral reasoning, the subject of the following chapter. The final movement in the cycle of transformation, Strategic Practical Theology, will look at a way to approach this missing link in human relationships.

¹⁰¹ Taylor, *Secular Age*, 16.

Chapter 4: Systematic Theology

4.1 Introduction

The subject of transformation in this thesis is the examination of the spiritual resources of dimensions of compassion in the Boomer culture in respect of the challenges of aging in an aging secular culture, a culture that in Canada is rooted in a Christian tradition. Richard Osmer's question "What ought we to do?" captures the aim of this third movement that is to correlate the vision "implicit in contemporary practices and the vision implied in the practices of the normative Christian texts".¹ Chapters One and Two sought to articulate a comprehensive view of contemporary culture by looking first at its philosophical and historical antecedents and then in the empirical research finding the importance of human relationships as a key dimension of compassion in the Boomer Culture. Chapter Three covered some dimensions of compassion in sacred scripture and Christian tradition through time. The purpose of this third movement in bringing two visions into conversation is to adhere to Don Browning's definition of systematic theology in practical theology "The systematic character of the movement comes from its effort to investigate general themes of the gospel that respond to the general questions that characterize the situations of the present."²

Relationships are significant sources of meaning making in life in contemporary culture and in Christian tradition. This dimension of compassion was the basis of the grounded theory in my empirical research based on the responses to a survey sample of

¹ Browning, *A Fundamental Practical Theology: Descriptive and Strategic Proposals* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996) 51.

² Ibid., 51.

well educated, financially secure young seniors in Ottawa. The grounded theory becomes the interpretive key to revise a traditional Christian understanding of compassion. Don Browning refers to this search for congruencies as the fusing of horizons of two otherwise separate realities, in this case the reality of relationship in contemporary culture and that of relationship in Christian tradition. This fusion brings into a critical dialogue the outcomes of my empirical and literature research that using the methodologies of practical theology should lead the way to a transformed praxis for young seniors. Working with authentic narratives to inspire compassion as faith based action will be explored in the following chapter, the fourth movement of the cycle, as a strategic practical theology for aging in the aging society of contemporary culture.

The fundamental method of practical theology assumes that truth is grounded in God's self revelation in his creation, whereas truth in the social sciences is constructed by human beings and their communities.³ Correlation is achieved by attempting to bring into a mutually critical conversation the interpreted theory of scripture and tradition with the interpreted theory of experience and reason. This is essentially a conversation between Christian tradition, the social sciences and a particular incident or situation.⁴ This method assumes that theological truth is an emergent dialectic truth.⁵ The grounded theory in this dissertation is a product of this assumption, but one whose validity must be tested according to the coherence of a transformed vision of aging and the obligations which

³ John Swinton and Harriet Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research*. (London: SCM Press, 2006) 34, 76.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 79-80.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 82.

flow from that vision. The vision must be one consistent with the pre-moral needs, socio-economic and cultural environment, and the rules and roles of those whose lives may be touched by a transformed vision of their own aging. Browning refers to outer and inner envelopes of vision as a means of understanding the complexity of an individual's vision of life. The outer envelope is composed of the "tradition saturated" narratives and practices of our daily practical reasoning of which there is an inner core that informs the outer envelope. This inner core is grounded in either an explicit form of practical reason that for Christians is the life of Christ or one that is implicit, that is, grounded in a faith narrative embedded in the culture.⁶ The outer envelope concerns the tradition saturated world view embedded in inherited narratives and practices that surround our practical thinking of everyday life. There is an inner envelope or inner core of practical reasoning that reflects the other culturally embedded moral command which for Christians is the narrative of love of neighbour. The difference between the outer envelope and the inner core is the difference between implicit and explicit narratives of faith. For Christians and other people who follow a faith narrative, that narrative is an explicit narrative that informs practical reasoning.

The social nature of humankind determines the overriding significance of human relationships in Christian tradition and in contemporary life. As noted in the previous chapter, Judeo-Christian tradition in sacred scripture describes the human experience of the relationship between humankind and God, the Creator. *Hesed* is the Hebrew word for a relationship between the One who is all powerful and free to choose or not to help the one beseeching help. The mutual relationship of need and compassion establish a two

⁶ Browning, *Fundamental Practical Theology*, 11-12.

way dialogue in which the beseecher confirms the relationship by following God's law for his creation. The beseecher accepts that God, the all powerful one, is completely free to respond or not to the many pleas of humankind even when humankind follows the laws of God.

In the description of our contemporary culture three key values inform the vision that determines the personal and societal obligations of the Boomers; namely, individualism, authenticity and autonomy. These three values are grounded in a post WWII youthful demographic in an economic context of plenty in a world largely at peace which provided financial independence for most and public social security for those who needed a helping hand. Advances in science and technology were sufficient for most people to expect that human reason was sufficient to control the environment in which most basic human needs could be met. This vision or world view of human self sufficiency could be considered in this time and place the outer envelope of intra-human relationships because the pre-moral goods of human existence appeared to be met by the human institutions of society.

Historically structured dimensions of the Christian tradition of compassion relevant to this dissertation were identified in the preceding chapter. These begin with recognition that God is a God of a divine relationship; namely, one of tenderness and compassion, rich in kindness and the keeper of promises. From this dimension of a divine relationship are other dimensions of compassion in relationships: suffering; paradox; intra-human relationships, displacement and hope.

The horizons of compassion in contemporary culture and in Christian tradition are fused around the social challenge of elder care by Boomers for Boomers. Understanding

the challenge has meant gathering the basic facts regarding answers to the question “what’s going on here?” before asking the theological questions of practical theology “what is our practice in this regard?” and “how do we defend what should be done?”. The critical social change in the Boomer generation will be meeting the increased care needed for growing numbers of dependent frail elders. Boomer Canadians have come to expect on the cusp of an aging society that “government” will provide the facilities and services required. Public and private sector economists and government policy analysts are now projecting that government does not have the resources needed for that task, and so the question – who will take up this burden of care and compassion? Does the Boomer culture have the relationships and spiritual resources to meet the challenge of compassion for fellow Boomers?

The grounded theory emerging from my research as presented in the diagram of compassion in the immanent frame of meaning making in life at the end of the second chapter situates compassion in relationships and their sources of inspiration. Charles Taylor uses the terms immanent and transcendent frames of meaning to differentiate between a vision that is focussed on everyday realities (a closed frame) and the transcendent that is open to Mystery and the wholeness of life. The horizons of compassion in the Boomer culture and in Christian tradition come together in a critical dialogue between the dimensions of compassion in the immanent and transcendent frames of meaning in respect of relationships, some of which link the transcendent to the immanent frame of meaning in life.

Table 4.1 below indicates two horizons or visions of dimensions of compassion; the immanent, that is in the Boomer culture, and the transcendent as in Christian

tradition. The first column reflects the grounded theory of dimensions of compassion in the immanent frame: duty, honour, altruism and the tendencies and needs of daily life. The third column reflects dimensions of compassion in a transcendent frame of meaning: God (rich in kindness, faithful, promise keeper), neighbour and enemy, hope, suffering, paradox, and displacement. In the central column are a variety of relationships in every human life that inspire a variety of dimensions of compassion within both visions of life. The middle column identifies various relationships in everyday life some of which are closed to mystery and some of which are open to both everyday life and self transcendence in expectation of the meaning of life. This chapter brings into conversation the connection of relationships to dimensions of compassion in both frames of meaning making. This exercise indicates that various aspects of relationships can be the point of fusion in the two horizons of meaning making in life – the immanent and the transcendent.

A Fusion of Dimensions of Compassion

Table 4.1 A Fusion of dimensions of compassion

Dimensions of Compassion in an Immanent Vision of Life	Relationships in Life	Dimensions of Compassion in a Transcendent Vision of Life
Duty	Self	God (rich in kindness, faithful, promise keeper)
	Spouse/Partner	
Honour	Children	Neighbour and Enemy
	Wider family	Hope
Altruism	Friends	Suffering
	Community - local	
Tendencies and Needs of Self Sufficing Humanism	Community - global	Paradox
	Community - faith	
	Creation/Natural World	Displacement

4.1.1 Ethics of Compassion and Care

Compassion understood as “suffering together” with another⁷ is the exercise of selfless caring for another in all human relationships. We know of this care and concern through the articulation and memory of acts of compassion extended and received. Critical reflection on our praxis and experiences of compassion render them purposeful and open us to a renewed transformative vision and action. This idea of compassion as caring for others is ethical and draws on theology for insight and guidance in working theologically with the social sciences that concern caring for others.⁸ Ethical approaches can be based on a philosophical principle of care that promotes for example, an ethic of the idea of the greatest good for the greatest number, or a narrativist ethic embedded in narratives and stories carrying “the moral sensibilities of the tradition” rather than non contextual principles.⁹ Don Browning contends that a critical correlational approach allows for sufficient distancing from the narratives or stories that elucidate key values and rational principles in a narrativist tradition that assists dialogue in a pluralist society.¹⁰ According to Graham it was Browning’s intent in his work to ensure that ethics of care remain based on religious faith expressed in narratives.¹¹

Graham is critical of Browning in some respects. She makes the case for a broader concept of the ethics of care that includes all of the ethical functions of a faith

⁷ *The Oxford Dictionary*, 1933.

⁸ Browning, *Fundamental Practical Theology*, 98-99.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 101.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 102.

¹¹ Elaine Graham, *Transforming Practice: Pastoral Theology in an Age of Uncertainty*, (Eugene Oregon: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2002), 85.

community under the single heading of the ethics of Christian practice. This approach she claims is grounded in her reference point “the priesthood of all believers”.¹² Browning’s intent according to Elaine Graham was to ensure a critical role and framework for the religio-ethical content of the principles of care in the modern welfare state. According to Graham, Browning believed that secularisation and industrialisation of the caring professions including pastoral workers, had privatised faith based normative values and thus rendered the pastoral care givers non-directive in their work of caring in the public space.¹³ With a pastoral orientation pastoral care in public spaces should be part of the “purposive, communal and theological identity of the Church, which is what generates the ethical norms by which pastoral ministry is guided and directed.”¹⁴ This is achieved by what Browning refers to as practical moral reasoning located in a correlation between five levels of moral principles in the gospels, Christian tradition and personal experience. These five levels of practical moral reasoning are the five validity claims to truth which Browning uses to test the truth of practical theological work. However, Graham indicates that these five validity claims reflect Browning’s technical rational reasoning grounded in developmental psychology rather than a system of norms grounded in fundamental truth claims; that is, the practical wisdom of the community of believers.¹⁵ For Graham, an emphasis on rational moral discourse on the ethics and practice of care based on individual reading of the gospels rather than theological discourse in the context of a

¹² Graham, *Transforming Practice*, 96.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 84.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 86.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 88.

congregation of men and women deprives Christian ethics of the hermeneutical validity of diverse voices of a church community guided by gospel values.¹⁶ In reading the gospels from the perspective of the context of those who were healed by Christ, I see that Christ's ethic of caring was contextual and personal. This is an ethic that does not discriminate between faith narratives or socio-economic classes but does discriminate on the basis of honest need and honest love for others. These are reasons to be expected in the implicit faith at the inner core of the outer envelope of every day life for people who grew up in what had once been explicit Christian cultures.

Osmer elaborates on the importance Browning assigns to working within the values and norms that fill the decisions of everyday life. He argues in favour of universal ethical principles and commitments that are equally applicable in any given circumstance, as for example the principle of equal regard for, and fair treatment in respect of, the rights of family and non family members, as also the rights of one's own community equally with the rights of other communities. Both Browning and Osmer argue that a universal principle such as equal regard is necessary in order to interpret the norms and values that are part of all human activity.¹⁷ Ethics cannot be imposed on a situation according to Osmer but rather, in using practical moral reasoning one must call upon universal principles in order to interpret and then transform the existing norms and values embedded in a specific situation.¹⁸

¹⁶ Graham, *Transforming Practice*, 89-92.

¹⁷ Osmer, *Practical Theology; An Introduction* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2008)149.

¹⁸ Graham, *Transforming Practice*, 150-152.

The question of ethics arising for Graham is the direction of this approach that she claims overestimates the significance of what she refers to as technical-rational action over norms and practical reasoning embedded in theological discourse within a congregation. According to Graham, Browning's concept of theological ethics is rooted in a technical rational discourse that considers theological ethics as a system of human rationality.¹⁹ She goes on to claim that this concept downplays the tradition of "a transcendent dimension to human affairs and Christian practice"²⁰, thus neglecting "the social and material dimension of praxis, of faith as doing or living the truth, rather than apprehending it intellectually"²¹ Graham's difference with Browning in respect of practical moral reasoning appears to be the lack of practical wisdom that she claims is both a constructed and a lived faith in the community of believers.²²

Osmer follows Browning in saying that self sacrifice and self denial for their own sake are wrong interpretations of what they refer to as the principle of agapic love.²³ As self denial is frequently a moral necessity in hands-on-care for frail elders, there is no question of rebalancing the relationship between care giver and the one in need of care. While such an interpretation of a moral principle of equal regard in this circumstance is not practical, self sacrifice as the primary form of love for the purpose of rebalancing a damaged relationship would be the case in ensuring that institutions that care for frail

¹⁹ Graham, *Transforming Practice*, 87-88.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 88.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 88.

²² *Ibid.*, 95.

²³ Osmer, *Practical Theology*, 151 with reference to Browning, *A Fundamental Practical Theology*, 100.

elders be judged and transformed according to the principle of equal regard and agapic love. Osmer thus highlights an important theological theme for Christian practice brought forward by Elaine Graham; namely, that transforming Christian practices disclose God and his presence in the community.²⁴

Graham also critiques Browning's reliance on principles emerging in the framework of traditional rational discourse for an omission of the feminist perspective in the many dimensions of moral decision making within all of the functions of a church community. This observation complements a practical observation emerging in my field notes showing that the women who run the pastoral care works of various church communities find it very difficult to be heard or consulted in respect of the moral dimensions of practical moral decision making in their faith communities. One of these moral dimensions is the Christian commitment to bring hope into people's lives through helping Boomers find a source of faith in the meaning and purpose of their lives with which to take them through their losses in aging.

The priesthood of all believers according to Graham refers to a broader understanding of Christian practice than was conceived of within the earlier work of practical theology which focussed on the practical actions within a church community such as liturgy, faith formation, and church administration.²⁵ This broader understanding of agape within Christian practice, can be conceived of as something larger than

²⁴ Osmer, *Practical Theology*, 160. Osmer connects the immanent act of transformation to transcendence when he writes that "Second, when the transforming practice of a congregation embodies alterity, it serves as a model of transcendence in our postmodern world."

²⁵ Graham, *Transforming Practice*, 96.

“reflecting and reinforcing social relations and ideologies”²⁶ Working with Graham’s concept of practice the transformation called for in respect of aging in an aging society similar to that of gender, challenges the institutionalised inculturated structures of Christian practice. The cultural challenge of ageism informs institutional Christian practice just as it does the broader society. The need for faith based ministries of elder care has been highlighted recently by Michael Parker, a Canadian emeritus theologian at Regent College, UBC, and his American collaborator, physician James Houston, in respect of perspectives on the need for faith communities to focus on the implications for churches of an aging society in the USA. They estimate that “care-giving will be the great test of character this century, and yet the modern church is virtually mute on the topic”.²⁷ This is one of the challenges to creating a seniors’ ministry within faith communities as a practical and moral obligation of the Christian vision. A general experience of these workers is that pastors (largely male clergy) appear more concerned with the primacy of traditional principles and practices guiding liturgy, church administration, and faith formation than the physical and spiritual welfare of those on the margins in their communities such as frail seniors (largely female) in an aging society. Graham’s focus on the omission of the feminist perspective in the theology of Christian practice suggests that the engagement of pastoral workers in an ecumenical pastoral ministry must be articulated within a theological framework of transformed practice.

²⁶ Graham, *Transforming Practice*, 103.

²⁷ James M. Houston and Michael Parker, *A Vision for the Aging Church: Renewing Ministry for and by Seniors*, (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2011), 39.

4.1.2 Paradox of Compassion

Reflections on meaning and life in contemporary culture could be subsumed within the paradox of pseudo-autonomous belonging in a culture in which the cult of mass consumerism dictates mores and fashion as authentic expressions of individuality.²⁸ In the preceding chapter on dimensions of compassion in Christian tradition I noted that the paradox of hope (hope of the hopeless) in the paradox of compassion (love of enemy) enlightens our acceptance of God's relationship with humankind. Jean Vanier offers an interesting insight in the paradox of human nature that might explain the incongruence between self and collective well being emerging in the interview findings. He observes between the "competing drives between belonging, being part of something bigger than ourselves, and the desire to let our deepest selves rise up, to walk alone, to refuse the accepted and the comfortable".²⁹ While the presence of God can be experienced at the personal level, church can be understood as an expression of the collective presence of God. The refusal to belong in order to walk alone requires an acceptance of the anguish of loneliness that in the case of the great mystics is paradoxical according to Vanier because the loneliness of the mystic's partial experience of God is a loneliness that "opens up mystics to a desire to love each other and every human being as God loves them."³⁰

A paradox of aging is the movement away from a pseudo-autonomy (that was really one of conformity to the mores and behaviour of one's preferred relationships),

²⁸ Taylor, *A Secular Life*, (Cambridge Mass.: The Bellknapp Press of Harvard University Press, 2007) 483 for a discussion around consumerism, mutual display and the language of self definition.

²⁹ Vanier, *Becoming Human*, (Toronto: HarperCollins Canada Ltd, 1998), 18.

³⁰ Vanier, *Becoming Human*, 8.

towards an unwanted autonomy in the loneliness experienced with the loss of meaningful relationships. The period of the collective youth culture of the Boomers is now over as the youngest Boomers hit middle age (the youngest born in 1965 are now 47) and the oldest are now receiving their Old Age Security pensions. The retreat from pseudo-autonomy raises questions of meaning and for many the experience of life and the experience of the mystery of life is the source of knowledge and truth about the meaning of life. A paradox of aging in a society in which the methods of science and technology have defined truth is the sense of the mystery of life which comes in reflective moments. The substance of non-scientifically testable subjective truth might therefore limit but not exclude articulation of transcendental experiences such as graced insights and acceptance of mystery that inspire selflessness and generosity.³¹

The celebrated “long civic generation” is passing, and so far young seniors have not risen to the challenge of community building as evidenced in public surveys on the current culture of volunteerism. An explanation may lie in the impact of a public social security system that disassociates collective well being from personal well being. Is this because the rituals and symbols which confirm self identity within the “effervescence” of a given community such as the Boomers created for themselves, have lost their relevance?³² Or, is this because the vision of self sufficient exclusive humanism has satisfied a Boomer generation content to live within the flatness of daily life³³ with

³¹ Browning, *Fundamental Practical Theology*, 45.

³² Durkheim, Émile, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, (1912, English translation by Joseph Swain: 1915) The Free Press, 1965.

³³ Taylor, *Secular Life*, 309.

expectations of continuing technical and economic achievements and liberation from human suffering? Is this possible because underlying such a world view could be an aspect of a creation centred theological orientation which might in fact suggest that the expectations of paradise on earth have indeed been realized by those who feel financially secure?

4.2 Relationships as Dimensions of Compassion

Relationships are the essence of community and the context of the life and role of Jesus in history. The anthropology model of contextual theology outlined by Stephen Bevans in *Models of Contextual Theology* is premised on an understanding of God's presence in all cultures. The tools of anthropology and sociology are used to uncover the presence of God in a given context.³⁴ A creation-centred model³⁵ of theological reflection accepts that human experience is good and that nature can be perfected in a supernatural relationship with God.³⁶ An anthropological reading suggests that what might be instinctive acts of compassion may or may not be rooted in an awareness of God's presence in the human person of the divine Christ. Rather than assume that awareness of an encounter with the mystery of life has a name or specific reference to a time and place, one can then accept the premise that awareness of the divine presence in the person of the human Christ is buried in all cultures. This is a possible interpretation of the Vatican II *Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions* "Let Christians,

³⁴ Stephen B. Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology* (New York: Orbis Books, 2002) 57.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 21.

³⁶ Karl Rahner, "Anonymous Christians", *Theological Investigations*, vol.6, 393-394 cited in Stephen B. Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, (New York: Orbis Books, 2002) 21.

while witnessing to their own faith and way of life, acknowledge, preserve, and encourage the spiritual and moral truths found among non-Christians, together with their social life and culture.”³⁷

The anthropological model of theological reflection offers useful insights into concepts of faith and hope in life that lie dormant in the spirituality of those who either walked away from a faith narrative and tradition, or never had one. The term “word of God” reflects the idea that language is a symbolic structure that provides a basic insight into and understanding of a culture.³⁸ In this model the actual presence of God in everyday life is experienced in both ordinary and particular human relationships which Bevans states are “constitutive” of cultural existence.³⁹ The significance of every day life for the anthropological model of contextual theology argues that “it is within human culture that we find God’s revelation – not as a super cultural message, but in the complexity of culture itself, in the warp and woof of human relationships”. This model of contextual theology suggests the experience of transcendence within the immanent frame of Charles Taylor that he captures in his phrase “human flourishing”.⁴⁰ Every day flourishing with no expectation of more in life he refers to as “exclusive or self sufficing humanism”⁴¹, one that includes a place for a lofty humanism in philanthropy and with it,

³⁷ *Vatican Council II Constitutions Decrees Declarations: A Completely Revised Translation in Inclusive Language*. Ed. Austin Flannery, O.P. (Northport NY, Costello Publishing Company Inc. 1996) paragraph 2, p. 571.

³⁸ Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, 58.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 56.

⁴⁰ Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 597.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 19.

he says, the potential for despotism⁴² He uses the phrase “the sanctification of ordinary life” to express a human flourishing that is open to transcendence wherein God’s presence is integrated in the realities of every day life⁴³. Taylor makes the argument that what both Buddhism and many practices of Christianity espouse is the renunciation of a self sufficing human flourishing; a renunciation that has often been understood and practiced more as limitations on human flourishing in the present, in favour of delayed gratification, particularly for Christians, Jews and Muslims. He refers to the “restoration of a fuller flourishing by God” as a Christian hope according to the promise made by Christ regarding the path to union with God in the context of the affirmation of ordinary life.⁴⁴

4.2.1 Relationship as *Hesed*

The Hebrew term *hesed* in the Old Testament captures the presence of God in terms of action because it is where help from one unique capable source is essential in preventing something terrible happening to someone in need. The one in a position to help, whether God or a fellow human, is completely free to respond or not, but if help is given, that help signals commitment to a relationship. The loss of meaningful relationships, at any time in life such as the death of a childhood friend, the death of a pet, moving to a new place of work, is a form of suffering, perhaps the most important according to the theologian Soelle.⁴⁵ Isolation and loneliness occur very frequently late in

⁴² Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 697.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 179.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 17.

⁴⁵ Dorothy Soelle, *Suffering* Trans. Everett R. Kalin, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975), 14.

life with either the realization of one's increasing dependence on others for basic needs, and/or with the death of family, friends and spouses. One interviewee replied to the question of fulfilment in her post retirement life saying that without his commitments and relationships in two retiree organizations which brought her into a social circle among people who "appreciate who I was and what I could do", my life would be very empty and I would probably dwell in the past". "Dwelling in the past" can be interpreted as a form of suffering; that is, as a consequence of isolation and loneliness brought on by the loss of a meaningful responsible role in a productive network.

In the recent book of Karen Armstrong, *Twelve Steps to a Compassionate Life*, there is a contemporary emphasis on the linkage between compassion, suffering and relationship. For Armstrong the principle of compassion is to treat others as we would like to be treated ourselves, to honour the sanctity of every human being.⁴⁶ Armstrong's description of compassion seems close to the responses of those Boomer interviewees who provided examples of what they choose to do, such as being a kind and attentive neighbour, without any reference to a personal source of faith or other narrative supporting hope in life as a reason for such compassion.

4.2.2 Affectivity in Relationships

Clifford Williams, an American Christian philosopher and author of *Existential Reasons for Belief in God*, provides a reading of affectivity as a contemporary dimension of compassion. He studied the significance of various self directed and other directed human emotions in his defence of a relationship nurtured by desires and emotions

⁴⁶ Karen Armstrong, *Twelve Steps to a Compassionate Life*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2010), 6.

integral to believing in God.⁴⁷ He defined these emotions as needs – self directed and other directed – which complement some of what Don Browning calls for as needs and tendencies in a validity test for truth in theological reflection. Of thirteen existentialist needs for belief in God he has listed five that indicate sources of inspiration for relationships: a source of ultimate meaning and comfort as cosmic security; to be loved for our own sake now and forever; to be forgiven and not rejected for going astray; to give of one self to another in love; to be in the presence of the one we love; to see justice rendered to those who suffer.⁴⁸ His most significant criterion for the selection of these existential needs is that good and not evil justifies believing in God because a God who is evil would not be God.⁴⁹ His criteria for such needs are that they be felt individually and generally; that they be enduring, felt strongly, significant, and part of a constellation of connected needs.⁵⁰ He has linked meaning in life with human and divine relationships in terms of human emotions, and thus depends on human emotions to buttress a religious narrative.

Some of my interviewees referred to their generosity for others as “fun”, “enjoying making others feel good”, “socially satisfying”, “giving purpose to their lives”, without reference to a narrative of faith or hope beyond their own emotional satisfaction. The answers to questions regarding commitments and a sense of fulfilment in choices are self and other directed and thus indicate the priority given to relationships: “sharing my

⁴⁷ Clifford Williams, *Existential Reasons for Belief in God: A Defence of Desires & Emotions for Faith* (Madison: Inter-Varsity Press, 2011).

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 21.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 88.

⁵⁰ Williams, *Existential Reasons*, 89.

life with others”; “being appreciated for helping others”; “meaningful lasting relationships”. The importance of relationships is confirmed in terms of common fears of the aging person: “becoming a burden on my family”, and “the loss of my spouse” and “the loss of my friends”. These personal emotional needs and satisfactions expressed as both self and other directed, relate to the criteria Williams insists for a relationship of faith and trust in God; that is, to be loved, to be accepted by the one loved, to be forgiven, to witness justice. Williams cites William James in stating that human needs guide a practical rationality in determining which desires should be satisfied in a religious philosophy.⁵¹ The experience of helping others as evident in the interviews suggests in a limited degree an opportunity to articulate some elements of an experience in self transcendence. There exists in the telling of this experience the story of an affective relationship between humankind and God. An indication of this linkage is in the gospels, for Christ himself recognized his own emotional attachments to various people such as his mother, Lazarus, John the Baptist, the apostles Peter and John, the wealthy young man.

4.2.3 Self Transcendence in Relationships

Going beyond ourselves in relating with the Other is an experience of self transcendence into the realm of mystery available in everyday life⁵², and one which meets what Taylor refers to above as the affirmation of daily life. Intellectual and intuitive

⁵¹ Williams, *Existential Reasons*, 93-94. Williams citing William James, “The Sentiment of Rationality” in *The Writings of William James*, ed. John J. McDermott (New York, Modern Library, 1963) 325. Williams’ reference is to William James argument in respect of a rejection of materialism as unsatisfying because it does not offer the virtues of fortitude, hope, rapture, admiration and earnestness.

⁵² Graham, *Transforming Practice*, 206-207.

awareness of the limitations of human control over the material world beg the question: “so, what’s more?” Is there a single overriding purpose in life? a higher goal that makes sense of the lower goals?⁵³ Our Christian heritage is replete with examples of the earth bound experience of momentary self-transcendence into the beauty of the natural world or into the heroic achievements of fellow human beings. Contemporary culture recognises a momentary religious experience sought in the Romantic and Idealist elitist cultural movements in 19th century Europe.⁵⁴ Bede Griffiths (1906-1993), a Benedictine monk who founded the Christian Ashram movement in India, expressed his own awakening to beauty as a young boy in the spirit of the earlier Romantic poets. Bede wrote of “experiencing an overwhelming emotion in the presence of nature” which he described as being overtaken by “a sense of almost religious awe, and in the hush which comes before sunset, I felt again the presence of an unfathomable mystery.”⁵⁵

In twentieth century European history, fascism and Nazism inspired varying degrees of youthful awe and hope in a heroic future sufficient to warrant self sacrifice to gain redemption through nationalist inspired myths and visions. These visions and ideals were rooted in the counter modernist ideal that like minded visionary people acting in unison could construct a better world or a more just society, that something great could be achieved in their ordinary lives.⁵⁶ Such visions and their achievement are rooted in self transcending expectations and goals regarding the purpose one attributes to one’s life.

⁵³ Taylor, *Secular Age*, 556.

⁵⁴ Browning, *Fundamental Practical Theology*, 55.

⁵⁵ Bede Griffiths, *The Golden String*, (Springfield: Templegate Publishers, 1954 &1980), 10.

⁵⁶ Taylor, *Secular Age*, 418.

Among the oral interviewees there was evidence of an expectation of the potential for greatness in the human existence, particularly with the three regular practicing Christians who referred their purpose in life to a greater vision articulated in Christian tradition, unlike the two Buddhist interviewees who limited their vision to living reflectively with their own existence. The interviewee who finds so much joy in choral singing referred indirectly to this experience of self transcendence when she referred to the sense of losing herself in the coming together of so many voices singing the great Christian works of the European classical tradition.

In pragmatic terms one must ask if such worldviews depend on grounded structures such as myths, ideals, or religious beliefs which bind the collective will to action. In spite of the secularisation of human life, Taylor finds that ex-Latin Christendom is an “extraordinary moral culture”⁵⁷ that has responded generously individually and collectively to cataclysmic events of human suffering. He argues that the scale of such a response had not been the case before modern media brought human suffering into the daily lives of so many intuitively compassionate people. Rather than exhibiting the righting of the world to God’s purpose which had earlier inspired the first generation of post Reformation social reformers, Taylor states that the contemporary response to dramatic suffering at home and abroad could be attributed to a much earlier sense of solidarity and benevolence, a universal sympathy that lifts human spirits into a vibrant awareness of the unity of all humankind.⁵⁸ Such a vision of belonging to

⁵⁷ Taylor, *Secular Age*, 695.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 694.

something much bigger than oneself could be said to constitute a momentary escape from an everyday purely utilitarian world view.

4.2.4 Love of Neighbour includes Love of Enemy

Love of neighbour is both a practical and spiritual injunction; practical in that it responds to pre-moral needs, and spiritual in that selflessness as reflection in action, lifts the spirit to a greater hope in life. Love of enemy responds to both the pre-moral need of survival and the Christian injunction to love of enemy “Instead love your enemies and do good, and lend without hope of return” (Luke 6:35) and as exemplified in the story of the Good Samaritan. The object of my research is to determine how best to mobilise young seniors to undertake caring for others, not necessarily enemies, but those they do not know in the spirit of the Good Samaritan. Urban neighbourhoods in which my interviewees live are usually not conducive to traditional small town neighbourly values and norms. Some of the factors named by Putnam that account for this change in the USA have occurred in different degrees in Canada; namely, two career families, suburbanisation, home entertainment (electronic), and generational change.⁵⁹ The spirit of neighbourliness is still kept alive in some areas of Ottawa with annual summer block parties hosted by long term residents at which new residents are warmly welcomed. Because Ottawa winters hinder socializing for frailer seniors living on their own, the Implementation of the Aging in Place policy will increase the population of elderly people living on their own in neighbourhoods in the coming years. This is the challenge for Boomers to relate to God in acting out God’s compassion of suffering together.

⁵⁹ Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000), 283-284.

The Beatitudes in the Gospel of Luke express some of the same physical but not spiritual needs espoused by secular Boomer social activists concerns (poverty and shelter). For the writer of this gospel the Beatitudes offer Christians through the voice of their speaker a kind of spirituality in action and a path to eternal self transcendence. Whereas Charles Taylor, states that for those in the closed immanent frame, these same concerns for the marginalised are thought of as humanist principles.⁶⁰ One interviewee who goes out of her way to help seniors in the apartment building in which she has lived for thirty or more years limited her sense of the significance of this commitment by saying that “right now it is only a small part of my life” and “it is just as important as many other things that I do. I don’t know about equally important. Truthfully I could live without doing it because I could please myself more.” She grew up in a small community and so her compassion may come from a sense of customary neighbourly duty, or simply, because as she put it, helping others can help her.

A dimension of compassion in the love of neighbour is the paradoxical love of enemy. Christ taught his followers to love their enemies by his act of forgiveness for those who made him suffer. In the Boomer culture one example of exclusive humanism where love of enemy became a judicial value was in the contextual consideration of criminal responsibility.⁶¹ The arguments for judicial decisions giving the benefit of the doubt to the impact of mental illness on human choices could in Taylor’s words reflect what he refers to as narratives of human flourishing or exclusive humanism which found

⁶⁰ Taylor, *Secular Age*, 370-373.

⁶¹ This turnabout could also serve as an interesting example of judicial transformation arising from a theological correlation with advances in the social and human sciences.

that a beneficence that was rational and natural could replace what had once been considered the beneficence of God.⁶² This concept suggests that while the practice of neighbourliness has diminished in urban centres for practical reasons, the Christian command to love the enemy has been rearticulated as human beneficence in the culture of exclusive humanism. The reality of exclusive humanism in contemporary culture flattens the mystery of God's presence in the neighbour and the enemy. My research question has focussed on bringing together, of fusing, dimensions of compassion in contemporary life and in Christian tradition that open in the experience of relationships insights into mystery through recognising moments of personal self transcendence.

4.3 Suffering as a Dimension of Compassion

4.3.1 Confronting Suffering

If compassion means to suffer with another then suffering engages a decision in any level of relationship between the one suffering and the one who does or does not respond. Suffering is therefore either a positive or negative source of inspiration as one among several human needs and tendencies in relationships. In the oral and written interviews Boomers were asked about their fears for the future. The loss of health and the loss of intimate relationships with family and friends were the most common fears in their aging. Two people did express fear for the future of their children and grandchildren in what they see as an increasingly troubled world. Only one said they feared death.

⁶² Taylor, *Secular Age*, 247. Charles Taylor explains this as a drive in modern psychology. It is what he refers to as “the upshot of the second immanentising move” replacing God's role thus giving humans “the great power of benevolence or altruism”.

A grounded theory of compassion expressed as relationship that addresses human suffering according to the validity tests of Don Browning can be validated as both an obligation flowing from a vision of life and a pre-moral need and tendency. Many contemporary theologians and philosophers wrestle with the challenge of the divine intent of suffering such as Soelle in her classic *Suffering*, Cynthia Crysdale in *Embracing Travail*, the Christian philosopher Clifford Williams, and Henri Nouwen in his many writings. Suffering can be either the site of God's presence (or absence) as we read in the Old Testament, or a signal with which to name and resist the source of suffering as in the writing of Soelle⁶³ and Paulo Freire⁶⁴.

What are the language and images around the experience of suffering? Soelle addresses the waywardness of a human-God gap expressed as divine apathy by looking into Christian tradition in which the language of the sacred scriptures dramatically acknowledges the fear and suffering of life and the strong expectation that God is present and all knowing in respect of human suffering. This question returns Soelle to a creation centred theology where the dialogue partner of human existence is God for the theist and "mammon or his own vitality" for the atheist.⁶⁵ For those who suffer in silence God is mute, yet, for those who suffer with God, the action of prayer nurtures images to enlighten the suffering, "Prayer is an all-encompassing act by which people transcend the mute God of an apathetically endured reality and go over to the speaking God of a reality

⁶³ Dorothy Soelle, *Suffering*, trans. Everett R. Kalin, (Philadelphia, Fortress Press, 1975), 73.

⁶⁴ Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, (New York, The Seabury Press, 1970); *Pedagogy in Process: The Letters to Guinea-Bissau*, trans. Carman St. John Hunter, (New York, The Seabury Press, 1978).

⁶⁵ Soelle, *Suffering*, 77.

experienced with feeling, pain and happiness”. In this respect Soelle concludes that this was the God whom Christ addressed in Gethsemane.⁶⁶

Don Browning in his professional training as a psychologist refers to a vision of life implicit if not explicit in all practical thinking, whether secular or religious. Even if this vision does not have a narrative form he claims it is there in “deep metaphors that suggest how the world *really* is”.⁶⁷ I was looking for such a metaphor to integrate suffering within the experience of “human flourishing” in both contemporary Boomer culture and the traditioned Christian understanding of the meaning of life. Soelle makes the case that the source of suffering must be named, held responsible, and if necessary, resisted. Charles Taylor says the need to diminish suffering in contemporary culture is linked to the larger issue of a decline in the eighteenth century belief in a larger cosmic moral order that demanded that evil be neutralised by imposing suffering on the perpetrators.⁶⁸ Out of the cultural and religious shift to a more rational inquiry into the sources of suffering, basic human rights emerged as a dimension of human flourishing limited to every day life.

Aging has the potential to be an oppressive chapter of life depending upon the physical, spiritual and social circumstances of aging. Some reasons for suffering in aging can be named as oppressors where basic material, social and spiritual needs are not met by oneself, family or society. In this case the approach of Soelle to naming and resisting

⁶⁶ Soelle, *Suffering*, 78.

⁶⁷ Browning, *Fundamental Theology*, 142. (ed.his italics).

⁶⁸ Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989), 13.

the oppressor is appropriate for the relief of suffering. Suffering when confronted as the site of God's presence, demands displacement by the one responding to the need for help as explored in the context of loneliness in the following sub paragraph. With faith, trust and hope an act of selfless displacement becomes the place where humans could be in the presence of God by doing his work, but only if that space has a name that is articulated. Clifford Williams argues that belief in a human relationship with God can be stimulated and claimed by recognising and naming the shared human existential quest for a significant, enduring Otherness.⁶⁹

4.3.1.1 *Apathy*

Dorothy Soelle states that a comfortable, pleasant life is also one which nurtures apathy to suffering as she writes "Apathy flourishes in the consciousness of the satiated".⁷⁰ As early as the beginning of the 1970's when Boomer lives were just beginning to change the culture, she perceived that with higher post war levels of education, mobility, and material comfort, the social suffering of the loss of friends and marriage partners had become less painful than in former times. She deduced from that observation that a reduced capacity for pain could lead to a reduced depth in human relationships.⁷¹ This could suggest that when desperate living conditions are assumed the responsibility of "someone else"; such as the state, the family, the church, there is less engagement or sense of responsibility on the part of the average person to deal with the

⁶⁹ Williams, *Existential Reasons*, 88-89.

⁷⁰ Soelle. *Suffering*, 40.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 40.

suffering of others. *Noblesse oblige* in these circumstances may be sufficient inspiration for any person of honour to provide relief.

Soelle provides an interesting perspective on the gap between what we do and how we reflect on suffering when referring her readers to the concept of apathy and fate. Working with her personal experience of apathy, she examines the experience of God as Spirit only, as one who is so far removed from the trials and triumphs of human life that a God in this image can be referred to as a God who is apathetic to the fate of individuals. The corollary would be that human aloofness to pain is justified; that is, that pain is fated, which brings Soelle to conclude that “Fate and apathy belong together in the same way as destiny and the person subject to it”.⁷² She names as “mute suffering” the acceptance of suffering as one’s fate, an acceptance she denies to be a divine intention. Humankind has the capacity to describe his/her suffering and identify its source, and thus to transform the circumstances. A human acquiescence and acceptance of God’s apathy to human suffering in the mystery of the divine human relationship does not necessarily deny divine judgment and condemnation.⁷³

4.3.1.2 *Loneliness*

Loneliness oppresses the human spirit and thus calls upon compassion to answer the question of “Why Bother?” Jean Vanier wrote of loneliness “To be lonely is to feel unwanted and unloved, and therefore unlovable. Loneliness is a taste of death. No wonder some people who are desperately lonely lose themselves in mental illness or

⁷² Soelle. *Suffering*, 44.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 44 and Chapter One “Theological Sadism,” 22-32.

violence to forget the inner pain”.⁷⁴ As noted earlier, medical research into loneliness has determined that this can be a cause premature aging, and thus a source of suffering in a culture which values its opposite, autonomy.⁷⁵

Many of my interviewees answered the question regarding their fears for the future as fears of social marginalisation, loneliness, physical pain, becoming a burden. Most comfortably off, educated Boomers living on pensions in Ottawa whom I interviewed came to Ottawa from the many corners of Canada leaving their parental homes and youthful social circles forever. Social services and rising incomes for the parents of this generation meant that the parental generation of the Boomers was able to manage their own aging in places given the services available in a familiar place. The children in Ottawa of this pre-Boomer generation whom I interviewed generally engaged in the transition of their parents into various forms of assisted living in places familiar to their parents, but by and large the parents did not move in with their Boomer children in Ottawa. This was the beginning of what is sometimes referred to by social agencies as an epidemic of loneliness in today’s older population. This is the case for many elderly seniors and will be the same for today’s aging young seniors in Ottawa whose children have left for opportunities outside of Ottawa.

⁷⁴ Vanier, *Becoming Human*, 10.

⁷⁵ John Cacioppo, a neuroscientist at the University of Chicago and co-author of *Loneliness: Human Nature and the Need for Social Connection* (W.W. Norton & Co., 2008) co-authored an article with Ye Luo; Louise C. Hawkey; Linda J. Waite; “Loneliness, health, and mortality in old age: A national longitudinal study” that loneliness can be measured in terms of stress hormones, immune function, and cardiovascular function because lonely adults assume unhealthy escapes in alcohol, poor sleep patterns and limited exercise. His research concluded that loneliness interferes with the orderly function of cellular processes deep within the body thus resulting in early indications of aging. *Social Science & Medicine* (March 2012), 74 (6), pg. 907-914.

While Soelle's perspective on apathy is grounded in her own experience of collective suffering in and after WW II and her later activity as a participant observer in anti-war demonstrations during the Vietnam War, a collective apathy to loneliness is now emerging as the social suffering of aging in modern western societies. Loneliness as suffering is not solitude, but rather the experience of being marginalised, cut off from others, to be without intimate meaningful relationships particularly at critical moments of suffering and rejoicing in life. This suffering is both individual and collective. Jean Vanier states that at the collective level the shell of self-centredness can be broken to let loose the seeds of honesty and loving which characterise the realisation of the common good.⁷⁶ In reflecting on the seeds of the common good Vanier identifies two in particular: that confirm a space for self transcending insights in the correlation of relationships in the immanent and transcendent frames of meaning in life: openness to others in dialogue; and, sharing together an appreciation of mutual needs which lead to trusting relationships.

In the past fifty years of mass urbanisation and globalisation contemporary references to compassion frequently include the widespread suffering of loneliness. The social reality of loneliness in contemporary life brings together the two dimensions of compassion explored above; namely, relationship and suffering. Soelle's approach to suffering such as loneliness and marginalisation can be an experience of mute suffering in a mute (or even apathetic) acceptance of the fate of aging and acceptance of the losses that are part of aging. Soelle phrases what could be this time of suffering in aging as a time for Christians to affirm life "To put it in Christian terms, the affirmation of suffering is part of the great yes to life as a whole, and not [...] the sole and decisive affirmation,

⁷⁶ Vanier, *Becoming Human*, 34.

behind which the affirmation of life disappears entirely.” Christianity affirms life as witnessed by Christ’s affirmation of the lives of those considered to be on the margins of life; that is, suffering in Christianity is “an attempt to see life as meaningful and to shape it as happiness”.⁷⁷ Soelle’s approach to suffering could include something of what Elizabeth MacKinlay says about aging as the time to achieve spiritual integrity, the last developmental task of life. MacKinlay’s task for spiritual development means an openness to change, willingness to search for ultimate meaning, to create meaningful relationships in a small group, to experience transcendence above the losses and disabilities of aging, to accept the past, to find a sense of freedom and a greater degree of interiority.⁷⁸

Henri Nouwen in *Compassion: A Reflection on the Christian Life* explored loneliness in relation to compassionate self displacement. He relates this experience of loneliness to the displacement that Christ experienced through the length of his passion and death “There, rejected by all and feeling abandoned by God, Jesus becomes the most displaced human being. (...) Jesus Christ is the displaced Lord in whom God’s compassion becomes flesh”.⁷⁹ From another perspective he referred to displacement in the ascetic lives of those such as cloistered religious who “disappear from the world as an object of interest in order to be everywhere in it by hiddenness and compassion”.⁸⁰ While no reference to such an experience or even such a knowledge of compassion appeared in

⁷⁷ Soelle, *Suffering*, 108.

⁷⁸ Elizabeth MacKinlay, *The Spiritual Dimension of Ageing*, (London: Jessica Kingsley, 2001), 220.

⁷⁹ Henri J.M. Nouwen, *The Wounded Healer: Ministry in Contemporary Society*, (New York: Bantam Doubleday Dell Publishing Group Inc, 1979), 63.

⁸⁰ Nouwen, *The Wounded Healer*, 64.

my empirical research, an insight of Jean Vanier's signifies that only a very few enter a deep search for union with God as experienced in the loneliness of the mystics; that is, in the desire and energetic search for a deeper union with God.⁸¹

4.3.2 Hope

The hope of looking forward, of moving forward is what Christianity is about. The problem of the future is the problem of hope in Christian theology.⁸² The apathy which allows suffering is an apathy that negates a transcendental hope. Such minimal hope is a human disposition necessary for survival regardless of what happens in the future.⁸³ One of my interviewees who referred to himself as a "recovering Catholic" when asked what benefits his post retirement commitments to community building bring to his life stated that he is "filled with hope that every person has within him/herself the power to bring hope to a complete stranger"⁸⁴. He says the fulfilment he finds is the hope he brings into his everyday activities in the compassion he lives through the groups of youth and seniors with whom he volunteers and raises funds for charity. His advice to young seniors contemplating their future aging is "We have only one option, that is to give hope to those who come after us; hope in a better tomorrow, a belief that good prevails in all we do." This interviewee more than any other, has expressed living his hope with others as a companion in the journey of life. This image of inspiring hope in

⁸¹ Vanier, *Becoming Human*, 8.

⁸² Jürgen Moltmann, *Theology of Hope: On the Ground and the Implications of a Christian Eschatology*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 16

⁸³ Farley, *Deep Symbols: Their Postmodern Effacement and Reclamation*, (Harrisburg, Pa.: Trinity Press International, 1996), 96.

⁸⁴ Interview L.

everyday life brings to mind the story of the transcendental hope that the incognito Christ gave to the apostles on the road to Emmaus when they were commiserating about their earlier commitments to the now crucified Christ.

Jürgen Moltmann refers to hope in relation to the movement of time. Greek philosophers had early distinguished the difference between quantifiable time and qualitative time. The eschatological direction of time (*kairos*) in the nomadic Abrahamic sense of time defined a hope to be realised through the resurrection of Christ.⁸⁵ The idea of hope as a “not yet realized future” moving towards a far off goal – the *eschaton* - contrasts with another biblical expression of a subjective hope rooted in the cyclical renewal and fertility of nature in the seasons. The cycling of time applies to a related concept of eternal epiphanies of God’s presence in *chronos* time: that is, seasonal time. God’s revelation of his promises for humankind in the death and resurrection of his Son contradicts the reality of suffering and opens the future to what Moltmann calls a “responsible exercise of hope”.⁸⁶ Saint Paul expresses his sense of a responsible exercise of hope in his epistle to the Romans when he says that his hope resides in being a joint heir with Christ as an heir of God by sharing Christ’s suffering so as to share his glory (Romans. 8: 17).

⁸⁵ Farley, *Deep Symbols: Their Postmodern Effacement and Reclamation* (Harrisburg, Pa.: Trinity Press International, 1996), 96. Farley refers to this idea of hope as hope in an “objectified future” Farley cites Emile Brunner, *Eternal Hope*, trans. H. Knight (Philadelphia, Westminster Press, 1954) with respect to speaking of this hope in an external outcome such as the kingdom of God or eternal life. As Farley writes “The sphere of this hope is not human possibility but an objectified future, what will be, what is in store, what will come about.”

⁸⁶ Moltmann, *Theology of Hope* 86.

Given the absence of an *eschaton*, Farley might ask “can ungrounded eschatological hope overcome suffering?” Farley would respond that “individual hoping is not what fosters messianic hope: the community’s messianic hope is the ethos and ground of the individual’s hoping”.⁸⁷ Such a communitarian hope would necessarily be expressed in a shared narrative or ritual. My research findings indicated that this concern or sensitivity to the end of time arose indirectly and only in four cases. In responses to questions regarding a sense of fulfilment in their choice of a meaningful commitment, only three interviewees provided some indication of religious reasoning for their engagements: “faith that God’s justice for those who suffer will be realized”⁸⁸; “that to follow Christ and trust in his promises meant doing as Christ did in responding to the needs of those who needed help”⁸⁹; “faith in what the Bible says about what one must do to respond to God’s love”⁹⁰. While not speaking in terms of her faith but more in terms of her Jewish identity in which one might assume some elements of religious knowledge and faith as well as the memory of the Holocaust, one of the Jewish interviewees indicated that the importance she attaches in her personal daily life is one of being closely associated with her synagogue and to being dedicated to the care of her elderly mother and the happiness of her spouse⁹¹.

⁸⁷ Farley, *Deep Symbols*, 98.

⁸⁸ Interview A.

⁸⁹ Interview H.

⁹⁰ Interview F.

⁹¹ Interview U.

While there was some hint in these four cases of an explicit religious meaningfulness in their lives, many of the others who claim to be affiliated to a faith community might do so in terms of celebrating Christmas or the high holidays with familiar religious rituals in a recognised sacred space. Farley's comment above relates also to the role of memory which the sociologist of religion, Danièle Hervieu-Léger in *Religion as a Chain of Memory* researched from the perspective of a metaphorical religion embedded in familiar religious symbols. She refers to old churches and magnificent cathedrals in French towns and cities as the carrier of religious memory from one generation to the next for the French people. She cites the approach of an earlier French sociologist of religion, Jean Séguéy, regarding the impact of these symbols as an affirmation of a moral obligation in the minds of those who are born and bred in France.⁹²

Hope in life is also a theme in MacKinlay's research⁹³ in that she asked independent able seniors to name the sources of their hope in a research project conducted in the early 1990's. Many responses were in terms of hopes for their families, of their own hopes for good health as they aged, of hopes to be able to afford comforts as they aged, hopes of reconciliation with one's past. MacKinlay identified three responses of the seventy-five interviewees in her Spiritual Health Inventory for Elders (SHIE) study who responded with a specific reference to a source of hope linked to a religious or spiritual narrative, while others also still living on their own expressed a sense of joy that

⁹² Danièle Hervieu-Léger, *Religion as a Chain of Memory*, trans. Simon Lee, (New Brunswick: Polity Press, 2000), Chapter 4.

⁹³ E. MacKinlay is a gerontology nurse, researcher, Anglican pastor and founder of the Centre for Spirituality and Ageing at Sturt University in Canberra, Australia.

she feels must be linked to some vision of hope in life.⁹⁴ In her 1992 survey she found that if the subject of death were raised in the interviews the fear of being dead was not a concern, but rather, the fear of prolonged suffering before death was the cause for a fear of dying.⁹⁵ This finding mirrors the responses on two points that I received from my interviewees; i.e., that death in itself unlike suffering, was not a concern, and that hope in daily life was grounded in family and friends. What happens at death and beyond was not much of an issue for those who were active. MacKinlay concluded her research with mobile seniors with the thought that perhaps it was only the very frail older adults who might turn to questions about the afterlife. She arrived at this conclusion only after finding that independent elders did not raise this as a concern in the unstructured interviews.⁹⁶ While my research sample excluded dependent frail seniors, the conclusions arrived at in MacKinlay's study of able seniors in a culture analogous to that of English speaking Ottawa are congruent with my findings; namely, that among healthy young seniors references to faith in something as a source of hope and fulfilment in life were very limited.

Charles Taylor links disillusionment with the equalizing benefits of modern progress such as "equality, the lowest common denominator, the end of greatness, sacrifice, self overcoming" to the denial of "transcendence, of heroism, of deep feeling".⁹⁷ This shift from a meaningful future to an immanent now, from time as *kairos*

⁹⁴ Elizabeth MacKinlay, *Spiritual Dimension*, 180.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 185.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 190.

⁹⁷ Taylor, *Secular Age*, 717.

to time as *chronos*, has led he says to both a denial of eschatological meaning in the contemporary culture, and also to a denial of the optimism of the narrative of human progress. Banality he says is the result and thus time is no longer moving to its fulfilment.⁹⁸ A sense of this banality might be found in some English media coverage of the spring 2012 Quebec demonstrations where the act of demonstrating became the goal and not the means of achieving a goal.⁹⁹

Transforming awareness of hope in life from sources of immanent hope such as experienced in political action to sources of transcendent hope is the challenge of aging; that is, of finding hope in the encounter with the mystery of death. Death as the end of physical life is a scientifically explicable reality; death as the encounter with mystery requires references located in philosophy, the arts and religion. A growing dependence on others in aging can be for believing Christians, the acceptance of total human dependence on the mystery of a Trinitarian God who is Creator (Father), Redeemer (Son) and Grace-Giver (Spirit). The gospel narrative of Christ's physical suffering, humiliation, feeling of divine abandonment; and death ending in resurrection and a new wholeness parallels also the experience of the human encounter with mystery and the need for hope in the power and love of God for his creation that is the narrative of the Bible.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁸ Taylor, *Secular Age*, 719.

⁹⁹ Wodek Szemberg, "Theatre of the hammer & sickle: In Quebec and Greece, communist kitsch still exists" (*National Post* 26 May 2012) A 18. Szemberg ended his article by saying that the goal was centred on the act of protest, not any coherent dream of a utopia to come.

¹⁰⁰ Drew Christiansen, S.J., "A Catholic Perspective," *Aging Spirituality and Religion: A Handbook Volume I*, ed. Melvin A. Kimble et al, (Minneapolis, Fortress Press, 1995), 403-416.

4.4 Correlating Compassion, Relationship and Sources of Inspiration

The grounded theory that has emerged from my thick description of the contemporary Boomer culture highlights elements of hope, suffering, paradox and displacement in the various dimensions of compassion in contemporary culture and the Christian narrative. These are elements embedded in the many different inter-human and divine relationships in life, and in the sources that inspire those relationships. These dimensions of compassion are in horizons of compassion that fuse in practical moral reasoning. The fused horizon of relationships in Table 4.1 between the horizons of contemporary culture (my grounded theory in chapter two) and Christian tradition in chapter three can be tested against the five validity claims of Don Browning.

This is a dissertation in Practical Theology in which divine revelation is accepted as evidence of God's presence in creation as interpreted within the contexts of the reader and the believer; that is, responses to divine revelation are dependent upon the conditions of life in which the truths of revelation are received and interpreted.¹⁰¹ Elaine Graham appears to take an approach congruent with Karl Rahner's view that the modern dialogical partner of theology is the social sciences.¹⁰² While anticipating the collapse of the traditional grand narrative of Christianity in the public sphere, she continues to work with the imperative of the claims to truth of Christianity in the practice of Christian

¹⁰¹ Swinton and Mowat, *Practical Theology*, 89, referring to van Deusen Hunsinger, *Theology and Pastoral Councelling: A New Interdisciplinary Approach*, (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1995) they argue the logical priority of theology in practical theology as follows "Within the critical conversation which is Practical Theology, we recognise and accept fully that theology has logical priority.." because "qualitative research tells us nothing about the meaning of life, the nature of God ...".

¹⁰² Anne Carr, "Theology and Experience in the Thought of Karl Rahner", *Journal of Religion* 53 (July 1973) p 373 cited in James D. Whitehead and Evelyn Eaton Whitehead *Method in Ministry: Theological Reflection and Christian Ministry* rev. edition, (Lanham, MD, Sheed and Ward, 1995), 58.

values of truth, destiny, knowledge and obligation in the daily life of Christian communities.¹⁰³ Richard Osmer affirms this stance as he considers that feminist and evolutionary thought in raising critical questions has the potential to bring major revisions and thus new knowledge into the Christian community.¹⁰⁴

A mutually critical dialogue out of which a fusion of horizons is anticipated must bring together theology and Christian tradition in conversation as equal partners with the other fields of the human sciences. This is a dialogue not about the philosophical questions of human meaning but around the practical questions of human suffering.¹⁰⁵ From that starting point there are many human voices seeking emancipation from suffering that claim an equal voice in God's relationship with humankind. Mutually critical dialogue requires that the claims of these voices for truth meet tests of their validity, tests that examine critically the tendencies, needs, context and rules and roles of a particular environment in the light of the metaphysical vision and its attendant obligations that inform the wider context of suffering. With a particular focus on the aging of the Boomer generation in the context of an aging secular society, this mutually critical dialogue brings together the vision of compassion in the grounded theory of relationship as the source of inspiration for compassion and the vision of compassion in Christian tradition.

¹⁰³ Graham, *Transforming Practice*, 203.

¹⁰⁴ Osmer, *Practical Theology*, 166.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 167.

4.4.1 The Existential Question

Seeking meaning in life for those who seek, is ultimately a search in finding what amounts to a personal sense of the presence of a higher power in one's own life story. Elizabeth MacKinlay refers to this search for the ultimate meaning of life as the spirituality of being human. This she writes is one of three related spiritual tasks of aging; namely, transcending loss and difficulties, finding intimacy with God and/or others, and finding hope.¹⁰⁶

The horizon of relationship in contemporary culture for most young seniors in my research has been grounded in personal stories of relationship and responsibility regarding their immediate family members and personal friends in sharing life, and being involved in some personal sense with selected colleagues at work and later in retirement in clubs and special interest groups. These stories are the existential life blood of those who live in large urban centres where a sense of responsibility for, and engagement in, the larger worlds of city administration, global financial management, poverty reduction, and other related phenomena of contemporary culture in urban centres are beyond the imagined capacity of most city dwellers. In large cities in a globalising world people are increasingly disconnected from the roots, wider families and traditions which anonymously structure their normative codes. In addition, any sense of what could be ascribed to God's presence in daily life has been lost for most urban people with the privatisation of religion, the ascendancy of science and technology in the economic sphere, and the public takeover of the social spheres of education, health and social welfare from what at one time had been the responsibility of privately managed religious

¹⁰⁶ MacKinlay, *Spiritual Dimension*, 243.

or fraternal institutions. During a long period when life has been good for the majority of people in Canada and in Ottawa particularly, public awareness of the need for divine intervention in restoring peace and order in human affairs has not seemed necessary as humans have managed quite well on their own. However, a cultural change (economic, social and political) is underway because of the impact on young seniors (and their immediate families) in Canada of globalisation and a dawning awareness of the challenges ahead of an aging society.

4.4.1.1 Meaning-making Frameworks

The existential question challenges frameworks of meaning making. Personal relationships that provide emotional, psychic and often material wellbeing are inspired by the natural human need for pre-moral goods determined by a particular context or environment. As Figure 2.2 Dimensions of Compassion in Contemporary Culture portrays there are other functions and inspirations for relationships that transcend immediate personal needs; namely, altruism, honour, duty. Taylor refers to frameworks to structure action, thought and feeling that anchor meaning making, as in a horizon of meaning within which life has an articulated meaning, in his words, “We find the sense of life through articulating it.”¹⁰⁷ Such articulation means that a framework has the potential to give a “higher” sense to an action or feeling. This higher sense he describes as “a way of feeling and acting as purer, a mode of feeling or living as deeper, a style of life as more admirable, a given demand as making an absolute claim against other merely

¹⁰⁷ Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989), 18.

relative ones, and so on.”¹⁰⁸ Whatever it is that elicits this higher feeling or purpose, this vision, becomes the considered approach to standards that define the obligations and the rules and roles of an individual’s life choices.

He refers to two such standards which can govern action and judgement in modern secular life; namely, honour and reason. Both ethical standards require a distancing from personal desire, and are the result of self mastery and a learned ability to direct the will. For the standard of honour, self mastery is embedded he says, in the ethics and actions of the warrior – strong leadership, loyalty, heroic gestures, dying in battle or being present at what one judges to be a participant in some important life altering event. For the standard of reason, self mastery was once embedded in a vision of cosmic and personal spiritual order that allowed for a reasoned account of human life. Taylor claims that this vision has been replaced in contemporary exclusive humanism by another vision informed by the ideal of altruism (dedication to others) but one disconnected from the love of God. Denial of these frameworks whose standards are “higher” has led to what Taylor describes as the “lower” standard of the natural and utilitarian in what he refers to as the good life of production and reproduction.¹⁰⁹

The open framework is not limited only to that which is immanent, accessible and potentially controllable by self mastery. The open framework that structures action, thought and feeling allows for grace and mystery. The immanent frame is a closed world

¹⁰⁸ Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 19.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., Part 1 Chapters 1-4. My paragraph here reflects Taylor’s distinctions in Part 1 in making the case of meaninglessness, or the “loss of horizon” in contemporary life.

structure which cannot rationalise the transcendent, spirituality or faith.¹¹⁰ I was looking in my interviews for what might constitute a closed or immanent framework without naming it as such. I asked my interviewees simple open ended questions in order to get a spontaneous articulation of an authentic sense of the spirituality grounded in a world view of exclusive humanism. I had constructed the questions around the concept that if one had the freedom to choose that which would make life fulfilling, what would that be, how would that provide a sense of satisfaction or fulfilment in life, and how would that be expressed. I was working on the premise that if I should find a common point of reference, a metaphor, indicating spirituality within the closed framework I might have a guide to mobilize and sustain non religiously inspired selfless Boomer engagement in elder care. What I found in the written interviews was frequent mention of the importance of good human relationships and gratitude for good fortune in life. In the oral interviews apart from the three professedly religious people the best metaphors for a spirit of fulfilment helping others were variations of *noblesse oblige* or altruism in a closed framework.

4.4.1.2 *Transcendence and Immanence*

Self transcendence can be the experience of a special relationship such as falling in love (partner, spouse, children, friendships), the experience of some deep personal insight, or a mystical experience that in religious terms can be thought of as a graced moment of divine relationship. An experience of the wonders of the natural world and of the grandeur of the cosmos is self transcending as witnessed by the poets of the Romantic

¹¹⁰ Taylor, *Secular Age*, 549-551.

and Idealist schools of art as well as by those who enjoy and work to enhance and sustain the goodness of the natural world. Charles Taylor speaks of the experience of transcendence by comparing the open framework that includes religious transcendence with the flatness of immanence in the closed framework. He provides three elements of the malaise of immanence: the fragility of meaning; the failure of meaningful passages in life; the emptiness of the ordinary.¹¹¹ The latter can include the importance, satisfaction and value modern society attaches to technical achievements fuelled by the maximal profits that respond to the human love of instant communication, luxury, speed, entertainment, consumer choice, in everyday living.¹¹² In this technical immanent mindset Taylor locates the contemporary experience of flatness, fragility and emptiness as the trigger for what he refers to as “different readings” of a spiritual experience of immanence in nature, in the pursuit of reforms, in political or financial success, which might allow for a brief self transcending lift from the ordinariness of everyday life.

Self transcendence nurtures a sense of the whole, of participation in and engagement with the wholeness of life, and therefore of belonging to something much grander and more significant than the self. That momentary experience of transcendence can be sustained in memory if recorded in words or the arts. Christian tradition has stories, sacred scripture, rituals, music, poetry, that are forms of human memory making to sustain the faith in and expectation of the reality of God’s self revelation. For example, the biblical canon is a series of recorded experiences of God’s active presence in Creation

¹¹¹ Taylor, *Secular Age*, 309.

¹¹² Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate: On Integral Human Development in Charity and Truth* (Ottawa: CCCB Publications Service, 2009), para 71.

over thousands of years. These stories became a canon because each inclusion provided a substantive meaningful testament of the meaning and purpose of the relationship between divine and human life to millions of people over time. This time tested story of God's relationship with humanity is the horizon of the Christian inspiration for all relationships.

4.4.2 Authenticity and Autonomy

The values of the Boomer culture which are significant in this dissertation are autonomy, authenticity, and individualism, and yet relationships which belie autonomy are the dominant theme of the interviews and the observations in the field notes. These three contemporary values do not seem to recognise that self transcendence is both authentic and singular, an authenticity and singularity that is briefly mystical, affective, and shared with the object of the transcendence or insight. These themes are in the horizon of Christian tradition. The decision to reach out to others, to establish a relationship with an unknown or difficult person, can be inspired by honour, duty, altruism, one's needs, or God's love. Yet the decision to reach out to others is always taken by the individual no matter the source of inspiration; it is therefore an authentic autonomous decision. Prophetic witness whether in words of faith or words of the common good are individualistic and authentic. Some actions in reaching out to help others are more dramatic if not heroic and are better understood as autonomous and individual actions because no one else wanted to take this challenge or risk. Authenticity and autonomy are therefore at the fusion of horizons of both Christian tradition and contemporary culture because risk taking is an individual, authentic and autonomous decision whether it be made by an Old Testament prophet, Christ, holy people, or a contemporary social activist.

Relationships of caring for the frail and vulnerable are not easy to initiate and sustain because they require a commitment of the heart as well as of the mind. Heart and mind can be inspired by a sense of duty, an altruistic principle, a sense of honour, self interest, or as in Christian tradition, inspired by agapic love demonstrated in discipleship of Christ and the faith and hope he put in his Father. These very different dimensions of compassion can be named in opening further reflection on the suffering and hope located in all relationships. This reflection is then the fusing of the horizons of relationship in contemporary culture and Christian tradition.

4.5 Summary and Conclusion

Systematic theology as the third movement in the hermeneutical cycle of practical theology is meant in this dissertation to put a grounded theory in a particular aspect of contemporary culture into conversation with Christian tradition. The social problematic under study has been sources of inspiration in respect of compassion for Boomers in caring for each other in an aging secularised society. The first chapter highlighted many socio-economic changes underway in our society that will challenge Boomers in respect of state sponsored care for aging. My empirical research in the Ottawa community of Boomers highlighted the significance of relationships in making life satisfying and fulfilling. Out of this emerged the grounded theory that personal relationships are the inspiring dimension of compassion in the Boomer cohort in English speaking Ottawa. The third chapter and fourth movement in the hermeneutical cycle focussed on a variety of dimensions of compassion in Christian tradition, dimensions that speak to compassion because of the overriding faith in God's presence in creation. This chapter has brought

the culture and tradition into dialogue through the horizon of the significance of relationships in framing meaning in life.

The theory emerging in the synthesis of my literature and empirical research suggests two horizons of compassion which communicate a vision and obligations for life. Metaphors from ordinary life shed light on less familiar areas of life and thus provide access to the otherwise inexplicable.¹¹³ An appropriate metaphor for compassion in contemporary life as in Christian tradition is the experience of relationships memorialised as stories, sacred narratives, monuments and rituals. While such memories are personal and collective their images and words provide access to the norms and values which guide one's life and one's sense of identity.

The narrative of compassion as an action of duty, honour, custom or divine grace is grounded in collective experience and revealed knowledge situated in time sanctioned sacred memory as scripture and historical practices. For Christians for example, an objective knowledge of compassion can be grounded in the story and imagery of the Good Samaritan and fundamentally in Christ's continuing presence and redemption of believers and indirectly of all of humankind in the Mass. For the Jewish people the readings, gestures and food of the Passover meal, observance of dietary laws, and weekly gatherings to read Scripture and learn the Torah affirm belief in belonging to the chosen people. Muslims following the traditions of the Koran observe the essential practices of praying five times a day, doing the hajj, fasting and almsgiving in order to honour the promise made by God to Mohammed of a redemptive relationship with God.

¹¹³ Osmer, *Practical Theology*, 115.

At the level of personal experience an affective narrative of compassion grounded in an objective knowledge of God's compassion can arise in an experience of awe and wonder at the power and beauty of the natural world, in stories or insights around a transcendent mystical experience of God, in manifestations of a human divine relationship such as the work of St Vincent de Paul, the stigmata and miracles of Padre Pio, or in apparitions and healing by the Blessed Virgin at Fatima and Lourdes. These stories and concrete images are narratives of God's compassion lived through others that initiate and sustain hope in self transcendence. Articulated experiences of trust, fidelity, human love, and liberation from suffering anchor hope in human flourishing both in the immediate and eschatological sense of the meaning of time. The link between compassion, relationship and the sources that inspire those relationships is where the horizons of meaning in contemporary culture and Christian tradition fuse to create a narrative to engage young seniors in meeting the challenge of aging in an aging society.¹¹⁴ This chapter closes with a systemic theology to use in finding ways in a strategic practical theology to engage young seniors in the fourth movement of the cycle of a transformed vision.

¹¹⁴ Taylor, *Secular Age*, 702, seems to confirm this conclusion when he speaks of a "higher good consisting of communion, mutual giving and receiving as in the paradigm of the eschatological banquet" thus pushing giver and receiver to "a relationship where giving and receiving merge". This experience of relationship he suggests can take humans to the edge of "a "leap of faith" of anticipatory confidence".

Chapter 5: Strategic Practical Theology: Doing Compassion

5.1 Introduction

Transformation in practical theology follows a series of reflections on practice – theory – practice in four movements of a hermeneutical circle. These four movements begin with a rich assessment of current practice; followed by reflection on theories of culture and faith in respect of theory laden practice pointing to potential for a renewed practice. The fourth and final movement is a practical strategy informed by practical moral reasoning. Browning argues that in strategic practical theology the practical moral reasoning of the church in situations requiring transformation considers separately the contemporary cultural and religious narratives that inform a situation before bringing them together in a conversation that will result in a practical moral strategy of transformation.¹ The grounded theory of compassion in contemporary culture in Chapter 2 considers that dimensions of compassion in everyday life that are informed by a variety of relationships as illustrated in Figure 2.2 on page 115, Dimensions of Compassion in Contemporary Culture. Some dimensions of compassion in Christian tradition are in conversation with those in contemporary culture as in Table 4.1 on page 170 in Chapter 4. Following the model of practical theology of Don Browning there are four main questions for this chapter:

1. “How do we understand this concrete situation in which we must act?”
2. “What should be our praxis in this concrete situation?”
3. “How do we critically defend the norms of our praxis in this concrete situation?”

¹ Browning, *A Fundamental Practical Theology: Descriptive and Strategic Proposals*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), 56-57.

4 “What means, strategies, and rhetorics should we use in this concrete situation?”²

The fourth question shapes this last movement and foretells the start of the next cycle of practice-theory-practice.

5.2 How do we understand this concrete situation in which we must act?

In Chapter One I presented the socio-economic facts and the main features of the cultural environment in which the Boomer generation of Ottawa can expect to age in an aging society. In Chapter Two the empirical research provided a grounded theory pointing to the importance of personal relationships that give meaning to the lives of people in my empirical research sample of oral and written interviews. The coming economic environment in Ottawa that will affect aging Boomers results from the impact both nationally and provincially of a dramatic rise in the demographic of people sixty five and over, the increasing longevity of the population, and the decline in public resources. The social challenge of meeting the needs of those aging in an aging society is currently considered to be a public responsibility guided by the norms and values of the universalising instrumentalist values of contemporary public culture.³ If the crisis is left to private initiatives whether collective or individual, the framework of meaning could be utilitarian-humanist (immanent), or one inspired by religious faith and tradition (transcendental). Each set of values defends different outcomes in resolving the circumstances that initiated this hermeneutical cycle.

² Browning, *Fundamental Practical Theology* 55-56.

³ *Ibid.*, 101.

There are values that define the social capital of a community. Putnam credits the American-Canadian urban planner, Jane Jacobs, as one of the inventors of social capital. Her contribution to city planning is recognition of the fact that every day human life lived at street level in big cities keeps city streets safer for everyone because people are engaged in the ordinary things of everyday life going on in the space around them. Such activity is as Jacobs refers to it a “web of public respect and trust, and a resource in time of personal and neighbourhood need.”⁴ This is a concrete utilitarian recognition of the significance of human interdependence functioning with normative rules and roles that define meaningful relationships that meet a social need in this particular environment. Will this structure of social capital function for an aging population in an environment in which collective apathy to lonely people is now emerging as the social suffering of aging in modern western societies? Life in big cities for frail elders living alone can be emotionally empty and lonely if there is not a private space where personal identity is affirmed in positive relationships such as family, community organisations and familiar faith communities. Medical research into loneliness noted previously, has determined that this can cause premature aging, and is thus a source of suffering in a culture which values its progenitor, autonomy⁵, in addition to being a cause for public disquiet.

⁴ Jane Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, (New York, Random House, 1961), 56 cited by Robert Putnam in *Bowling Alone*, 308.

⁵ John Cacioppo, a neuroscientist at the University of Chicago and co-author of *Loneliness: Human Nature and the Need for Social Connection* (W.W. Norton & Co., 2008) co-authored an article with Ye Luo; Louise C. Hawkley; Linda J. Waite; “Loneliness, health, and mortality in old age: A national longitudinal study” that loneliness can be measured in terms of stress hormones, immune function, and cardiovascular function because lonely adults assume unhealthy escapes in alcohol, poor sleep patterns and limited exercise. His research concluded that loneliness interferes with the orderly function of cellular processes deep within the body thus resulting in early indications of aging. *Social Science & Medicine* (March 2012), 74 (6), pg. 907-914.

Most of the responses from the oral and written interviews indicate the “I” as the reason for finding fulfilment in the activities chosen for discretionary free time. Both Taylor and Hervieu-Léger see in such language the hallmark of the Boomer generation. Hervieu-Léger traces the loss of faith based belief more to social change brought about by the material benefits of science and technology than to conscious awareness of an underlying cultural shift to rationalism. A significant outcome of the social change was what Hervieu-Léger found in the research of Jean Baudrillard in “psychological modernity”, the term Baudrillard uses to refer to the collapse of objective sources of moral authority.⁶ Hervieu-Léger sees as their replacement “the inalienable rights of subjectivity” in the late twentieth century.⁷ This observation would include the increasing significance of personal relationships in later life; that is, that relationships rooted in a personal affective benefit have priority in framing meaning making in late aging.

In order to be open to an encounter with mystery, human relationships in the senior years must be generous in forgiving oneself and others for harm done and received according to the research of Elizabeth MacKinlay. This search for reconciliation engages relationships and is a source of spirituality in aging. If the norms of contemporary culture do not recognise the importance in life of individual and collective reflection on the spiritual significance of aging, then we may find that aging will have little positive to offer the surrounding culture.

The importance of meaningful inter-human and human-natural world relationships in secular urban life is the reality informing my grounded theory regarding

⁶ Hervieu-Léger, *Chain of Memory*, trans. Simon Lee, (New Brunswick: Polity Press, 2000), 132.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 132.

dimensions of compassion in the Boomer culture. Human interdependence means a private life-source is needed to protect the individual against the anomie of the policies that inform the increasingly large public space of the urban landscape. The significance of meaningful relationships as the platform for my focus on the sources of faith or inspiration in both the immanent and transcendental visions of life assumed significance in the process of my interviews, in my reading of reactions to modern anomie in the literature survey, in my observations of volunteers working with seniors, and in my own experience discovering and managing the very popular Aging and Spirituality Conferences for active seniors over the past four years.

5.3 What should be our praxis in this concrete situation?

Browning's second question concerns the norms for this situation that were the subject of the historical and systematic theology chapters. If the secular values of social capital are about to be challenged by the social changes underway within an aging society, what is the appropriate praxis of Christian tradition in this situation? Judeo-Christian tradition embedded in sacred scripture and the lives of holy people following Christ through the ages have interpreted in their particular circumstances the practical moral reasoning appropriate for the suffering of aging and dying. The perspective of compassion and caring in Christian tradition demands that attention be paid to the person suffering⁸ and not simply to the technical problem of pain. Christian tradition has a perspective on the role of suffering in human life based on faith in the narrative of the

⁸ Elaine Graham, *Transforming Practice: Pastoral Theology in an Age of Uncertainty*, (Eugene Oregon: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2002), 117.

death and resurrection of Christ, a narrative that does not exclude scientific reasoning in respect of the physical suffering of aging.

Relationships were top of mind for most interviewees in expressing a sense of fulfilment in later mid-life and often reason enough to focus one's time around the needs of intimate family and friends. In Christian tradition according to sacred scripture and the lives of well known holy persons, personal mystical relationships with God, and with God mediated by Christ have been accepted as narratives which confirm the possibility, if not the reality, of a human divine relationship. These narratives act as witnesses for faith and hope in life for Christians across the centuries while recognising the importance of time and place in interpreting the truth of such revealed knowledge.

My written and oral interviews were with twenty-six people of whom twenty claimed some degree of affiliation with a faith community; however only three of the twenty made any reference to a faith narrative in their responses regarding a sense of fulfilment in what they freely choose to do. The separation of church and state, if taken at its most extreme, excludes faith narratives and symbols from public discourse. Stanley Hauerwas refers to the idea of church "as a sign of the gospel" whose task is to act as witness of "a radical alternative" to secular society.⁹ Elaine Graham commented on this concept of church as a reformulation of pre-Reformation thinking regarding the place of pastoral care in conjunction with moral theology as "integral aspects of ecclesial discipline".¹⁰ Larry Rasmussen, at Union Theological Seminary in New York shared

⁹ Graham, *Transforming Practice*, 115-116.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 116.

Hauerwas' view¹¹ that coherent communities embedded in an ethical tradition can only survive within the walls of an enclosed community.¹² A more nuanced discussion of this same dimension of faith in an urban secular society church is presented by Andrew Davey, a priest in the Church of England and author of *Urban Christianity and Global Order: Theological Resources for an Urban Future*. He concludes that “on the fault lines and in the back alleys of our global society, the vision and priority for our faith communities must be to allow room for grace to flourish in the reshaping of our space, our relationships and our environment for justice, infusing them with the imagination of hope.”¹³ Room for grace to flourish for those aging in an aging society could also be space for collective reflection on the many faceted experiences of personal aging. Insights that inform a vision of the obligations and needs of one's own aging are gifts that can be explored, shared and acted upon.

5.3.1 Finding a Narrative of Meaning

The question of what ought we to do is a question about sources in the tradition that might guide a response. These sources are often narratives and stories. This question reflects the importance of narratives in both the immanent and the transcendent frameworks of meaning. If as Jean-François Lyotard has written, local narratives have

¹¹ S. Hauerwas and W. H. Willimon, *Resident Aliens: Life in the Christian Colony*, (Nashville, Abingdon, 1989).

¹² Rasmussen, Larry L., *Moral Fragments & Moral Community: A Proposal for Church in Society*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993). Rasmussen indicated his support for this closed community idea in 1993, four years after Hauerwas co-authored *Resident Aliens*.

¹³ Andrew Davey, *Urban Christianity and Global Order: Theological Resources for an Urban Future*, (Peabody, Mass. Hendrickson Publishers Inc., 2002), 133.

replaced faith in a meta narrative in our complex modern world,¹⁴ then local narratives meeting these criteria will reflect meaningful reconstructed local stories that carry their own unique educative power of relationships with the divine, natural and human worlds in metaphors, images and symbols. Meaningful relationships as a metaphor of the pre-narrative quality of life thus can be understood to hold the power to correlate immanent and transcendent visions of life. Sharing personal stories, that is, sharing the outer envelope of life experience embedded in individual practical reasoning, involves sharing the inner core of practical moral reasoning grounded in the vision that enlightens the obligations that guide or have guided the life choices brought forth in the stories. Sharing stories among Boomers such as I interviewed may not involve explicit references to Christian teachings; however in a conversation among Christians in a Christian setting the life and teachings of Christ could become more explicit. Narratives that inform personal life choices are the subject of collective sharing, particularly if these are familiar narratives shared by people who share many of the same references in life's journey. The topic of aging which is explicit in this conversation will lead inevitably to questions and stories about losses, suffering, and coping with suffering.

Personal suffering and the suffering of others taps into the inner core of practical moral reasoning. Reasons for suffering, responses to suffering, and the sharing of personal responses to suffering become structured stories as narratives that highlight the place of vision and obligation in responding to the needs of those who suffer. The conversation would inevitably touch upon the existential question of why suffer. Hope in

¹⁴ Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: a Report on Knowledge* cited by Elaine Graham in *Transforming Practice*, 20.

life is an answer to the challenge of bothering about the suffering of one self and others, for the action of selfless care comes from a sentiment that the future is meaningful. An eschatological vision of hope goes beyond the narrow horizon of things hoped for in everyday life to faith in a self transcendent relationship with mystery. According to Jürgen Moltmann the time frame for such hope is not in cyclical or foreseeable time but in evolutionary time wherein the yearnings of all creation can expect to be fulfilled in an end point.¹⁵

The experience of transcendent insights into something about life whether aesthetic, intellectual or emotional, can be experiences of eschatological hope in a momentary experience of Mystery.¹⁶ This insight into mystery if captured in memory is a rich source of transformative self knowledge.¹⁷ Cynthia Crysdale describes these moments of glimpses of union with God as “the taste of ultimate desire fulfilled”.¹⁸ These moments needs a narrative to sustain the vision of hope embedded in the experience.

5.4 How do we critically defend the norms of our praxis in this concrete situation?

Browning’s third question for a strategic practical theology concerns the validity of the claims of the norms of action. In this section the norms of contemporary culture that appear in the conversation on aging for young seniors ended with the question of

¹⁵ Jürgen Moltmann in his *Theology of Hope* (Minneapolis, Fortress Press, 1993) expresses this as follows: “The ‘not yet’ of expectation surpasses every fulfilment that is already taking place now. Hence every reality in which a fulfilment is already taking place now, becomes the confirmation, exposition and liberation of a greater hope.” p 106.

¹⁶ Cynthia Crysdale, *Embracing Travail: Retrieving the Cross Today*, (New York: Continuum International Publishing Group Inc., 2000), 37-38.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 34.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 35.

why suffer. This question brings together the norms of contemporary culture and those of Christian tradition that will apply in this conversation. Relationships, particularly those in which suffering occurs, engage norms of either the eschatological meaning of life in the transcendent frame or of a self-sufficing humanism in the immanent frame. If relationship is the appropriate dimension of compassion that brings contemporary culture and Christian tradition into dialogue then relationship is about communication in strategic practical theology “even when basic assumptions either are not shared or are unclear.”¹⁹

The challenge of truthful communication of a vision is anticipated in addressing the four subsequent validity claims of Browning.²⁰ The vision challenged in this dissertation concerns the obligations which flow from a vision of life affirming relationships. Such expectation of truthful communication does not allow for what Donna Haraway sees as those who “play God” out of nowhere “by appealing to a universal vision and totalising vision and knowledge”²¹ Graham concludes from Haraway’s argument that communication must be grounded in a fusion of theory and practice otherwise purposeful practices are “neither here nor there”.²² Love of neighbour in either framework of meaning involves presence and meaningful interaction.

The vision of God is made real in exploring the vision of life that is embedded in insights into the substance of meaning making in relationships. The question of why suffer is a religious and a cultural question in the traditions of the outer envelope and

¹⁹ Browning, *Fundamental Practical Theology*, 291.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 293.

²¹ Graham, *Transforming Practice*, 157 citing Donna Haraway *Cyborgs, Simians and Women*, (London, Polity Press, 1991), 196.

²² *Ibid.*, 159.

inner core of our vision of what makes life meaningful. Truthful communication in a dialogue between the immanent and the transcendent frames requires attention to speaking the truth, and reflection upon and articulation of normative moral claims in relationships and suffering. These standards create space for an authentically voiced and trustworthy exploration of the inner core of relationships, suffering, and displacement in which compassion or suffering together is understood within the immanent and transcendent frameworks of meaning making.²³

The Christian narrative of relationships is expressed in terms of displacement, suffering and hope. The compassion of Christ according to the gospels was expressed as empathy and healing in an act of personal relationship with, and attentiveness to, the one suffering. This is how we can read the gospel story of Christ's response on the cross to the one we know only as the good thief. This experience of compassion calls upon Christians to grasp their own crucifixion realised in "embracing pain, choosing to love, forgiving others, letting go of justice as revenge".²⁴ Kasper also captures this in his concept of Son-Christology, "The turning of Jesus to the Father implies the prior turning of the Father to Jesus" as "self communication of God to him".²⁵ Kasper cites Blaise Pascal's sense that this expectation of relief means we can see in human wretchedness the experience of greatness.²⁶

²³ Browning, *Fundamental Practical Theology*, 200-201.

²⁴ Crysedale, *Embracing Travail*, 154.

²⁵ Walter Kasper, *The God of Jesus Christ*, (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1984), 171.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 161.

Reference to suffering in the story of Christ speaks to all human suffering. The inner core of meaningful relationships acknowledges suffering and the need for redemption from suffering. Christian tradition is founded on the meaningful relationship Christ has with humankind because of the promise of human redemption realised in his resurrection from human suffering to a new human wholeness. The vision is the hope of redemption from suffering and death, a vision that is universal though expressed contextually.²⁷ This hope of redemption from suffering can be communicated in narratives of redemption in contemporary culture and in Christian tradition. This hope of redemption is the visional dimension of practical moral thinking in the inner core of Christian tradition that structures the outer envelope of self understanding in western culture.²⁸ The narrative of redemption from meaningless death is no longer explicit in contemporary culture; however the narratives of meaningful human relationships and the hope of relief from suffering are deeply embedded, if not implicit, in contemporary culture.

The obligational dimension of all practical moral thinking in western culture is the principle of neighbour love, a continuous narrative in the Bible. An obligation arising in a vision of meaningful relationship is ethical care in respect of the pre-moral needs and tendencies of those in a relationship of equal regard one with one another.²⁹ This means that stealing, lying, murdering, envy, dishonour are therefore excluded in such

²⁷ Graham appears to affirm this vision of pastoral ministry in respect of suffering and redemption in the death of Christ when she writes “it is impossible to gain access to these values independent of the contexts in which they are put to work in forms of pastoral ministry” *Transforming Practice*, 90.

²⁸ Browning, *Fundamental Practical Theology*, 105.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 188. Browning here refers to equal regard as both a product of revelation and a product of the interaction of reason and experience.

relationships. Don Browning states that these two validity claims, obligation and tendencies and need, are the inner core of practical reason.³⁰

Equal regard can nonetheless be considered socio-cultural or environmental because embedded in a variety of human traditions. In western liberal democracies equal regard has been realised through political revolutions. Equal regard has become a principle of governance that is easily linked to the gospel stories of Christ's compassion for despised taxpayers, prostitutes, the Roman military, and the Jewish religious elite. From another perspective the principle of equal regard in respect of tendencies and needs could be said to be explicit in contemporary consumerism because all people have an equal right to what they want so long as they have the means to pay. The claim to adequate social and health benefits has been regarded as universal in Canada, but the coming pressure on public finances to provide high levels of care and social support will create differences within society. Equal regard as an operative principle of governance may no longer be a realisable vision of relationship in an evolving future local culture.

5.5 What means, strategies, and rhetorics should we use in this concrete situation?

The way forward requires a bridge between Christian tradition and contemporary experience recognising that “all knowledge comes from somewhere” and thus contains forms of mediation.³¹ David Wood makes reference to Paul Ricoeur's concept of “points of anchorage” or “points of support” to anchor the world of the text in the world of the reader. He refers to several points of anchorage to mediate lived experience and narrative,

³⁰ Browning, *Fundamental Practical Theology*, 107.

³¹ Graham, *Transforming Practice*, 157.

one of which is the need for action to be symbolically mediated.³² I have used relationships as a “point of anchorage” that can mediate frameworks of meaning. Actions disclose: values and preconceptions in the act of relationship, so selfless action given and received in relationships can disclose mystery at the heart of any relationship and thus mediate between the immanent and transcendent frameworks of meaning. This disclosing action in relationship is the heart of a story or narrative that mediates the world of the text and the world of the reader; or more specifically, the world of the actor in one framework and the world of the actor in the other framework.³³

Emotional attachments that give hope in life are disclosed in a relationship between particular friends and family members. Such emotions reflect life experience and a vague sense of hope that these relationships will continue to flourish and give meaning to life throughout one’s lifespan. Deep personal relationships communicate the substance of the authenticity of one’s life; that is, of being accepted and appreciated for the individual I am and want to be. In Christian tradition according to sacred scripture and the lives of well known holy persons, personal mystical relationships with fellow humans, with God, and with God mediated by Christ have been accepted as narratives that confirm the possibility if not the reality of a human divine relationship. These narratives have spelt out reasons for faith and hope in life for Christians across the

³² David Wood, ed. *On Paul Ricoeur, Narrative and Interpretation*, (London, Routledge, 1991) 28 E-library at Google.books.ca. (accessed 12 December 2014).

³³ Graham, *Transforming Practice*, 162 referring to a discussion of situated knowledge states that “For practical wisdom to be guided by the dialectic of ‘disclosure/foreclosure’ would mean that its evaluative criteria remain contextual, but consistent in its questioning of fundamental implications of any enacted claim to truth or value.”

centuries while recognising the importance of time and place in interpreting the truth of such revealed knowledge.

Following Charles Taylor's reasoning in respect of many normative values in contemporary culture, relationships are opportunities for non transcending mutual benefit³⁴ and mutual display³⁵ guided by the principle of doing no harm. If the divine-human relationship in respect of doing no harm is based on faith and hope in God's presence in creation, then suffering for the good of others witnesses faith and hope in the purpose of life. This belief is self transcending and yet still relates to a humanist belief in doing no harm if such belief is rooted in selflessness. In this instance the narrative of the closed immanent frame can relate to the narrative of the open transcendent frame in respect of a shared ethical narrative of relationship and responsibility.

Anecdotes and stories bind expectations of relationships over time. Upon reflection these expectations reveal the inner core of the outer envelope of a sense of self, of identity and of meaning in life. Among the stories are buried moments of transcendence and insight into the potential of life, of what it might have been, of what it could be. The interview questions regarding choices about what to do with free time, and the sense of fulfilment in life in the activities of choice did not reveal significant levels of reflection from most interviewees, particularly not for most of the written interviews, and not in any evident way in the large public surveys into Boomer volunteerism. This

³⁴ Taylor, *A Secular Age*, (Cambridge Mass.: The Bellknop Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), 256. Mutual benefit in contemporary culture refers he feels to the contemporary human "capacity under certain circumstances of universal benevolence and justice".

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 481 mutual display refers to the fact that others in the presence of our action are "co-determiners of the meaning of our action".

absence suggests that there could be an opportunity for young seniors to learn the art of reflection and so make connections with narratives that inspire hope and compassion in aging.

Reflection opens towards a spiritual journey that has the potential to enlighten persons as to the meaning of relationships in their lives. In moving into that consciousness of others the spirit is engaged in practical moral reasoning in exploring the desire to be with another, to help another, to engage with someone marginal; that is, to act with and for someone. Exploring the inner core of personal relationships engages one's spirit in the meaning of life and ultimately in the life of the Spirit. To arrive at a point of working out autonomously from an authentic experience of meaningful relationships an appreciation of the inner core of relationships also opens up a greater appreciation of the language of religious narratives. This exercise of reflecting is the basis of the renewed practice I propose to engage Boomers in caring for friends and neighbours at the local level.

Because of the significance of the values of autonomy and authenticity in contemporary culture a religious vision must come through reflection on the gifts or insights about life that are seeded in meaningful relationships. The essence of a meaningful relationship is expressed in action, an action that upon reflection becomes a personal narrative from which there is a vantage point to explore personal and collective spirituality. Religious narratives are about relationships that can then be integrated through the experience of reflection on personal relationships grounded in acts of relationship such as sharing a moment of joy, or of suffering and displacement. The intentional nature of the relationship forms the vision that guides the nature of further

engagement – the obligational level of relationship. The tendencies and needs, the pre-moral goods, the socio-economic environment and the rules and roles embedded in specific contexts of relationship inform the vision and the nature of the obligations practicable within the context of that vision. Each relationship in life and the action accompanying that relationship can be explored against the five validity claims. An articulation of a reflective relationship, whether individual or collective, then has the potential to be considered truthful and valid for understanding the spirituality of religious traditions.

The material every day world can also stimulate reflection on the inner core of relationships. The natural and built environments affirm a sense of place and of belonging. In this respect Danièle Hervieu-Léger has constructed a model of four elements of such relationships that confirm a sense of identity; namely, a sense of belonging to the purpose of a community (la logique communautaire); the emotional experience of identifying oneself with the group (la logique émotionnelle - le sentiment de former un “nous”); appropriation of the values of a group (une logique éthique); and finally, sharing memory of a common history (la logique culturelle).³⁶

Strategic practical theology concerns strategies and rhetorics that change situations. Freire referred to the importance of awareness and reflection on the socio-political inner core of relationships that can initiate transformation of those relationships where change is needed. This process he called “conscientization”, or awareness raising; that is, an exercise in “the expulsion of myths created and developed in the old order,

³⁶ Danièle Hervieu-Léger, “La Transmission Religieuse en modernité: éléments pour la construction d’un objet de recherche,” *Social Compass* vol 44 (1) (January 1997), 134-135.

which like spectres haunt the new structure emerging from the revolutionary transformation”.³⁷ Critical self reflection on the force of relationships that control the lives of the poor become narratives that can inspire faith and hope in action. Liberation is thus self generated, as he wrote “The oppressed must be their own example in the struggle for their redemption”.³⁸ The true spirit of revolutionary change he once said was “that the true revolutionary is guided by strong feelings of love”.³⁹ This is the love which powers graced moments of insight that Freire shared with participants in his literacy projects. He integrated literacy with consciousness-raising by ensuring that “the learner in adult literacy education is one of the subjects of the act of knowing”.⁴⁰ His programme was based upon “developing a critical attitude in relation to the object” which was not to be “a discourse by the educator about the object”.⁴¹ Life transforming insights inspire a critical assessment in the context of the time, place and experience of the individual in his/her community. As Freire wrote, “In order for the oppressed to be able to wage the struggle for their liberation, they must perceive the reality of oppression not as a closed world from which there is no exit, but as a limiting situation which they can transform.”⁴² Such transformation he says can only begin with reflection and action in order to arouse

³⁷ Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, (New York, Continuum Press, Thirtieth anniversary edition, 2000), 55.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 54.

³⁹ Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy in Process: The Letters of Guinea-Bissau*, (New York, The Seabury Press, 1978), 4.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 10.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 11.

⁴² Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 49.

the desire for liberation from a growing awareness of the sources of one's oppression, one of which is apathy to one's own suffering.⁴³

Consciousness-raising similarly takes on the dimensions of personal individual reflection on one's personal relationships, one's relationship with the institutions of religious tradition, and the role that relationships play in transforming the vision and obligations of a community. In order to raise awareness of the dimensions of compassion in the Boomer culture I propose two projects to do this, one appealing to personal exploration and articulation of the vision and obligations of relationships at the level of immediate interpersonal relationships; and another at the level of spiritual and pastoral formation for people engaged or searching to be engaged in transformational change in respect of community needs.

5.6 Ministry Opportunities and Future directions: a renewed Praxis

The social crisis of aging in an aging society when understood in terms of its personal impact will be reason enough for young seniors to consider their own fears for the future, and to understand the practical need to transform their socio-cultural assumptions of autonomy to those of a more social culture of mutual self help. The grounded theory of relationships as dimensions of compassion in the Boomer culture provides a theory laden argument for a change in practice that can provide a basis of dialogue both between people of religious faith and those for whom the concept of a narrative of self transcending faith is not meaningful. The aim of a renewed praxis in this dissertation is to bring neighbourhood Christian churches together to create opportunities

⁴³ Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 51.

for young seniors to reflect on the insights of life embedded in the narratives of their meaningful relationships. In most intra-human relationships there are insights into sources of inspiration in an inner core of dimensions of self transcending compassion in past experiences of giving and receiving selfless kindness. Such insights into a deeper reality are received as free gifts that in Christian religious terms are referred to as grace. These authentic moments of self transcending insight provide an emotional energy and sense of individual autonomous worth which according to Crysedale, trigger an opportunity for personal transformation. These insights she advises can be encouraged but not created with intentional reading, reflection, participation in reflective rituals or even counselling.⁴⁴ For Christians these insights can be explored further in the context of dimensions of compassion in Christian tradition, and for people of no faith, these insights have the potential to open some understanding of dimensions of compassion in the lives of Christians. Reflections in moments of critical self awareness are transformative and when explored among people who trust each other, hold the potential for collective transformation.

5.6.1 Projects for Neighbourhood Pastoral Care

An aging society is a challenge for church communities of caring for growing numbers of seniors, which, as noted above by James Houston and Michael Parker, suggests that “care giving will be the great test of character of this century”, a challenge which they have found in their research that has not yet been picked up by the Christian

⁴⁴ Crysedale, *Embracing Travail*, 36-37.

churches of North America.⁴⁵ They have proposed as I do here, the integration of the faith community in the secular activities of the community such as healthy living and socialising for elders.⁴⁶ In my capacity as Social Justice Coordinator with the Archdiocese I have explored the possibility of faith and practical formation for compassionate aging within communities of neighbouring Christian congregations. The purpose would be to attract Boomers to participate in neighbourhood workshops to explore their own aging in the context of the challenges of an aging society. The workshops would include engagement with the needs of frail seniors in the neighbourhood in the context of ongoing reflection groups in which to explore the needs of local frail seniors and the public and private resources available to call upon. These reflection groups would also encourage a sharing of personal experience and lessons in spiritual awareness coming out of these new relationships.

I have received supportive responses for an ecumenical neighbourhood initiative in respect of Christian community building in Ottawa after presentations of this project to several Christian pastors. A core neighbourhood group of people from the local churches would reach out to retirees and young seniors in the nearby community to find and form volunteers in the creation of community caring for seniors by seniors with the help of public and private agencies that offer programmes for seniors. I have also organised with a local public senior's social centre a series of five workshops under the title "Engaging My Aging" to work with a small group of young seniors in exploring the aging process

⁴⁵ James M. Houston & Michael Parker, *A Vision for the Aging Church: Renewing Ministry for and by Seniors*, (Downers Grove, Ill.: Intervarsity Press, 2011) 39.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, Chapter 14 "Important Steps to Unifying our Communities" pp 150-166.

and the spiritual and community resources for aging in an aging society. The goal of the workshops is to form volunteers through a process of reflection and sharing regarding their own aging and spiritual quests. This formation would then lead to opportunities to engage more deeply the needs of frail seniors in the neighbourhoods. Appendix 3 (a) is an outline of the workshop topics.

5.6.2 Certificate Course in Compassionate Aging

Another approach for the future is directed at young seniors who would like formation as community leaders in initiating volunteer neighbourhood support for frail seniors living alone. This project in compassionate aging is envisaged as a nine week certificate course in elder care within a renewed programme for Pastoral Formation and Spirituality at Saint Paul University. The course could be given with two summer sessions of one intensive week each, and an interim mentored practicum consisting of a half day per week with frail elders. During the fall and winter seasons time would be set aside for assigned readings, written reflection, mentoring and sharing with other students. The practicum would provide the fruits of experience for virtual group discussions around the experience of practical knowledge and the awareness of spiritual growth acquired in meeting the challenges of “doing” compassion. While this project has been conceived for a multi-faith community, my preference is to conceptualise this project at the beginning as spiritual and pastoral formation within a single Christian faith tradition.

My research and ongoing experience in seniors groups has raised many issues that could be considered in caring for frail seniors in an aging pluralist secular society. The intent is to provide pastoral and spiritual formation for caregivers in the context of developing experiences of personal spiritual maturity and learning about resources for

spirituality that can be shared. The goal of the certificate is to empower volunteers and paid care workers to appreciate the spiritual and practical dimensions of their engagement in care giving; i.e., to transform the “work” of caring for frail seniors into a spiritually enhancing period of adult maturity for both the caregiver and the one receiving care. Appendix 3 (b) provides an outline of this project.

CONCLUSION

In this dissertation I set out first, to understand the coming social challenges for our aging population, and then to locate dimensions of compassion in the aging of the Boomer cohort in our local aging society. As this was research in the field of practical theology I worked with Don Browning's method of a hermeneutical spiralling cycle of four movements and five validity claims for truthful communication. I interviewed a sample of well educated, financially secure young English speaking seniors who could be expected to have the time and education to engage in care for others in the Ottawa community. I did field notes as a participant observer in seniors' groups in Ottawa. From this research I developed a grounded theory of relationships as dimensions of compassion in contemporary culture that correlates with some aspects of relationships in Christian tradition. I then used this research to propose some strategies for addressing the problematic circumstance soon to challenge our community. The following sections summarise aspects of my work in this dissertation.

Selection of Research Methods

The research question concerns practical moral reasoning. I used Don Browning's model of four movements and five validity tests for the practical moral reasoning he applies to Christian theory and practice. The steps in this model provided an ordered approach to my analysis of the research findings. The critique of Browning's narrower consideration of moral reasoning in the life of singular faith communities by Elaine Graham in *Transforming Practice* is pertinent to my selection of a population of a wide range of believers and non-believers for my research sample because her definition of the priesthood of all believers is very broad, and the tasks of that priesthood are

transformation of the oppressive practices and structures of our society; that is, outside of the institutional church. The sample included members of faith communities, those who identified themselves as affiliated to a faith community, and those who said they had no such affiliation. I included in my field notes two groups of mixed Boomers and Pre-Boomers who are women of faith working in various aspects of pastoral care. Given the diversity of modern city life in Ottawa some of these women represent a sample of women now working in patriarchal structures who might be in a position to create a local movement in ecumenical pastoral care. This movement would follow from what Elaine Graham says about the experience of women in patriarchies; that is, that women brought up in patriarchal structures can better “acknowledge the integrity and autonomy of the Other”.¹

Only three of the twenty interviewees who claimed affiliation to a faith community referred specifically to faith narratives in response to the questions regarding a sense of fulfilment in life. Graham alerted me to avoid an implicit expectation of finding “metaphysical moral principles” for reasons of a sense of fulfilment and acts of compassion rather than “embodied, incarnational practical wisdom” whether this be in a single congregation to which she referred or in my selection of the twenty interviewees who self identified as affiliated to a faith community. Following from this, the truth claims of these twenty can be said to be informed to some degree by these affiliations as they engage in, or did once engage in, acts of participation in a faith community; namely, social action, worship, a congregation centred spirituality or faith formation. Three of the

¹ Elaine Graham, *Transforming Practice: Pastoral Theology in an Age of Uncertainty*, (Eugene Oregon: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2002), 176.

twenty did reference a faith narrative while seventeen did not. This finding would suggest that these seventeen interviewees practice practical wisdom rather than an explicit practical moral reasoning based on a religious narrative.² This would suggest that the vision of the seventeen is bound “in the context of specific traditions carried in the narratives, stories, and metaphors that shape the self understanding of the communities that belong to the tradition”.³

I found in researching a grounded theory to engage young seniors in caring for others that an exploration of relationship as the foundation of spirituality and compassion as well as of faith and hope is implicit in the Boomer culture. I found that the transcendent nature of compassion in God’s relationship with humankind in Christian tradition can be in dialogue with the pre-moral good of inter-human neighbourliness. This fusing of horizons of compassion in relationships informs the inner core of contemporary culture and Christian tradition. The grounded theory, constructed from the findings of the interviews, highlighted the fact that relationships were the primary dimension of compassion in the Boomer culture. Compassion, that is, suffering together, is an expression of a caring relationship between God and humankind located in Christian tradition in many different dimensions such as love of enemy as well as love of neighbour, hope in the meaning of life, displacement for others, divine paradox, and suffering.

² Graham, *Transforming Practice*, 90.

³ Don Browning, *A Fundamental Practical Theology: Descriptive and Strategic Proposals*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), 105.

Reflecting on the spirituality of relationships can put into dialogue sources of inspiration in dimensions of compassion shared in the immanent and transcendent frames of meaning making. The self transcending insights into the mystery of life that have brought new meaning to life through relationships are the experience on which to focus this correlation. Ultimately for those who explore and contemplate the questions of meaning, the experience of self transcendence implicit in those questions would likely bring the immanent and the transcendent together more easily. My intention in this was to find an area of reflection on life transforming insights that would be less intimidating and more likely an experience that a large number of people would be able to explore with others.

Selection of Key Authors

Of the ideas and questions raised by the many authors of books and journal articles I have encountered in this research, I will identify only those whose works became key references during the course of writing. John Swinton and Harriet Mowat's collaboration on *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research* was my introduction to the relevance to renewed practice of qualitative research in practical theology. The presentation of the task of practical theology and the questions they raised in those early chapters became clear overtime as I became familiar with the task of transformation, or renewal, in individual and collective pastoral work. As is evident throughout this dissertation using the method of practical theology, the works of Don Browning, the critical views of Elaine Graham on the work of practical theology, and the reflections of Richard Osmer on metaphor, have informed my understanding of the skills needed to appreciate the art of practical theology. Don Browning's ordered approach to a method of

practical theology, particularly his arguments for practice-theory-practice and for the addition of vision to Gadamer's four tests of validity for truthful communication was made easier to appreciate with the insights and explanations raised by Elaine Graham. Graham's focus on women's experience in critiquing many assumptions of practical moral reasoning in Christian faith communities opens windows on many questions of alterity. This focus is especially relevant for all who live and think about questions demanding moral reasoning or those who deal with issues of faith and ethics in the cultural shifts underway in the big cities of our globalising world culture. For the empirical original research I selected the hourglass interactive research design model of Joseph Maxwell because this model demonstrates a continuous interaction through the research question of all elements of the research project required in Don Browning's model of practical theology.

Elizabeth MacKinlay was the first author whose research on aging and spirituality opened my research question to consideration of specific aspects of the stages of mid and late aging, and particularly into the concept that spiritual maturity is the last developmental task of life. This insight shed an important light on aging as a significant stage of life, and as one that indicates a positive challenge for Boomers who seek growth and renewal at every stage of life. The assumption that the divine, that God, is present in life informs the philosophical work of Charles Taylor and so is a significant text for any research on questions of faith in contemporary western culture. His *Sources of the Self* was an introduction to the richness and deeper reflection I encountered in *A Secular Age*. In the latter book Taylor created cryptic phrases to identify succinctly and memorably specific aspects of contemporary culture. His concept of frameworks of meaning making

as in the Immanent and Transcendent Framework I have used extensively as shorthand references to two very different visions of life that can be located in the norms and values of contemporary educated people in Ottawa. His exploration of autonomy and authenticity as the values of contemporary culture has provided a useful insight into the meaning of self identity in contemporary culture. *The Malaise of Modernity* for the CBC *Ideas* programme series of Massey Lectures in 1991 is a succinct presentation of his thoughts and insights expressed in a more secular voice than his other two books. This approach gives an important secularist perspective to a reading of the key features of the pervading utilitarian Kantian philosophy of modern society. The work of Danièle Hervieu-Léger opened up for me an appreciation of the relationship between the symbols of a religious past that exists in Ottawa and the actions of those who volunteer with the marginal populations of the city. These are symbols rituals and monuments embedded in our local culture that according to her research continue to serve implicitly to inform the values and norms of contemporary western culture.

I chose to work with the theological writings on sacred scripture of Walter Brueggemann for the breadth and depth of the historical, linguistic and theological insights arising from his research and reflection. His writing style gives clarity to could be complex interpretations of biblical stories. Edward Farley has brought together faith and culture in his concern for the loss of public references to many traditional Christian expectations of the meaning of life. His use of the word *habitus* to express values and norms that are lived in daily life was particularly enlightening in his work on what he refers to as the fate of hope in a post modern world. My foundational research and reflection on hope in life came from *Theology of Hope* by Jürgen Moltmann. His careful

reflections on *chronos* and *kairos* time clarified my understanding of eschatological hope, epiphanies of hope, and the relationship of faith and hope. Henri Nouwen's concerns for the interaction of a personal struggle with faith lived among a multiplicity of other understandings of people of faith was a particularly evocative presentation of the practice of displacement in contemporary culture.

Dorothy Soelle's exploration of suffering demonstrates clearly in many different ways the evil of both mute suffering and apathy which brought greater awareness of the nature of the suffering that accompanies the loneliness and losses of aging that I experienced in the seniors' residence of my mother. Cynthia Crysdale's understanding of the dimensions of suffering in the life of Christ that are replicated in the lives of all humanity gives a significant pastoral insight into suffering, but one that can be interpreted as acceptance of living between what she refers to as the creative tension of limitation and transcendence.⁴

Limitations in my Research

Practical Theology is a contextual theology and so requires multidisciplinary skills above and beyond competence in a given field of theology. Every research question in practical theology is situated in a socio-economic environment for which different skills and experience are required to interpret the theological question. I came to my research question with a recent Master of Arts degree in Inter-religious Dialogue following a career serving the government of Canada in Asia, Africa and Europe. My previous academic background had been in history, politics and economics and with my

⁴ Cynthia Crysdale, *Embracing Travail: Retrieving the Cross Today*, (New York: Continuum International Publishing Group Inc., 2000), 144.

experience of government I was in a better position to work on subjects related to the socio-economic environment of contemporary culture than to work in the fields of contemporary ethics or religious education. Practical Theology is meaningful because it is about faith in a culture that values the practical reasoning and secular empirical philosophy underpinning rational public policy. I had to familiarise myself with the basic skills for research design in the social sciences in order to select an appropriate research method that would work well with Don Browning's method of practical theology.

The skills needed to understand the structure and purpose of narrative forms of truthful communication have engaged scholars in western culture since the time of Aristotle. I was introduced to the complexity of the subject of narrative in looking into topics covered in the multidisciplinary work of cultural studies. Psychology is another topic closely related to practical theology, particularly on topics dealing with suffering and spiritual counselling. In this respect I started with some knowledge of the research of A. Maslow and L. Kohlberg in respect of moral development and psychology. I found in Graham's critique of Browning's work in psychology some important questions related to the role of individuals as givers and receivers of pastoral care. I had some background in ecclesiology both academically and now in my position with the Archdiocesan Centre in Ottawa. This provided me with an understanding of the focus and issues of pastoral ministry; a topic now challenging Catholic faith in action in light of the speeches and symbolic pastoral actions of Pope Francis.

Psychology, sociology, history, ecclesiology and philosophy challenge various aspects of the topic of my research question which indicate how wide and challenging is the work of Practical Theology. There are many questions of daily human life yet to be

explored at a time of globalisation when issues related to religious practices are once again discussed in the popular media. A major limitation to the specifics of the problem that I have researched is that of predicting exactly what will be possible in community organisation for aging in an aging society of Ottawa over the next seventeen years before one in four Canadians and one in four residents of Ottawa will be sixty five years of age and over. Another limitation was the need to focus the empirical research to a specific socio-economic segment of the population of one Canadian city – Ottawa. This limitation was needed in order to explore the research question regarding faith in action in a specific known context rather than generalising the results in a wider context of different urban cultures of Ontario. I compensated for this limitation by referencing the findings of two large surveys on volunteering, one in the province of Ontario, and the other across Canada.

Topics for Future Research

Aging in an aging society is a new field of inquiry in practical theology with very few writers working on this as a socio-theological field of inquiry in North America, particularly so from the perspective of identifying opportunities for spiritual growth for Boomers in aging and finding a source of hope in life through charitable action. One topic that would challenge some of the findings in this research would be to look at the topic of aging in the aging society of Quebec where the majority of the French speaking population of Boomers were once practicing Catholics but have now abandoned that experience of faith and hope for other visions of life. There is an area of contrast, if not conflict, between what had once been an assumed meaning and purpose in life expressed in regular Catholic practices in the rural Catholic culture of Quebec, and what is now

articulated as the quest and expectation of some certainty and hope in new forms of faith and spirituality in a radically secularised urban culture.

A related topic of interest for research in culture and faith using the methods of practical theology would be a study of the dimensions of compassion for aging in an aging society in the many immigrant communities of Canada, particularly in the large immigrant populations of the big cities where immigrant populations have greater access to their “home” cultures. Related interests for social and health policies in such a study would be the case for home versus institutional care, and thus the expectations of immigrant families vis a vis the role of the state in intimate family life.

The role of Christian women in creating a practical theology for faith based neighbourhood pastoral ministries for frail seniors is a third research project worth exploring in respect of the contribution to Christian practical moral reasoning of women’s pastoral ministries. As Boomer women will likely live longer than Boomer men, women will more likely engage in one on one care-giving as the population ages. The conceptual thinking for this undertaking could find its source in Elaine Graham’s argument that “the theological nature of pastoral practices rests in the ability of the pastoral encounter, via its appreciation and cultivation of the mystery and provisionality of alterity, to apprehend the presence and agency of the Divine.”⁵

Concluding Statement

This thesis is a contribution to research on aging in an aging society in the field practical theology. I have not found anything written for practical theology using Don

⁵ Graham, *Transforming Practice*, 175.

Browning's or Elaine Graham's methods with which to research dimensions of compassion expressed as faith in action in the triangulation of faith and contemporary culture, aging in an aging society, and the achievement of spiritual maturity as the last developmental task of life. I have brought into practical theology the importance of understanding in the language of government the socio economic challenges of the day in respect of the significance of some of the factors of an aging society. My experience with the Interfaith Network for Isolated Seniors and in working with frail seniors in neighbourhood projects has given me insights into what aging in place will mean for the large numbers of Boomer seniors who will be expected to support themselves with limited public support. I have found that very few of the Christian churches in Ottawa have begun to focus on their role in an aging society, particularly so because the Boomers are generally not members of most of the local churches although older pre-Boomer women attempt to fill the gap. Reasons for a sustained hope in life that activates individual and collective responsibility for human dignity in the face of the suffering other requires a community narrative of practical moral reasoning that is the heritage of the Judeo-Christian tradition. This dissertation is a modest attempt to open up practical moral questions concerning aging in an aging society and thus to challenge the Christian community to take a lead in honouring the human dignity of those entering now on the lesser margins of the materially productive life of highly urbanised modern societies.

APPENDIX

Appendix 1 Research Permission Letters

1.1 Research Ethics Board Permission

UNIVERSITÉ SAINT-PAUL

SERVICE DE LA RECHERCHE
ET SERVICES INTERNATIONAUX



SAINT PAUL UNIVERSITY

RESEARCH SERVICES
AND INTERNATIONAL SERVICES

223 MAIN OTTAWA ON CANADA K1S 1C4
TEL: 613-236-1393 FAX: 613-782-3001

Friday, March 20, 2009

Mrs. Patricia Marsden-Dole
Faculty of Theology
Saint Paul University

INTRA

**Subject: Project Why Bother? Looking for the Relationship between Hope and
Compassionate Engagement in the Boomer Culture**

Dear Mrs. Marsden-Dole,

At its March 20, 2009 meeting, the Research Ethics Board (REB) reviewed the above application. I am happy to tell you that it has been accepted.

Nevertheless, the board wishes to remark that while on page 3 of the consent form (the page to be signed by the participant) it is said that participants may withdraw from the study at any time, this has not been said on pages 1-2 of that form, and the board suggests that you insert this possibility in these pages.

If you have any questions or need additional information, please, do not hesitate to give me a call at 236-1393 (2452) or to call Mrs. Ming Zhang, Director of Research Services, at 236-1393 (2312).

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Raymond Jahae'.

Raymond Jahae, O.M.I.
Chairman, Research Ethics Board

c.c. Ming Zhang
John A. Jillions

1.2 Consent Letter for Interviews

UNIVERSITÉ SAINT-PAUL

FACULTÉ DE THÉOLOGIE



SAINT PAUL UNIVERSITY

FACULTY OF THEOLOGY

223 Main Ottawa ON Canada K1S 1C4
TEL: (613) 236-1393 FAX: (613) 751-4016

Consent Form for Interview

Researcher : Patricia Marsden-Dole

Thesis Supervisor : Professor John Jillions
Sheptysky Institute
Saint Paul University
613- 236-1393 ext 2415

Purpose of the Research: To find narratives of commitment and engagement which define the relationship between hope and compassion in the Boomer culture. The goal of this research is to find images which attract and nurture volunteers in caring for marginalised people with a particular focus on engaging able Boomer seniors to provide companionship and help to seniors at risk in their neighbourhoods.

Procedures Involved in the Research

1. You will participate in an open-ended, one on one interview lasting one and a half hours.
2. Following the interview you will be invited to put in writing for me any further thoughts you might have on the subjects we discussed.
3. Upon completion of my initial analysis of the interview findings you will be invited to a focus group lasting up to two hours to discuss the preliminary conclusions of my analysis.

Potential Risks

You are free to respond as you please to open ended questions which ask about what you do with the extra time you have in your retirement to choose new activities. You do not need to address issues which might make you uncomfortable in the interview or in the concluding focus group if you find yourself ill at ease with the conversation. You are also free to withdraw from the study at any time.

I am a volunteer member of the Interfaith Network for Isolated Seniors which is a group of faith community representatives working on issues related to seniors at risk along with Help the Aged Canada and the City Health Department. There is no commercial benefit

to the researcher or potential for conflict of interest for the researcher, in the information which you will provide.

As with any conversation or group discussion there is a risk of breach of confidentiality; however, I will not use names or identify institutions without the permission of the interviewee which I will invite during the interview. In the focus group I cannot guarantee that all participants will honour confidentiality and so participants will have to decide for themselves what they will or will not reveal about themselves.

Potential Benefits

Your participation in this research project will provide insight into the sources and language within the Boomer culture which engage concern and care for others. These insights will be helpful to recruiting volunteers to initiate or join neighbourhood activities where the more able are in a position to help their less able neighbours.

Confidentiality Your privacy and confidentiality will be ensured in the following ways:

1. All participants will be respected and confidentiality throughout the research process.
2. Information will be kept confidential to the full extent of the law and I will treat all information provided to me as subject to research-participant privilege.
3. Written records will be secured in my home office.
4. No persons shall be referred to by name, and every effort will be made to safeguard anonymity in the publishing of the final research.
5. Once the final research is published, the gathered data will be shredded and the audio-tapes will be erased.
6. The draft research findings will be presented at a focus group for those interviewees who wish to participate. The research will be made available to you when the full doctoral thesis project is submitted and accepted. It is expected that this will be no later than June 2013. The accepted thesis will then be available in the library of Saint Paul University.

Referees

The Chair of the Research Ethics Board of Saint Paul University is Professor Raymond Jahae who can be contacted at 613-236-1393 ext 2452.

The qualified designated representative for my research is Professor John Jillions who can be contacted at 613-1393 ext 2451.

Consent Form for Interviewees

I have read the information presented in the information letter about the research process being conducted by Patricia Marsden-Dole of Saint Paul University. I have had the opportunity to ask questions about my involvement in this research, and to receive any additional details I wanted to know about the research. I understand I may withdraw from the study at any time, if I choose to do so. I have been given a copy of this form.

Participant.....

In my opinion the person who has signed above is agreeing to participate in this study voluntarily, and understands the nature of the research and the consequences of participation in it.

Researcher.....

Date

Appendix 2

Interview Questions

2.1 The Oral Interview

The primary purpose in these semi directed recorded interviews was to ask young seniors (all but one not on a pension) about decisions they have made regarding the use of their free time in retirement.

- A The leading question was – What are your feelings about retirement?
Leading to an initial set of possible responses concerning: feelings about being retired such as loss of daily routine; loss of the sociability of the work place, realization of aging, financial issues, etc
- B What does retirement mean to you now?
Leading to possible responses concerning reflections and decisions related to having achieved the passage to retirement: perceived gaps in one's life; search for fulfilling activities; search for meaning in one's own life;
- C What new life commitments, if any, engage you now?
Possible responses concerning decisions about the need for a new life commitment; the degree of commitment to something new? The nature and inspiration of a new commitment – sustaining or creating social networks? Reform movements? Care for someone? Academic pursuits? Making money? Staying busy? Faith based commitment? Having fun by doing what I like when I like?
- D What sense do you have of the wholeness or completeness of your life at this point in time?
Leading to search for words or images regarding: sources of individual interiority/spirituality; insights on journey of life; satisfaction with life; seeking and finding the purpose of one's life;
- E I am also looking for casual comments about world views to see connections to the Boomer culture and to thoughts on one's own aging often arising from aging, dying and death of elderly parents, relatives, and friends.

2.2 Written Interview Questions

Patricia Marsden-Dole, Doctoral candidate, Practical Theology, Saint Paul University, Ottawa

Thesis supervisor: Professor John Jillions, Metropolitan Andrey Sheptytsky Institute of Easter Christian Studies, Saint Paul University Ottawa

Question 1 To remain anonymous please do not provide your name but kindly provide Y for yes and N for no in your answers to the following questions:

Male ___ or Female ___

Married ___ divorced ___ partnered ___ single ___

Home language English ___ French ___ other ___

Born in Canada ___ attended high school in Canada ___

Formal education BA ___ MA ___ PhD ___ Professional Certificate or license ___

Do you have a pension ___ if yes, year of retirement ___?

Do you have any affiliation to a faith community ___? Christian ___ Muslim ___

Buddhist ___ Hindu ___ other ___?

Question 2 How did you feel about retirement just before you retired?

and then just after you left your place of full time work for the last time?

Question 3 What are your main reflections about retirement now that you have some experience of retirement, that is to say, what has been positive? What has been a real challenge?

Question 4 What new life commitments have you taken up since retiring?

What led you to choose these commitment/s?

What have these commitments opened up for your life now?

Question 5 How would you describe the sense of life fulfillment you find in your daily routine and commitments?

Question 6 What are your fears, if any, as you look into your future?

Question 7 Can you give me a few words which would describe the Boomer culture?

Question 8 Do you have any additional comments to make about your commitments or volunteer engagements which might encourage others to follow what you have done with your retirement?

Appendix 3

Generic Proposal for Five Workshops

3.1 “Engaging My Aging”

Workshop One: Aging

Part I Confronting My Aging Stages of Human Development

I A Three stages of human life: pre-conventional, conventional, post conventional.

I B Stages of spiritual development

Exercise: Participants to work with the three stages and consider what is going on in the third and fourth stages of spiritual maturity

Break

Part II Happiness and Suffering: The Great Religions teach Happiness (the difference between what we have and what we want)

1. Hinduism – the four aims of life
2. Buddhism – the Four Noble Truths
3. Islam – the Sufi story of Nasrudin
4. Judaism and Christianity – expulsion from the Garden of Eden (craving leading to awareness of loss)
 - a. Judaism
 - b. Christianity

Exercise: 1. Describe pain by relating and assessing a personal pain
2. Can we eradicate craving by examining it

Workshop Two: What’s going on here?

Part I Our Culture The Contemporary Social Challenge

1. background history of evolution of contemporary culture in western history
2. arriving at authenticity; understanding negative and positive authenticity

Break

Part II The Practical Challenge Going Forward: Our Aging Society

1. the demographics
2. the dollars
3. contemporary volunteerism

Exercises: putting elements of parts 1 and 2 into a personal context and then in a second exercise into a neighbourhood context

Workshop Three: Befriending my Spirit

Part I Where is my Spirit

Themes and tasks of psychosocial and spiritual aging: identifying sources of ultimate meaning; responding to these; transcending loss; finding intimacy with a higher power; finding hope.

Break

Part II Finding words and images that nourish my Spirit (faith and hope)

Exercise Familiarising oneself with resources for ongoing Reading, reflection, and practice (rituals, engagements)

Workshop Four: Moving from Me to We

Part I Creating and Living Community

Break

Part II Practical public and private resources for Aging

1. familiarisation with public and private resources for frail seniors
2. engaging with those in need

Part III The practicum

1. choosing a practicum
 - a. initially through Good Companions
 - b. leading to other needs in the community
2. finding a mentor

Workshop Five – Setting up Mentoring and Reflection Groups

1. talking about personal experiences in the practicum
2. reflecting on lessons learnt in the practicum
 - a. practical
 - b. spiritual (relational)
3. moving beyond this practicum and group reflection to others

Appendix 4 – Training Community Leaders for Compassionate Aging

4.1 Program Overview of a Draft Proposal for a Certificate Programme

With the projected aging of the Canadian population over the next several decades, public resources for elder care will be stretched. The availability of a wide range of skilled and caring community members (including health care practitioners, volunteers, families, parishioners, and neighbours) will be essential. Compassion and social connection are now recognized as pillars of health care and essential aspects of the elder care continuum. The aim of the Compassionate Aging Program (CAP) is to prepare participants for engagement in holistic elder care in the community and for the inner journey of aging. It provides both practical training and personal (or spiritual?) development for people involved with the care and well-being of frail and hale senior members of society. The Certificate will assist health professionals, social service providers, family caregivers, ordained clergy, lay pastoral care workers and anyone else interested in healthy aging to acquire the tools, competence, and personal capacities necessary to engage in this work to their fullest potential.

The Compassionate Aging Program is completed over a one-year period. It consists of two successive Summer Institutes, plus two evening/online courses and a community-based practicum in the intervening fall to spring period. Each Institute consists of three weeks of full-time study (five 15-hour courses per Institute). There are no pre-requisites for participating in the program; however, all applicants are required to submit an application package that consists of: a letter of interest, resume, and personal references indicating their background to fulfil the requirements of the program.

Upon completion of the Compassionate Aging Program, participants will understand the challenges and opportunities inherent in an aging Canadian society, and will have the basic knowledge both to effectively navigate the local elder care system, and to identify areas where they can see that their new skills will best fit. They will also better understand their own experience of the aging process, increase their care-giving capacities, and deepen their awareness of the wisdom of aging as well as its vicissitudes.

Cost: \$xxxx.xx (\$xxxx.xx per Institute/\$xxx per week) plus HST. Accommodation/materials are extra. Some bursaries or work exchange opportunities are available for those who can't afford to pay the full amount. On request, individual program modules may also be available for interested community public and private elder care agencies or faith communities.

4.2 Program Structure

1. First Institute:

- a) Aging as a Spiritual Practice: Guided Self-Reflection
- b) The Aging Society
- c) Ethical Issues in Aging
- d) Intercultural/Interfaith Dimensions of Compassionate Aging
- e) Integrity and Wisdom in the Second Half of Life

2. Second Institute:

- a) Being with Aging: Compassionate Care for the Elderly
- b) Knowing and Navigating the Canadian Elder Care System
- c) Developing Senior Friendly Neighbourhood Communities
- d) Death and Dying – Physical, Social, Emotional, Spiritual
- e) Compassionate Care for People with Dementia

3. Online/distance courses

- k) Sexuality and Spirituality in Later Life (September to December)
- l) Creative Aging: The Role of the Arts in Elder Care (January to April)

4. Practicum

Participants will be expected to arrange their own practicum placements in the community (e.g., health or community elder care settings or family care giving). Guided reflection questions will be provided to help participants enhance their learning from their practicum experience. The practicum will entail a minimum of 80 hours of service in the intervening time between the first and second Institutes (approx 2.5 hours per week = 10 hours a month x 8 months).

Participants will also be expected to maintain a personal discipline (such as prayer or meditation) and keep a reflective journal for the duration of the program. There will also be ongoing opportunities for regular interaction among participants between the Institutes, so they stay connected and motivated and continue learning from their mentors and from each other.

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