



Hermeneutical Approaches: Exploring Leaders' Perspectives on Bible Usage in DMM Contexts

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Maria Cruz

Examinator: Fredrik Wenell
Supervisor: Roland Spjuth
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Abstract

This research aims to examine the Bible reading methods used in Disciple Making Movements (DMMs) and put them in dialogue with a hermeneutical reflection. This aims to help reflect on how these methods can be used in a Swedish context. This master's thesis uses a qualitative research method to describe and analyze the hermeneutics in DMMs. Four interviews have been conducted with key leaders from different DMMs. Brother E, who works in various regions of the Middle East, was one of the interviewees, along with Ailia Tasse from Eastern Africa, Victor John from India, and Christian Kuhn from Switzerland.

The interviews have been analyzed using a model for Theological Hermeneutics presented by Stephen Fowl. This has been supplemented with perspectives from three other theologians from the same field as Fowl and a missional perspective represented by Mark Naylor, DTh (missiology). The research shows several intersections between the hermeneutics presented by the leaders of DMMs and Theological Hermeneutics. The primary contribution to hermeneutics identified in this survey is the missional perspective, which affects how the Scripture is interpreted.

Keywords: *Systematic Theology, Theological Hermeneutics, Disciple Making Movement, Discovery Bible Study, Stephen E Fowl*

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Abbreviations

DBS	Discovery Bible Studies
DMM	Disciple Making Movement
CPM	Church Planting Movement

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Background and Relevance

The Bible reading rate in Sweden is regarded as low. According to a Sifo survey done in 2016, only two percent of the Swedish population reads the Bible daily.¹ Even though this survey was done almost ten years ago, one can presume the numbers haven't changed drastically, as the number of people active in a church has decreased since the survey was published.² A quick search on the website of one of the largest Christian newspapers in Sweden shows that questions about Bible reading have been a topic in the free churches for many years. The question about how to increase Bible reading is followed by topics about how to read the Bible. Ulrik Josefsson, the principal of one of Sweden's pastor and leadership training programs – ALT School of Theology – recently wrote an article addressing how Pentecostal pastors in Sweden tend to preach the Bible to confirm their theology. Josefsson expresses his concern about this phenomenon and calls for a change. He encourages pastors to include three objects when addressing the Bible: preach the word of God and refrain from using it to confirm their thoughts, preach in a manner that raises questions and conversations, and make room for communal Bible reading and Bible conversations. Josefsson expresses a longing to see an increased usage of the Bible.³ Furthermore, in recent years, there have been numerous conversations in the Swedish Evangelical Free Church on how to view and interpret the Bible.⁴ In response to Josefson's article, Greger Andersson – Professor of Literature at Örebro University and a teacher at ALT – expresses a worry about how preachers handle the process of interpretation. Primarily, he is concerned about how the preacher uses “free” interpretation methods where the dialogue between the text and the listener is premiered and where one moves between different texts to create a theological message.⁵ This shows that biblical hermeneutics is a highly relevant topic in the free churches in Sweden today.

One suggestion for approaching this topic is to examine how the Bible is used in Disciple Making Movements. During the last three decades, Church Planting Movements (CPMs) or

¹ Svenska Evangeliska Alliansen 2016, Internet: <https://www.sea.nu/svenskarnas-bibelvanor/> (2016-10-06)

² Dagen 2023, Internet: <https://www.dagen.se/nyheter/2023/05/22/har-ar-trossamfunden-som-vaxer-mest-i-sverige/>

³ Josefsson 2025, Internet: <https://www.dagen.se/debatt/2025/01/28/anvander-vi-bibeln-s-ord-for-att-legitimera-vara-egna/>

⁴ This is mainly due to the question about how to understand homosexuality in light of the biblical texts.

⁵ Andersson 2025, Internet: <https://www.dagen.se/debatt/2025/02/07/risken-ar-att-texterna-tystnar-och-teologin-plattas-ut/>

Disciple Making Movements (DMMs) have been observed in different contexts worldwide. These movements are characterized by the multiplication of new disciples, spreading rapidly. They are spreading foremost in the Global South, despite some examples of DMMs in Europe and North America. One of the central focuses in these movements is studying the Bible together, obeying its teachings, and sharing it with others. Bible reading can be seen as one of the main characteristics of these movements. Bible reading is spreading among ordinary people, both believers and those who are not yet believers. In many of these movements, an inductive Bible study method called Discovery Bible Study (DBS) is used. This is a simple tool that helps people discover Jesus and grow in discipleship by reading and discussing passages in the Bible.

In Sweden today, an increasing interest in DMMs and the DBS method can be observed. In September 2024, the Network *Vidare*, which involves several Christian denominations, had a Learning Community gathering focusing on DMMs.⁶ *Vidare* has also released the book *Discovery Bible Conversation*, with the DBS method as the ground.⁷ In addition to churches, there are organizations working towards a discipleship movement in Sweden. Two examples are Catalyst Sweden and IBRA.⁸

In summary, the Swedish Free Churches are interested in seeing the Bible reading rate increase, conversations about how to read and interpret the Bible are, to some extent, given priority, and there is a growing interest in DMMs and the DBS method. Considering all this, there is a need to research the biblical hermeneutics in DMMs. Suppose this method is used to train disciples in communities and reach new people with the gospel; in that case, churches need to understand and reflect on the inductive Bible reading methods in DMMs and the principles behind them. There are several questions about whether this methodology does justice to a holistic theological hermeneutic. One question that can be asked is whether the methods used in DMMs give justice to the wholeness of the Bible or if they are only applied selectively. Another question is how experience relates to interpretation. This research aims to examine the Bible reading methods in DMMs and put them in dialogue with a hermeneutical reflection. This will help reflect on how these methods can be used in a Swedish context. However, the main

⁶ Vidare is an ecumenical network with a vision to see new churches planted in Sweden. The churches that are involved are Ekumeniakyrkan, (Uniting church), Evangeliska Fosterlands Stiftelsen (The Swedish Evangelical Mission), Evangeliska Frikyrkan (The Swedish Evangelical Free church), Frälsningsarmén (The Salvation army), Pingsrörelsen (The Swedish Pentecostal Movement), Svenska Alliansmissionen (The Swedish Alliance mission), The Seventh Day Adventist Church, Evangelisk Lutherska Missionen (Evangelical Lutheran mission). Additionally there are also missional organisations in the network.

⁷ Stenberg 2024.

⁸ Catalyst Sweden is an organisation working to make disciples and form new missional churches (<https://www.katalysator.net/>). IBRA is a missional organisation which also organize DMM training in Sweden (<https://ibra.se/dmm/>).

focus of this thesis is to do a systematic theological reflection on DMM hermeneutics; its potential weaknesses and strengths, not a practical theology on how the Bible is used.

1.2 Research Questions

The research question of this paper is the following: What hermeneutical approaches are evident among key leaders in Disciple Making Movements (DMMs)? To answer this question, four sub-questions have been formulated:

1. What is the context of biblical interpretation?
2. What is the perception of the authority of the Bible?
3. Does the hermeneutic do justice to the wholeness of the Bible?
 - How do the informants read and interpret the Old Testament?
4. How do the informants' experiences influence their approach to biblical texts?
 - How do the informants' hermeneutics affect their view on women and leadership?

I have chosen to use questions about how to interpret the Old Testament and women in leadership since these serve the purpose of the research well. The question of how to interpret the Old Testament is important concerning Theological Hermeneutics and provides insight into how the Bible is interpreted in its fullness. The question about women and leadership explores how the informants' cultural experiences and differences affect their interpretation.

1.3 Method

This thesis is written in the field of Systematic Theology, focusing on theological hermeneutics within DMMs to investigate the hermeneutics of DMMs, I have conducted semi-structured interviews with four key leaders in four different disciple-making movements to answer the research questions. In Chapter Two, a theoretical perspective will be presented as a tool to analyze the hermeneutics appearing in the interviews. A qualitative research method is employed. An account of this method and how it is applied will follow.

According to Creswell and Poth, qualitative research is appropriate when a problem or issue that isn't easily measured needs to be explored.⁹ They state that qualitative research starts with assumptions, using theoretical/interpretive frameworks as a lens to study a social or human problem or issue. Studying the problem using a qualitative approach means collecting data in a setting sensitive to the study's object, and analyzing it in both inductive and deductive ways. They state that this demands reflexivity of the researcher, hearing the participants' voices. It

⁹ Creswell, Poth 2018, 45.

will involve a description and interpretation of the problem, resulting in a contribution concerning the specific topic or issue.¹⁰ In addition, Johan Alvehus explains that using an interview method is appropriate when one wants to find out how a person thinks or feels about a particular matter, subject, or phenomenon. Understanding how individuals and groups construct and maintain their social world is beneficial.¹¹ Creswell and Poth point out that the researcher doesn't use forms or questionnaires developed by other researchers; rather, they collect data in a face-to-face interaction.¹²

In this research, I have made an effort to describe the phenomena of DMMs, which is the context of the informants. Questions have been formulated to address the key questions of this thesis, while maintaining an openness that allows the informants to respond freely. Additionally, follow-up questions have been employed to explore their perspectives further. The interviews were conducted from a personal angle, with the informants being met face to face.

Creswell and Poth underline that researchers gather different forms of data, such as interviews and documents. The researcher uses an inductive–deductive process, meaning they will check and edit the themes they are building against the data throughout the process.¹³ In this thesis, interviews serve as the primary source of information; however, other documents have also been consulted to offer a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon under study. When analyzing the data, an inductive–deductive process has taken place, both in thematizing the interviews and analyzing them using the theory that will be presented in Chapter Two.

Brinkman and Kvale state that the interviewer needs to be aware of the unequal balance of power. The interviewer has a superior role and needs to find ways to handle how this affects the interview.¹⁴ From my standpoint, this was not the case when I conducted the interviews, since the leaders I interviewed are key leaders in movements and have much more knowledge on the subject than I do.

Creswell and Poth suggest five different approaches to qualitative studies: *Phenomenological research*, *Narrative research*, *Grounded Theory research*, *Ethnographic research*, and *Case Study research*. This research incorporates certain aspects of a case study. According to Creswell and Poth, case study research begins with identifying a case to explore

¹⁰ Creswell, Poth 2018, 42–43.

¹¹ Alvehus 2023, 112.

¹² Creswell, Poth 2018, 42–43.

¹³ Creswell, Poth 2018, 42–43.

¹⁴ Brinkman & Kvale 2014, 52–54.

and analyze. The case can involve, for example, an individual or a community. Multiple cases can be studied for comparison. A case is defined based on certain parameters such as the place where the case is located and the timeframe for the study of the case. According to Crosswell and Path, a qualitative case study should involve an in-depth understanding of the case, which means the researcher collects many forms of qualitative data. They also state that a case study involves identifying case themes that the researcher describes or issues the researcher has uncovered.¹⁵ In Chapter Five, themes that occur in the interviews will be presented. These themes were identified using the sub-questions presented in Chapter 1.2 and the questions formulated in the interview guide (available in the appendix).

This survey can be seen as an in-depth case study on the hermeneutics in DMMs, primarily based on interviews. Due to time and space constraints, however, conducting field studies has not been possible. As stated, this survey has considered different forms of data in addition to the interviews.

Since this research is conducted within systematic theology, a theory based on theological interpretation has been used to analyze the material presented in Chapters Four and Five. This enables a deeper analysis of the interviews to address the thesis's research question.

1.4 Material

1.4.1 Selection, Contact, Implementation

To understand how the Bible is read and interpreted, I interviewed four key leaders in four different DMMs, in four different parts of the world. This means they all work in very different contexts. This could be seen as an issue since I will not be able to give a thorough account of their different cultural contexts. However, the aim is to approach this research issue from a phenomenological angle. Warrick Farah, a researcher on DMMs, states that DMMs can be viewed both methodologically and phenomenologically.¹⁶ Even though the leaders in this survey come from different contexts, they have a common ground in the DMM setting.

The informants have been elected based on their role in DMMs. I searched for informants who have played an important part in starting DMMs and are key leaders in the movements they work with. The aim was to gain a broad understanding by interviewing leaders from different movements in different areas, to see what they have in common and what might differ. I got in touch with the informants using my network and their contact information with DMM

¹⁵ Creswell & Poth 2018, 98.

¹⁶ Farah (januari 2020) Internet: www.globalmissiology.org.

leaders. The informants that I contacted were Victor John – a leader in India, Brother E – a leader in the “Silk road” area, Christian Kuhn – a leader in Switzerland, and Aila Tasse – a leader in East Africa. All who were contacted accepted the invitation to be interviewed.

The interviews with Brother E, John, and Kuhn have all been conducted face-to-face. Tasse was interviewed online using Zoom. All the interviews were recorded between September and November in the Autumn of 2024. The interviews were recorded and then transcribed. All informants were asked to answer follow-up questions via voice message or writing on Messenger. This is accounted for in the footnotes.

A verbatim transcription was made, and the text included pauses, repetitions, etc. to improve readability. The quotes used in the thesis have been edited to remove information that was not considered relevant to the content, such as repetitions. Some minor grammatical corrections have also been made. When material in a quotation has been removed, this is indicated by [...]. Other edits, such as grammatical corrections or clarifications, have been marked using square brackets.

Websites, books, and seminars have been used as secondary sources to provide background information on the informants. Additionally, the New International Version is used when Bible texts are referred to.

Since I am writing in the field of Systematic Theology, I will analyze and discuss from the perspective of Theological Hermeneutics. According to MLY Chan, the word hermeneutics describes the theory of interpretation that aims for understanding. The discipline of hermeneutics is concerned with studying the phenomenon, methods, and theories found in interpreting texts (and other nonlinguistic objects).¹⁷ The discipline of hermeneutics has many different streams, and it is a comprehensive topic. However, my research questions will be connected to this purpose using a model for Theological Hermeneutics presented by Stephen E Fowl. The choice of theory will be accounted for in Chapter Two. Fowl is writing in the field of Theological Interpretation. Theological Interpretation emphasizes that the Bible should be lived in community, and that interpretation is shaped by faith, doctrines, and life of the church. As a theoretical framework, I have primarily used Fowl; however, in my analysis, I will also reference other theologians in this field—Richard B. Hays, Ellen Davis, and Kevin Vanhoozer—who address certain aspects that Fowl does not fully cover. Since DMMs have a missional drive, I will complement them with some perspectives from Mark Naylor, a theologian who has written an article on the subject “Reflections on the Theological Validity

¹⁷ Chan 2008, 379.

of Disciple-Making Movements (DMMs). Naylor's perspective provides valuable insights regarding how *Missio Dei* can be used as a theological lens for understanding the Bible use in DMMs.”¹⁸

1.4.2 Limitations and Ethical Considerations

All interviews were conducted in English, which is not my first language as the interviewer, nor that of the informants. This must be considered, as it imposes certain limitations on both me as the interviewer and the informants in their responses. However, it should be noted that the informants are accustomed to speaking and teaching in English. The different culture between me as an interviewer and the informants must also be considered. I have consciously tried to remain aware of this in my analyses.

In conducting this research, the informants were provided with information about the purpose of the study. Informed consent was obtained considering the purpose before any interviews took place. The informants will be referred to by their whole names, except for one – Brother E. Since he is working in an area with much persecution, he has asked not to use his full name, and to be cautious about using too much information about his local work.

1.4.3 Reflexivity, Reliability, and Validity

Creswell and Poth state that readers of qualitative research have a right to know the researcher's position.¹⁹ Hence, one must acknowledge that I have a personal interest in this subject. I have worked with DMM principles in the Network of House Churches that I am involved with for several years. This means that, to some extent, I have an insider perspective on the research. However, working *with* the principles behind the DMMs isn't the same as working *in* a DMM. In Sweden, there are no examples of DMMs. This means that, even though I have some insight, I have little experience. This means that I am also approaching this research from an outside perspective. This also ensures that there is no power imbalance between me and the informants, where I hold a dominant position. As a researcher, I approach my interaction with the informants from a bottom-up perspective.

According to Brinkmann and Kvale, reliability refers to the consistency of the research results. It involves whether the informants would change their answers during the interview or

¹⁸ Naylor (fall 2021), Internet: <https://nimer.ca/reflections-on-the-theological-validity-of-disciple-making-movements-dmms/>

¹⁹ Creswell & Poth 2018, 44.

if interviewed by different individuals. They assert that leading questions can affect the answers. Brinkman and Kvale state that validity in qualitative research entails reflecting on the reliability of the informants' responses, the quality of the conducted interviews, as well as the transcription, analysis, and conclusions.²⁰ Throughout the research, a reflective approach has been used. The questions asked during the interviews were carefully considered to avoid leading **questions, and the** material has been analysed with the exclusion of responses that were identified as answers to leading questions.

1.5 Disposition

After the introduction and this first chapter, which has displayed and explained how this research is conducted, a theory based on Fowl's model on Theological Hermeneutics will be presented. Chapter Three will provide a background to DMMs and an important definition of common expressions used in DMMs. In Chapter Four, a background on the informants will be provided. Chapter Five will provide a thematic presentation of the interviews. In Chapter Six, an analysis will be presented using the theory, along with a discussion of the four other theologians. The survey results and concluding reflections will be accounted for in Chapter Seven.

²⁰ Kvale & Brinkmann 2014, 295–298.

Chapter 2: Theoretical Perspective

Since DMMs do not adhere to a formal hermeneutical framework, a theological model to work as a dialogue between Bible reading in DMMs and hermeneutics is helpful. There are several possible hermeneutical positions that share similarities with DBS while having a well-developed and clearly articulated hermeneutic. Not least, there are significant similarities with much of Pentecostal hermeneutics.²¹ However, I have chosen Fowl since his emphasis on living out the Bible and interpreting it within a Christian community aligns well with the principles of DMMs, and this approach aims to uncover the implicit hermeneutical principles present in DMMs. Fowl has presented a model for theological interpretation in his book *Engaging Scripture*, which will facilitate a dialogue between the experiences of Bible reading within DMMs and Theological Hermeneutics. Perspectives from his book *Theological Interpretation of Scripture* will also be considered. Fowl is formerly a professor of theology and dean of Loyola College of Arts and Sciences at Loyola University Maryland. In 2023, he started his appointment as CDSP's president and dean. He has written on the subject of theological Interpretation. While Fowl primarily focuses on the church in the United States and Britain, and the contexts of the informants in this thesis differ, his perspectives provide valuable insights for analyzing the research material. Although Fowl addresses a different context, his insights on interpretation apply to Christian communities' interpretation practices, regardless of context. There are certain differences between Fowl's model of hermeneutics and the informants. The goal is not to compare them but to apply some of Fowl's perspectives in analyzing the interviews. This will be discussed in Chapter Six. To complement Fowl, three theologians working in the same field have been woven into the discussion in Chapter Six: Kevin Vanhoozer, Richard B Hays, and Kevin Vanhoozer. Additionally, Mark Naylor, DTh, has written an article entitled "Theological Validity of Disciple-Making Movements (DMMs)," presenting a missional hermeneutical approach to DMMs. This will also serve as an important complement to the discussion since the missional perspective, essential in DMMs, is lacking in the field of Theological Hermeneutics. This chapter will account for the main points of Fowl's model for Theological Interpretation.

²¹ This is briefly exemplified in Chapter Seven.

2.1 Introduction to Fowl's Model

Fowl has developed his hermeneutic as a critique against historical critical research as dominating the field. He criticizes this determinate interpretation, which first and foremost views the text as a problem to be solved, not as a text to engage with. According to Fowl, this perspective assumes that the text's true meaning forms doctrine and practice and not the other way around. This, he argues, will lead to too much focus on professionals and their authority and institutional power, as they are the ones with the knowledge to establish the "true" meaning of the text.²² Instead, Fowl argues for an underdetermined interpretation, which means that one "avoids using general theory of meaning to determine interpretation,"²³ and recognizes diverse interpretive practices without prioritizing them. According to Fowl, this way of interpreting allows practices and Christian convictions to both shape and be shaped by interpretation.²⁴ This contrasts with a determined interpretation, where one seeks to find the text's true meaning. Fowl also criticizes what he calls an anti-determinate interpretation where the meaning of the text is deconstructed as a way of finding "hidden" perspectives, standing in contrast to the dominant interpretations. According to Fowl, this way of interpreting relies on the determinate interpretation since one first must establish the dominant interpretations. This approach to interpretation will also require professionals, a concept that Fowl is critical of.²⁵

2.2 Authority of Scripture

When it comes to Scripture, Fowl states that it isn't the authors of particular books that are canonical, but the text of Scripture. This means that questions regarding authorship or historical facts don't affect the authority of Scripture.²⁶ According to Fowl, a common, modern way to view the Bible is by referring to its Christological metaphysics. Just as Christ is divine and human, Scripture is seen as divine and human. Fowl argues that the problem with this view is that it tends to focus on the question of what the Bible is, and how it came to be, rather than interpretive practices. He also argues that when it comes to establishing the human side of the Bible, this often leads to a focus on historical critical questions, which, presumably, will lead to a point where the divine side of the Bible is toned down. Instead, Fowl finds that John Webster has a better starting point, arguing that doctrines about Scripture must start with

²² Fowl 1998, 10, 36.

²³ Fowl 1998, 33.

²⁴ Fowl 1998, 33,

²⁵ Fowl 1998, 10, 47.

²⁶ Fowl 1998, 180.

doctrines about the triune God. The Christian God is the Triune God, whose inner life is characterized by the self-giving, and the self-communicating of the Father, Son, and Spirit. From this triune God, man has been created. God created man in his image, to be drawn into relationship with him and others and to join his divine activity. This triune God reveals himself to mankind through revelation. This revelation, according to Fowl, is greater than Scripture. For example, God spoke to Adam and Eve directly, and states in Jer 31: 31 – 34 that the law will be written on human hearts. However, this doesn't mean making Scripture obsolete, according to Fowl. Even though Scripture is not an end in itself, Christians need to engage it for teaching, reproof, correction, and training in righteousness. Fowl additionally argues that, if revelation is understood as the self-communication of the triune God – an activity that draws humanity into a relationship with God, one can recognize the human process in the formation of Scripture in a more relaxed way. One can fully acknowledge the human process and at the same time recognize that however Scripture was formed, it “reveals all that believers need to sustain a life of growing communion with God and each other.”²⁷ Fowl states that this presupposes the Spirit's role in forming Scripture. According to the Gospel of John, the Spirit is the one who will remind us of all that Jesus has taught (John 14:6). Thus, the Spirit's role in the life of believers and in the production of the Scriptures is vital. Fowl additionally argues that when Christians call the Scripture holy, this doesn't reveal anything about the writers' motives. Regardless of the motives of the editors and writers, Christians are to view the Scripture as the revelation of God, which he uses to communicate with humans and draws them into a passionate fellowship with him. Fowl states, “Scripture is holy because of its divinely willed role in making believers holy.”²⁸

2.3 Ecclesial Authority

For Fowl, the question of interpretation depends on the community of believers. He argues that the authority of Scripture cannot be understood apart from ecclesial communities. He states that the authority of Scripture isn't something that can be drawn out from the Bible and analyzed. It must be connected to a Christian community that struggles to interpret and live out their lives in a way that worships God. Fowl calls this ecclesial authority. For a church to be able to practice this kind of ecclesial authority, Fowl presents two theological considerations. First, ecclesial authority must recognize that the Spirit has been working and is still working in the

²⁷ Fowl 2009, chap.1.

²⁸ Fowl 2009, chap.1.

Christian community and the life of Christians. Second, the church needs to identify as the body of Christ and aim to do justice to this identity. Additionally, Fowl argues that Christians must see themselves as part of the global Church throughout history when it comes to how they interpret and embody Scripture. He points out that Christian communities need to understand that they are not the first in time to interpret Scripture. They need to understand that they are part of the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church.²⁹

Fowl emphasizes that the character of the interpreter is important, especially when it comes to what he describes as counter-conventional interpretation. To exemplify what he means with counter-conventional Fowl uses Paul's interpretation of the story of Abraham in his letter to the Galatians. According to Fowl, this method of interpreting a story from the Old Testament in a totally new way isn't limited to Paul; contrary, it should be seen as an example to follow. Fowl stresses that Paul's interpretation of the Abraham story depends on his character. This becomes visible in his letter to the Galatians where he first testifies to his own character before interpreting the story of Abraham. Fowl refers to two components in Paul's description of his character that he finds important. First, Paul's testimony about himself is supported by others who did not always agree with him. Second, Paul interprets his life, through Jesus' death and resurrection. He understands himself as part of God's larger story, culminating in Jesus. Fowl points out that for Paul to be able to do this interpretation there also needed to be a Holy Spirit-filled community: "Scripture simply cannot be understood apart from a community's ongoing struggle to embody its interpretation in the aid of faithful, obedient living." Fowl calls this way of reading Scripture ecclesiocentrically. He refers to Richard Hays' book *Echoes* and lists three habits that Hays finds essential when Christian communities read scripture:

- A reading cannot be true if it denies Israel's God's faithfulness to his covenant.
- A reading cannot be real if it doesn't acknowledge Jesus' death and resurrection as the manifestation of the righteousness of God.
- A reading cannot be legitimate if it doesn't shape and form the readers into a community of believers that personifies how Christ shows the love of God.

Fowl states that he doesn't have any disagreement with Hays concerning these habits. Nevertheless, what he wants to stress in addition to Hays is that for Christians to read and interpret Scripture, there needs to be a community where habits and practices – such as forming close friendships, opening their lives to each other, viewing their lives through Christ – are formed. If one is to read and interpret like Paul, one also needs to form a character like Paul.³⁰

²⁹ Fowl 1998, 203–205.

³⁰ Fowl 1998, 153–158.

Thus, ecclesiocentric reading involves a holy Spirit-filled community, forming Christ-like interpreters by virtuous habits and practices.

2.4 Ecclesial Practices

According to Fowl, Christians are called to lifelong engagement with Scripture. Christian communities need to form good habits and practices if they are to interpret scripture in a virtuous manner. He underlines that the contexts of these communities are constantly changing, which means that what is a good interpretation in one context might differ from another context.³¹ He stresses that it is important that Christian communities form Christians who are Christ-focused and exercise a practical reasoning when interpreting Scripture. He states that:

Christian interpretation of scripture is not primarily an exercise in deploying theories of meaning to solve textual puzzles. Rather, Christian interpretation of scripture is primarily an activity of Christian communities in which they seek to generate and embody their interpretations of scripture so that they may fulfil their ends of worshipping and living faithfully before the triune God.³²

The goal for a follower of Christ is to live and worship faithfully before God. This means, according to Fowl, that Christians need to be single-minded on Jesus when reading the biblical texts. They need to be open to seeing their own sinful behavior. He underlines the importance of Christian communities that practice confession, forgiveness, repentance, and reconciliation regarding interpretation. An interpreter of the Scriptures needs to be aware of his/her own sin and open to correction. According to Fowl, interpretation is dependent on a community of close relationship, where Christians share their life together, in closeness and openness. There needs to be self-reflection and training new members in recognizing their own sinful behavior.³³ Fowl underlines that this should not lead to dwelling on one's sins but to experiencing God's forgiveness, resulting in a reconciled relationship with God and others.³⁴ Fowl also stresses the need for charity in interpretation. When it comes to interpretation, he argues that there will be differences. Hence, there will be a need for listening to each other and trying to understand the different interpretive views without dividing from each other. He points out that this doesn't mean watering down one's interpretation, but that multiple interpretations can coexist.³⁵ Furthermore, when interpreting Scripture, Fowl stresses the importance of being aware of one's words so that they don't become destructive. Christians need to speak truthfully with each other,

³¹ Fowl 2009, chap.3.

³² Fowl 1998, 161.

³³ Fowl 1998, 74–78, 81–83.

³⁴ Fowl 1998, 84.

³⁵ Fowl 1998, 87–89.

in a graceful and edifying manner. They need to be able to be upset and angry with one another without sinning.³⁶

Even though Fowl is critical of the academization of interpretation, he stresses that Christians must have some biblical knowledge when interpreting Scripture. According to Fowl, this knowledge should be gained in a community that endeavors practical wisdom and formation in Christ. This means that members of the community are to be trained in these practices. However, this will look different in different contexts. Thus, to articulate this kind of practical wisdom, Fowl suggests that practical wisdom needs to be Christ-focused and “begin from an accepted Christological standard” as formulated in Phil 2:6—11.³⁷ He also emphasizes the need for human examples where the life of Christ can be identified and imitated. Regarding interpretation, “Christians will need to mark, remember and attend to those who preceded them in the faith and who were accomplished interpreters of Scripture.”³⁸ Fowl underlines that the more Christians spend time doing this, the more likely they are to imitate their interpretation.³⁹

Fowl also emphasizes the importance of becoming a part of God’s covenant people by baptism and that catechesis needs to precede or follow it. Catechism, according to him, includes the development of knowledge in Scripture and provides a context where virtuous interpretation can take place. He also accentuates engaging in the church’s liturgy, the eucharist, and the ministry of the world as a vital aspect for Christians in their journey to God and reading the Scripture.⁴⁰

2.5 Reading with the Spirit

For Fowl, a trinitarian grounding is essential regarding interpretation. He underlines that the Holy Spirit speaks in unison with the Father and the Son. The Holy Spirit guides believers to understand the words of Jesus, in light of his death and resurrection. The Spirit’s intervention and interpretive work are crucial to carry on Jesus’ mission. Fowl shows that, by the Holy Spirit, the disciples understand biblical passages in new ways through the event of Jesus. He states, “...experience of the Spirit’s work provides the lenses through which scripture is read rather than vice versa.”⁴¹ According to Fowl, the Spirit leads the disciples to remember and connect Jesus to passages in the Old Testament. The Spirit guides them to interpret in the light of Jesus’

³⁶ Fowl 1998, 174.

³⁷ Fowl 1998, 197.

³⁸ Fowl 1998, 199.

³⁹ Fowl 1998, 190–199.

⁴⁰ Fowl 1998, 200–201.

⁴¹ Fowl 1998, 114.

life, death, and resurrection. Fowl points out that it is the Spirit who helps the disciples to remember, points them to Jesus, and emphasizes that this should be the guideline for believers who interpret scripture today.⁴² When it comes to reading the Old Testament, Fowl underlines that Christians need to view it as continuous with the New Testament, Jesus and the church. He states that the Spirit led the early Christians to revise how they understood the Old Testament. This means that Christians need to read the Old Testament, letting the Spirit guide them through the lens of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus.

If the Spirit is essential for interpreting Scripture, how does one discern the Spirit? Fowl argues that the discernment of the Spirit must be done by the ones who are recognized as the people of the Spirit, and that they need to learn how to testify to what the Spirit is doing in the lives of others. The disciples didn't just testify about themselves but about the Spirit's work and what God was doing in other people's lives. Fowl points out, "To be able to read the Spirit well, Christians must not only become and learn from people of the Spirit, but we must also become practiced at testifying about what the Spirit is doing in the lives of others."⁴³ Thus, Christians must live in close relationships with each other, forming friendships. If Christians are to detect the Spirit's work in others, they need to know them well. Fowl also stresses the importance of hospitality and welcoming strangers to build relationships as an essential virtue for acknowledging the Spirits' work in others. He argues that to be able to interpret *with* the Spirit, one must interpret the Spirit. The way to interpret the Spirit, according to Fowl, is done by recognizing the Spirit's work in other people's lives, through close friendship.⁴⁴

2.6 Reading the Old Testament

Fowl states that reading the Old Testament requires considering how it should be interpreted in a Christian context. He states that one must consider both a Jewish reading and an Old Testament scholarly reading. He suggests that Christian interpreters of Scripture should engage with those communities without losing their own purpose of interpretation. He also points out the complexity of reading the Old Testament because of the difficult but necessary relationship between the church and Israel and how Jews have been treated by Christians throughout history. With this in mind, Fowl gives two suggestions for a Christian approach to the Old Testament:

1. Christ is the subject matter of all Scripture, including the Old Testament.

⁴² Fowl 1998, 101, 127.

⁴³ Fowl 1998, 116.

⁴⁴ Fowl 1998, 118–119.

According to Fowl, this assumption can lead to a view that Christ is always hidden in the texts, and that interpretation becomes about revealing hidden truths. He finds this problematic and argues instead that it is better to comprehend Christ as the subject matter of the Old Testament in a general way. The Old Testament can point to Christ in various ways. He points out that this way of interpreting requires no specific methods.

2. Christ is the end or *telos* of the law, according to Rom 10:4.

According to Fowl, Paul seems to have in mind that interpreting the law without finding the *telos* of the law – namely Christ – cannot bring a good result. Understanding the Old Testament properly will lead to the end goal, which is Christ. Fowl points out that this doesn't seem to require a single interpretive method for Paul.

Fowl establishes that the Old Testament is valuable in providing a fuller picture of Christ. He also argues that Christ is the *telos*, not only of the law but of the lives of the believers in Christ. This *telos* directs the Christian life here and now, but also reminds them that they have not yet reached their final end. Fowl states that viewing Christ as the *telos* of both the law and the Christian life provides a framework for how Christians can read the Old Testament. He emphasizes that this doesn't require any particular interpretive method either. It also helps Christians to recognize the eschatological tension between the *telos* of the law, the life, the death, and the resurrection of Jesus, and the final end of the Christian life. It establishes that the Old and the New Testament are the instruments God uses to bring humanity to its final goal.⁴⁵

Fowl's main point is that the Old Testament points to Jesus; it is edifying for a Christian reading, and it doesn't require one single interpretive method.

2.7 Conclusion

In this section, I have accounted for Fowls' model for theological interpretation. Fowl's main point is that the interpretation of Scripture should take place within a Christian community where close friendship is prioritized and Christ-focused reasoning is nurtured. Fowl uses the term ecclesial authority to describe that the authority of Scripture cannot be understood apart from a community of believers who struggle to interpret the Scripture in their context. He mentions two criteria for ecclesial Authority: the church must acknowledge that the holy Spirit has been and still is working in the community, and the church must identify as the body of Christ. This involves recognizing the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church and being a part of it. The goal for the community is to form practices and disciplines that are essential to

⁴⁵ Fowl 2009, chap. 2.

interpret Scripture with the goal of living faithfully and in worship of the triune God. Training in practical wisdom and Christlike formation is needed in a community of believers. He highlights the importance of self-reflection, confession, forgiveness, repentance, and reconciliation. One needs to be able to accept differences in interpretation. This demands careful usage of words with each other, and that one tries to understand each other's opinions. Baptism is assumed to be a way into the Christian community, and Fowl underlines that knowledge of the Bible and Christian formation must precede or follow baptism. He argues that accurate interpretation of Scripture can only be done in a community of believers. He stresses that the Old Testament needs to be seen as continuous with the New Testament and be read in the light of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection through the Holy Spirit's reminder. Fowl views both the New Testament and the Old Testament as important Scripture for Christian reading.

These perspectives will serve as a sounding board in analyzing the research material in Chapter Six.

Chapter 3: Disciple Making Movements – background and definition

3.1 Historical Review

This chapter aims to give some insight into the background of Disciple Making Movements. This isn't an easy target, as the movements have been developing in different places worldwide for approximately three decades. Even though there are people that have helped with defining the phenomenon, and who have played an important role in initiating movements, one should take notice that these movements have been spreading fast and uncontrollably and therefore not too soon give credit to certain persons or make the assumption that the names of people being recognized are playing the most essential role in the movements. I also want to point out that many of the books written on the subject are written from a Western perspective, even though DMMs are found foremost in the Global South.

David Garrison has written one of the earliest books on movements, which came out in 2004, called *Church Planting Movements*. Garrison is a former missionary and executive director of Global Gates, a ministry engaging diaspora communities through global gateway cities. He has been a pioneer in the research of church-planting movements for over three decades. Garrison's research covered different parts of the world, and he found that these types of movements could be seen primarily in the global south, but to some extent also in the global North. In Europe, he states, it is mainly seen among the marginalized, for example, the refugees.⁴⁶

According to Garrison, David and Jen Watson – missionaries in India – reported about a new phenomenon in 1994. They had witnessed thousands of people coming to Christ and churches being founded in hundreds of cities and villages. An American survey team ensured this, being sent out to examine whether this was true. The team visited small villages and big cities like Varanasi, Patna, and Delhi, and ascertained that something new was happening – they called it a movement of God. The same year, Garrison states, reports came in that showed similar movement in Southeast Asia. A new movement of church planting could be registered

⁴⁶ Garrison 2004, 33–140, 155–168.

in several places around the world between 1990 and 2000. This movement came to be known as a Church Planting Movement – a CPM.⁴⁷

The origin of the term Disciple Making Movement – DMM – is often attributed to David L Watson and his coworkers in the organization New Generations International (the former division of City Teams International).⁴⁸ David Watson is the VP for Global Disciple Making and has written the book *Contagious Disciple Making* with his son Paul D Watson. Watson himself writes that after some time, he and his team felt that the expression CPM didn't define what they were doing based on the biblical principles. They agreed to use the term DMM instead since it was more in line with what they were doing. The focus was to make disciples, see them grow, and become new communities of faith – churches – with indigenous, local leaders.⁴⁹ Watson makes the distinction between DMMs and CPMs by explaining: “A DMM is causative; a CPM is the result.”⁵⁰

In 2003, Jerry Trousdale – a missionary and co-founder of Final Command Ministries, an organization with the vision to catalyze ministries of DMMs among unreached Muslim groups in Africa⁵¹ – and some of his African colleagues at the organization City Team, met with Watson and resonated about the biblical principles of disciples who obey God. This resulted in launching new ministries of “disciples making disciples” in Central and West Africa. Trousdale notes that, at about the same time, a group of African leaders started working more closely together to make disciples in East Africa, forming a network of ministries.⁵²

The spread of DMMs continues to increase. According to the report “State of The Great Commission” published by the Lausanne Movement, there are more than 100 million disciples in DMMs. This means that approximately 1 percent of the world is part of a DMM. The report states, “... there are over 9 million churches emerging from or part of a CPM.”⁵³ Most of these churches are house churches. According to the report, these movements are growing exponentially.

This section has provided a background on CPM and DMM, highlighting the important research conducted by David Garrison. It has also shown how David Watson has played a key role in influencing DMMs. Additionally, it has been demonstrated that these movements are proliferating – primarily in the Global South but also emerging in the Global North.

⁴⁷ Garrison 2004, 15–16.

⁴⁸ Kebreab 2021, chap. 2.

⁴⁹ Watson & Watson 2014, 3–5.

⁵⁰ Watson 2014, 7.

⁵¹ Trousdale 2012, 9–11.

⁵² Trousdale 2012, 10.

⁵³ Lenocker 2024, s 18.

The following section will demonstrate what defines a CPM and a DMM.

3.2 CPM and DMM definition

The definition CPM is an idiom coined to define what was happening in certain missional movements worldwide before the definition DMM was used. Garrison mentions some of the main characteristics of a CPM:

- Reproduces rapidly
- Multiplication – multiplies churches
- Indigenous – generated from within
- Churches planting churches
- Appears within people groups or interrelated population segments.⁵⁴

Garrison continues to describe characteristics that are the same for all CPMs:

- Extraordinary prayer
- Abundant evangelism
- Intentional planting of reproducing churches,
- The authority of God's word
- Local leadership
- Lay leadership
- House churches
- Church planting churches
- Rapid reproduction
- Healthy churches.⁵⁵

According to Garrison: “Movements differ from revivals, evangelistic campaigns, mass conversions, and the so-called ‘church growth movement’ of the previous generation (which, among other things, is associated with big churches rather than small churches).⁵⁶

One important researcher on CPMs and DMMs is Warrick Farah. Farah is a missiologist and theological educator at the Arab Baptist Theological Seminar. Farah is the editor and one of the authors of the anthology *Motus Dei*. *Motus Dei* is written by some of the most significant researchers on movements today. Farah is also the founder and a facilitator of the Motus Dei Network, and a researcher at the Oxford Centre for Mission Studies. Warrick Farah is a pseudonym for Wes Watkins and it differs which name he uses. In this thesis, he will therefore be referred to as Watkins or Farah.

⁵⁴ Garrison 2004, 21–23.

⁵⁵ Garrison 2004, 172

⁵⁶ Garrison 2004, 23–25.

According to Farah, a CPM is described as follows: “CPMs might be better classified as “lay-led small-group discipling movements,” where the small groups themselves multiply (at least up to four generations) and often in social networks. With or without favorable socio-political factors, the engine driving the CPM process tends to be easily reproducible churches with communal, interactive Bible study as their main liturgy.”⁵⁷

Sometimes the expressions DMM and CPM are used interchangeably, and one can see that the difference between them is, first and foremost, that a DMM defines the starting point of the process. A DMM leads to a CPM, and a CPM starts with disciple-making. From now on, I will use the term DMM when referring to movements in this thesis. The leaders I have interviewed work with DMMs and have witnessed CPM. However, since the term DMMs is more commonly used today to describe movements, this will be the term I use.

A DMM is often described by the way disciples multiply. In a report from the Lausanne movement, a DMM is described as having four or more generations of disciples, being dynamic and growing, and containing more than 1000 believers or 100 churches.⁵⁸ Watson characterizes a DMM as follows: “When believers obey Christ, they train people to be disciple makers. A disciple maker prays, engages with lost communities, finds Persons of Peace, helps them discover Jesus through DBS, baptizes new believers, and helps them become communities of faith, trains and mentors emerging leaders.”⁵⁹ According to Watson, a DMM focuses on the Bible, and doesn’t add any extra curriculum. He states that every culture needs to experience the Word of God speaking to them in their context. By being obedient to what they discover, find ways to be the church in a way suitable for their culture without falling into syncretism. DMMs are about discovering the commandments of Jesus and learning to obey them. It’s not a focus on knowledge but obedience. Watson refers to what the church did in the first century, giving the gospel to people, helping them obey it and become disciples – “leaving them to struggle in obeying the Word of God in their own context and history. And allowing them to develop their way of practicing worship, leadership, and governance within the confines of biblical obedience.”⁶⁰

3.2.1 Definition of Common Expressions

Before moving on, some of the common expressions used in DMMs should be explained. There might be various ways of using the terms, but here I will focus on the common ways the

⁵⁷ Farah 2021, chap. 1.

⁵⁸ Lenocker 2024, s 18.

⁵⁹ Watson & Watson 2014, 5.

⁶⁰ Watson & Watson 2014, 26.

expressions are understood. This is essential for understanding the informants during the analysis of the interviews. My effort is not to give examples of specific ways to understand the different expressions in this section since it is not the focus of this thesis. Since Discovery Bible Study (DBS) is a key term of interest in this thesis, it will not be described in this section; rather, a more thorough explanation will be provided later in this chapter.

- **Person of peace**

Finding Persons of Peace is an expression used in DMMs. This originates in Matthew 10 and Luke 10, where Jesus commands the disciples to find the person of peace when entering a new community. A Person of Peace is open to the gospel and works as a door opener into a new community.⁶¹

- **Generations**

The term generation is used to describe disciples making disciples. When disciples and churches multiply, new *generations* of disciples and churches are born. This term is often used to define a movement. For a DMM to reach the movement stage, one often talks about reaching the fourth generation.⁶² When talking about generations, 2 Tim 2:2 is often referred to: “And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable people who will also be qualified to teach others.”⁶³

- **Oikos**

Oikos is the Greek word for household. In DMMs this can be used to describe a family, an extended family, or a group of people that gathers regularly. A person of peace opens the door to an “oikos” where there is an opening to hear the Word of God. Often these “oikoi” become churches when their members come to Christ and get baptized. One example from the Bible is Cornelius, where the whole household came to Christ (Acts 10).⁶⁴

- **Obedience-based discipleship**

The term obedience-based discipleship emphasizes obedience in contrast to knowledge. This should not be understood as implying that knowledge is unimportant, but rather that knowledge without obedience is futile.

Farah points out that in Matt 28:19 – 20, Jesus seems to emphasize behavior more than knowledge, and that in a Western society, where knowledge has played an important role, there has been a lack of focus on behavior. In DMMs, there is an insistence on obedience.⁶⁵

⁶¹ Lim, 2021, chap. 6, Watson 2014, 123–129.

⁶² Tasse 2024, 148.

⁶³ Ott 2021, chap. 7.

⁶⁴ Farah 2021, chap. 1.

⁶⁵ Farah 2020, online: <http://ojs.globalmissiology.org/index.php/english/article/view/2309/5305>

Watson states, “disciple-makers make disciples, not converts.”⁶⁶ In other words, a disciple is a believer in Jesus who not only knows what Jesus said but also *obeys* his teachings. Watson refers to Matt 28:19 – 20, where Jesus commands his disciples to obey everything he has taught them and points out that to love Jesus is to obey his commands, as stated in 1 John 5:3 – 4.⁶⁷

3.3.2 The DNA of a DMM

To understand DMMs, it is important to get an overview of essential elements that characterize them. In this thesis, there is no room to describe this DNA in detail, but in this section, an outline will be given to summarize some of the main features necessary for understanding DMMs. It will start with a definition of ecclesiology and leadership. This is relevant for understanding the use of the Bible in DMMs. Examples of what is often mutual in DMMs will be provided to help illustrate the phenomenon. A special focus will be on Discovery Bible Study (DBS) since this is the most relevant subject for this thesis.

I am aware of the risk of harmonizing where there might be a spectrum of differences in DMMs. However, the purpose of this section is to highlight what is common among DMMs rather than what may differ.

3.3.2.1 Ecclesiology

Gaining an understanding of ecclesiology within DMMs can benefit from contrasting it with more “typical” forms of ecclesiology. Such an approach carries the risk of polarization. It also indicates that there is one common ecclesiology in churches that are not CPM. This is, of course, not the case. Some characteristics are often found in “typical” churches, which can be contrasted with DMMs. Aware of these risks, I find it fruitful to start by showing the main differences by referring to research done by Farah and Alan Hirsch. Hirsch is one of the co-authors of *Motus Dei* as well as the founder of 100 Movements, Forge Mission Training Network, and Future Travelers. In an article, Farah and Hirsch describe the differences between what they call “typical ecclesiology” and “movement ecclesiology.” They suggest that “typical ecclesiology” is inherited by Christendom, has a top-down authority leadership with a focus on the pastor, a professional ministry, a static/hierarchical structure, focuses on pulpit teaching, reproduces slowly, centers around a building, and grows by addition. Meanwhile, “movemental ecclesiology” emerges from Christology and is led by APEST (Apostles, Prophets, Evangelists,

⁶⁶ Watson 2014, 47.

⁶⁷ Watson 2014, 40, 47.

Shepherds, and Teachers, according to Eph 4:11). It emphasizes active participation in ministry, focuses on participatory learning, orients toward disciple-making, follows an organic or flat structure that is easy to reproduce, promotes multiplication, and centers around a household/oikos.⁶⁸

According to Farah, a minimum for calling something a church in movements is that a group of believers in Christ identifies as a church, listens to and obeys the Scriptures, practices baptism and communion, has spiritual leaders and understands that they are in unity with other followers of Christ.⁶⁹

DMM churches are formed in a community that has discovered the church's functions in its own context. David S Lim – coauthor of *Motus Dei* and president of the Asian School for Development and Cross-cultural Studies – points out that in the NT, the church appeared wherever the members met to build up each other. These small units, Lim states, became house churches that formed networks together in a decentralized system – a flat structure.⁷⁰ He describes a house church as a “disciple-making group”. Making disciples means helping believers form a holy life, with holy habits, listening to and obeying the Word of God, and sharing it with others. A house church can meet in a home, under a tree or in a coffee shop. The church meets where it suits its members best, according to Lim.⁷¹

3.3.2.2 Missiology

The principle of missiology is about joining God in his redemptive mission. In an article about missiology in movements, Watkins points out that the concept of *Missio Dei*, originating in the 20th century, “marked an important shift from understanding mission as an activity of the Church to seeing it as derived from the very nature of God himself. The idea emphasizes that God is a “missionary God.”⁷² Watkins argues that the term *Missio Dei* sadly has been overused and that among evangelicals, almost everything has been labeled “mission” and “missional”. He claims that for many Christians, “missional” has become almost exclusively about filling needs in society. He underlines that this isn’t wrong, but he also points out that most missional churches are ineffective regarding reproduction and disciple-making. Watkins claims that what has been forgotten is *how* God is missional, and he suggests another term for describing God’s

⁶⁸ Farah & Hirsch 2021, online: <https://abtslebanon.org/2021/04/15/movemental-ecclesiology-recalibrating-church-for-the-next-frontier/>

⁶⁹ Farah 2021, chap. 1.

⁷⁰ Lim, 2021, chap. 6.

⁷¹ Lim 2021, chap. 6.

⁷² Watkins 2024, online: <https://abtslebanon.org/2024/05/23/from-missio-dei-to-motus-dei-the-recovery-of-movement/>

activity in the world, namely *Motus Dei*. Watkins declares: “God is not a static deity but a vibrant presence, deeply intertwined with his creation. *Motus Dei* highlights the movement of God, which guides and shapes the universe. The God of the Bible is *motil* (Latin for “moving”) and has communicated that attribute to humanity.”⁷³ Watkins continues to describe how this movement of God can be seen in DMMs, where the mission has modified how the church thinks about mission and affects ecclesiology.

Furthermore, missiology in movements emphasizes Jesus’s commission and the kingdom. As Watkins points out, this affects ecclesiology, but also how mission is lived in words and action. Mission is about the kingdom of God working through societies, changing lives, and affecting structures. Lim calls this “kingdomization”, a word he contrasts to “christianization”. Lim states: “Kingdomization is an occupation plan, not an evacuation plan.”⁷⁴ This means that God didn’t intend for people to be extracted from society but to, by living new holy lives, change it.

This identification as kingdom people being sent out to live out and proclaim the kingdom of God, disciplining people where they live their lives, and seeing new churches grow in new societies and subcultures seems to be consistent throughout DMMs. It is important not to extract people from their societies into a new context but to let the Kingdom of God change the contexts of the new believers.

Holistic mission is also highlighted in DMMs. In DMMs, the mission is not just about evangelizing by sharing the gospel in words. Much focus is on meeting the needs of the people and serving the community. This becomes clear when studying, for example, the instructions for doing DBS. One of the questions involves sharing the needs and asking the group how the needs can be filled. It is also asked if there are needs in society that the members of the DBS group can help to fulfill.⁷⁵ Farah states that it is not the personal piety that is emphasized in DMMs but the common good of society. Starting schools and health clinics, and developing sports activities are examples of what DMMs do.⁷⁶

3.3.2.3 Leadership

In DMMs, there are various ways to describe different levels of leaders. They are often categorized into five or six levels. A distinctive feature of movements is the recognition of a

⁷³ Watkins 2024, online: <https://abtslebanon.org/2024/05/23/from-missio-dei-to-motus-dei-the-recovery-of-movement/>

⁷⁴ Lim 2021, chap. 6.

⁷⁵ Watson & Watson 2014, 152.

⁷⁶ Farah 2020, online: <http://ojs.globalmissiology.org/index.php/english/article/view/2309/5305>

disciple who shares the gospel with others and obeys the commands of Jesus as a one-level leader. The fifth or sixth level is usually described as a movement catalyst who takes on broader responsibilities to reach unreached people groups.⁷⁷

According to Farah, the outcome of ecclesiology in DMMs will lead to variation and flexibility in leadership.⁷⁸ Even if this is true, one can acknowledge some features that characterize leadership in DMMs:

- Leaders trust in the Spirit and depend on the Spirit ⁷⁹
- Leaders lead by example, not by authority or control ⁸⁰
- Leadership is a lifestyle, not a profession ⁸¹

Lim states that, in the Kingdom of God, there is a decentralized organic structure built on friendship and servant leadership. Since Jesus is Lord, no hierarchies are necessary.⁸² This way of thinking about leadership and structure is common in DMMs. One of the Bible passages highlighted when it comes to leadership is John 13:34 – 35 where Jesus teaches his disciples to “love one another as I have loved you,” that is, self-sacrificially.⁸³ Another passage is from 1 Peter 2:5 where Peter describes the priesthood of all believers. The principle of the priesthood of all believers is vital in DMMs. Every believer in Christ has a mandate to make new disciples, and all believers are empowered to minister to those in and outside of church.⁸⁴ Examples include housewives, poor widows, and taxi drivers functioning as movement leaders.⁸⁵

3.3.2.4 Prayer and miracles

Prayer is highly emphasized in DMMs. Among leaders, praying is a part of their everyday lifestyle. A survey conducted by Watson revealed that leaders in one of their ministries, who were unpaid and held regular jobs, dedicated approximately three hours per day to personal prayer. Watson states that, looking at movements worldwide, one can observe that a prayer movement always precedes a DMM.⁸⁶ Prayer is also a key element in the DMM strategy of finding a person of peace. Watson explains that in their ministry, they train people to enter new

⁷⁷ Addison 2015, 95.

⁷⁸ Farah, 2021, chap. 1.

⁷⁹ Addison 2015, 35.

⁸⁰ Watson 2014, 52, Tasse & Corley 2021 chap. 16.

⁸¹ Bailey 2021, chap. 18, Watson 2014, 51.

⁸² Lim 2021. chap. 6.

⁸³ Lim 2021, chap. 6.

⁸⁴ Tasse & Corley 2021, chap. 16, Watson & Watson 2014, 51.

⁸⁵ Kebreab 2021, chap. 2.

⁸⁶ Watson 2014, 79.

communities, searching for a person of peace, after extensive prayer.⁸⁷ Additionally, Farah points out that: “DMMs integrate the supernatural with prayer, worship, and discipleship.”⁸⁸ He states that DMMs depend on the Holy Spirit and the expectations of God doing miracles.

3.4 DBS and Inductive Bible Study

According to Dave Coles, a researcher of church-planting movements among unreached groups, different forms of inductive Bible study are commonly used in various ways in CPMs.⁸⁹ Inductive Bible study means studying the Word with a focus on observation, interpretation, and application.⁹⁰ DBS, as a method, is often accredited to Watson. However, according to Victor John, it was a development of the inductive Bible studies used among the leaders in the Bhojpuri movement.⁹¹ In 2008, Watson and John, amongst some other leaders, put together a guidebook on how to use the method.⁹² The DBS has evolved into a tool for believers and those who have not yet come to faith, helping them discover Christ. The process begins with identifying a person of peace who facilitates access to a community eager to explore the Bible’s teachings. The aim is not to remove individuals from their existing community but to initiate a DBS group within their own environment, with an external leader guiding the group’s start. The DNA of a DBS is:

- Sharing what one is grateful for
- Sharing one's needs
- Helping each other discover how they can meet each other’s needs
- Discovering if there are needs in the community that can be met together
- Holding each other accountable for what was decided in the last meeting
- Reading a passage in the Bible
- Retelling the passage in one’s own words
- Asking these questions:
 - What does the text say?
 - What does it say about God?
 - What does it say about people?
- If this is God’s word, what will you do? Is there something in your life that needs to change?
- Who are you going to tell what you have learned?

⁸⁷ Watson 2014, 127–128.

⁸⁸ Farah 2020, online: <http://ojs.globalmissiology.org/index.php/english/article/view/2309/5305>.

⁸⁹ Coles 2021, chap. 3.

⁹⁰ Olesberg 2012, chap. 1.

⁹¹ Interview with Victor John 2024-09-20.

⁹² Watson 2008, online: <chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://internationalproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/Discovery-Bible-Studies-David-L.-Watson.pdf>

When the passage is read, the second question helps focus on obedience, which is important for discipleship. The final question encourages individuals to share, enabling them to become disciple-makers themselves and to multiply what they have learned.

According to Watson, DBS is best used in a group, as people learn better together. Additionally, groups replicate faster than individuals. A group is also a good protection against heresy and bad leadership as the group members help correct each other to what the Scripture says. Groups also hold individuals accountable. Watson points out that it is essential to help the group get the right DNA as soon as possible. When people come to Christ, sharing what they are grateful for along with their needs, this naturally turns into prayer. Helping people take responsibility to fill other people's needs also becomes natural after they have become disciples.

Regarding leadership, Watson points out that the DBS group is led by a facilitator whose role is to help people stay in the word, not add extra knowledge from other people or books. The facilitator's task is not to teach but to help the group discover more by, for example, asking good questions. The facilitator is not to answer questions since he or she doesn't want people to become dependent on him or her. The point is to make people dependent on God as they experience him speak through his word.⁹³ When the outside leaders find an inside person who can lead the group, they hand the group over to the facilitator, continuing more of a mentoring relationship with him/her.⁹⁴

In DMMs, there is a high emphasis on the Bible and that people should be able to read or hear it in their own language. This has led to many different Bible translations as well as audible Bibles in different languages to be used by illiterate people. Other tools have also been developed to help facilitate DBS groups in different contexts. For example, the Discover App, and the Waha App, provide Bible texts and themes in multiple languages along with simple instructions on how to do a DBS together.

Naylor has written about hermeneutics in DMMs from the perspective of *Missio Dei*. These insights will be presented and used in the analyses of the interviews in Chapter Six.

3.5 Common Critique against DMM

There is criticism being lifted when it comes to DMMs. Coles, for example, responds to some of the critiques in his chapter in *Motus Dei*. I will account for some of the critiques that he

⁹³ Watson & Watson 2014, 141–156.

⁹⁴ Watson & Watson 2014, 129–130.

refers to and the responses he gives to them. I will focus on the critique that is of interest for the focus of this thesis.

In many movements, DBS is used with both believers and not-yet believers, and there is a focus on the process of becoming a disciple more than a focus on a moment of conversion. For example, Trousdale makes this statement: “*Disciple people to conversion, not vice versa*”.⁹⁵ Trousdale refers to how Jesus chose his disciples and taught them how to live their lives by spending time with them – discipling them before they grasped who he truly was and decided to follow him no matter the cost.⁹⁶ Discipling people before the conversion has met critique, saying that this will lead to legalism and that obedience shouldn’t be the foundation for discipleship. Instead, it should be the grace of God.

Coles answers this critique and states that he finds the expression “obedience-based discipleship” unfortunate because it can lead to the impression that the grace of God isn’t central in DMMs. At the same time, he explains that obedience-based discipleship shouldn’t be seen as a dichotomy to grace-based discipleship but to knowledge-based discipleship. Coles also problematizes Trousdale’s statement “*disciple people into conversion*,” since it can lead to thinking that one can be a disciple before accepting Christ. According to Coles, this cannot be observed in DMMs, rather, the journey and the process to accepting Jesus as Lord are emphasized.⁹⁷

Other critiques of DMMs are that it isn’t wise to let unbelievers study the Bible without any mature Christian leader and that there is no room for biblical teaching by spiritually mature leaders. This, it is argued, can lead to the spreading of false teachings.

Coles argues against this and explains that there is influence by more mature leaders even if it’s not direct. Usually, the facilitator of a DBS group is being mentored/guided by a more mature Christian who functions as a mentor. Sometimes, the mentor and the facilitator meet to review the Bible passage that will be studied before the DBS meeting. Even if the mentor isn’t attending the DBS group, he is there in the background as a support. Coles points out that in DMMs, there is a trust in the Holy Spirit and in the Word of God to teach and work in people’s lives. According to him, the argument that unbelievers shouldn’t read the Bible by themselves is an expression of disbelief in what God Himself can do through his word and Spirit. He continues to explain that in a Bible reading group within a DMM, like a DBS, the question: “Where do you see that in the Bible?” is built in from the beginning. In this way, the group

⁹⁵ Trousdale 2012, 43.

⁹⁶ Trousdale 2012, 43.

⁹⁷ Coles 2021, chap. 3.

becomes self-correcting. Coles also points out that knowledge isn't a safeguard from false teachings. Often, false teachings arise when one person is looked upon as "higher" or more educated than the others, and there is no room for questioning that person's knowledge.⁹⁸

3.6 Summary

This chapter presented a background of CPM and DMM. CPM is a collective name for church planting movements that have spread around the world during the last three decades. Garrison has shown the similarities between these movements around the world. When realizing that the starting point in these movements begins with making disciples, not planting churches, the expression DMM was established. The expression CPM is still used, though, with the emphasis that a CPM is the outcome for a DMM. Sometimes the expressions are used interchangeably. It can be established that David Watson has played a significant role in systematizing and developing the methods used in DMMs. At the same time, it should be acknowledged that many individuals are involved in discovering and developing various methods, and that the method itself is neither the foundation nor the starting point for the movements. Instead, the Holy Spirit guiding people to discover biblical principles for discipleship and mission seems to be the common denominator for these movements. Both Tasse and John show how God has been working in different areas before seeing a breakthrough in movement and multiplication, and before the use of DMM methods. One should also recognize that DMM is about church and church planting – this cannot be separated from making disciples.

This chapter also presented examples of common expressions and characteristics found in DMMs. It has shown how ecclesiology and leadership are viewed and given an overview of how missiology is understood. The aim was to paint a picture of the phenomenon DMMs that would be helpful for further reading. Additionally, some of the critiques against DMMs and Cole's response to this have been presented.

In the next chapter, a background of the different contexts of the informants will be provided.

⁹⁸ Coles 2021, chap. 3.

4. Background of the informants

In this chapter, background information about the informants will be provided. This aims to show how the informants relate to DMMs, their role in movements, and their active context. The purpose is not to analyze if the movements can count as DMMs according to how DMMs are defined in the earlier chapter. Analyzing whether the movements can be described as DMMs would be a different task than the focus of this thesis.

In this section, I have chosen to include how the informants view ecclesiology and leadership. The cause of this is twofold. First, it demonstrates the similarities and differences between the movements of which the informants are part. This illustrates why the informants can be understood as part of a DMM and highlights the diversity within DMMs. Second, it is to give a background for understanding the setting in which the Bible is read and applied. Ecclesiology and leadership are essential aspects of understanding hermeneutics.

In this section, I have gathered information mainly from the interviews, seminars, the movement's websites, and the books written by Tasse and John.

4.1 Christian Kuhn

Kuhn lives in the French-speaking part of Switzerland. He is a leader in a DMM called @home but works full-time in a regular job as a director of the Swiss Evangelical Alliance. Besides his work with the Evangelical Alliance, he works as an engineer in start-up projects. He leads a small church that meets in his family's house. Kuhn is married and has two children. He has no formal theological education. However, he describes that he studies theology in different ways regularly. In the work in Switzerland, they have seen what Kuhn recognizes as a DMM; there are up to nine generations of disciples, and there are about 2800 people connected to the movement. The movement consists almost exclusively of new believers who have become disciples (i.e, they have not immigrated from other churches). The movement reaches people from different cultures – for example, people groups from the Balkan and North Africa, people from different social backgrounds, and of different ages. Kuhn describes that in the city, they tend to reach more immigrants, whilst in the countryside, they reach more people of Swiss origin. For this movement to develop, Kuhn recon it has taken about 15 – 20 years.⁹⁹

The network @home is what Kuhn describes as a "Petrinian" context. This means that people in the network invite people to their homes, to join them, as Peter did in Jerusalem. This

⁹⁹ Interview with Kuhn, 2024-09-10, Voice message on WhatsApp from Kuhn, 2024-10-02.

stands in contrast to what he calls a "Paulinian" context, which he describes as a context where you find persons of peace, like Paul did when he traveled.¹⁰⁰ It is worth noting that this differs from how DMMs are usually described and from the other informants whose context could be described as "Paulinian".

Kuhn explains that he and his wife train new disciples by inviting people to live with them for a more extended period – about three to eight months. It might involve couples, singles, or whole families. Mainly, the people are non-Christians. By inviting them into their family, they become a part of their lives and see how they handle everyday life, struggles, and difficulties following Jesus. This way, Kuhn explains, people get to know that his and his family's lives aren't perfect, and they get to give an example of how their imperfect lives relate to following Christ. Kuhn calls this "doing incarnated disciples in real life."¹⁰¹ In the movement, they have about ten houses discipling people in this way. Thus, this is not the only way disciples are being made in the movement, but a way that Kuhn and his family exemplify.

4.1.2 Ecclesiology

Kuhn stresses that, even if he doesn't think that the church is the goal, it is essential because it is the place where disciples multiply. He admits that the Bible does talk about church, but not in the way that people often tend to imagine it. Kuhn implies that the Bible talks about the body of Christ as an organism, not an organization. He states that having churches allows the body of Christ to meet each other, develop itself, encourage one another, pray, and worship together. The body of Christ is not validated through the number of churches but through the number of disciples, because it's an organism and not a structure.¹⁰²

Kuhn describes the church by referring to Acts 2:42-47 and describes that this is how they understand and live church; church is something you are, not something you go to. In the movement, church isn't defined by how many people are a part of the church. At the same time, Kuhn underlines that when a church contains about 20 people, it tends to need a program, which they want to avoid. That is why, when a church reaches about 20 people, they send out people to start new churches or groups. Sometimes, they send them into a different area, and sometimes in the same context. The goal is to let people go.¹⁰³

When Kuhn refers to church, he does it in terms of a spiritual family, with mothers and fathers, grandparents, and children. He explains that disciples who are mature enough to "start

¹⁰⁰ Voice message on WhatsApp from Kuhn, 2024-09-17.

¹⁰¹ Interview with Kuhn, 2024-09-10.

¹⁰² Interview with Kuhn, 2024-09-10.

¹⁰³ Interview with Kuhn, 2024-09-10.

their own spiritual families” and become parents by themselves are encouraged to do so. When they have started new churches, they connect to the regional organization of the movement. Generally, the churches meet as a church every other week. This is because many of the disciples who are part of the church also lead their own groups, so they must take time with those groups. However, Kuhn points out that people meet daily in different physical and digital constellations. Kuhn describes the movement as a Christ-centered community.¹⁰⁴ The churches in this movement are called “@home” because they meet at a home. Kuhn says: “We say we are a discipleship movement to DMM with a strong option on house churches because it's the size of the church. [This is] The expression of the church that really fits well with the family dynamic.”¹⁰⁵

4.1.3 Leadership

Kuhn states that every disciple who makes disciples is a spiritual parent and that leaders “pop up” in relation to the people who are training disciples. In the movement, he explains that one expects everyone to become a leader in some aspect – that they lead themselves and their families and make disciples, which means that they become spiritual parents. When a disciple leads another disciple, Kuhn calls it basic leadership, and the aim is that every disciple will lead like this. He states that they also have ways to help leaders discover their giftings, but mainly, people are trained as disciples and grow into leadership as they mature, and some become regional leaders.¹⁰⁶

Kuhn describes leadership as being Christ-centered and stresses that this affects how leadership is defined in their ministry as servanthood and as a function, not a position. He also emphasizes that the movement has a culture of grace when training leaders. He refers to how the Bible contains stories of failure and points out that when people fail, they help them to try again. He describes how they focus on collaborative leadership and a five-fold ministry with apostles, prophets, evangelists, and shepherds/teachers working together in the ministry. This team is also the founding team, although many of the founders in the team have been replaced (even though they haven't left the movement). He points out that it's not a function you have for life.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁴ Interview with Kuhn 2024-09-10, Kuhn, seminar 2024-09-10.

¹⁰⁵ Interview with Kuhn 2024 -09 -10.

¹⁰⁶ Interview with Kuhn, 2024-09-10.

¹⁰⁷ Interview with Kuhn, 2024-09-10.

In the movement, both women and men are in leadership, locally and regionally. Kuhn underlines that there have been women leaders in the ministry from the start.¹⁰⁸

4.2 Victor John

Victor John has been working with church planting for over three decades. The Bhojpuri movement started about 25 years ago and is still spreading, reaching different people groups in the North of India. The movement has spread to Hindu people with different casts, tribal people, and other marginalized people groups in the society.¹⁰⁹

John was brought up in India and went from being a pastor who wanted to see people fill up the church to start planting new churches. He worked in an area known as the Graveyard of Missions, and he was frustrated that nothing seemed to happen. Then, John describes how God started showing him possibilities on how new things could happen in simple ways. John shares how he had to unlearn everything that he had learned in order to do things in a different way. He began working in new ways in 1989. At the time, he had never heard about movements. He just wanted to see new churches start and Jesus worshipped in new areas. John describes that he learned about movements in 1998 when some visitors joined one of their conferences. The visitors from the Southern Baptist church interviewed about 800 pastors – all from a Hindu background and realized that these pastors all had started new churches. John explains that it was hearing the visitors talking about how remarkable what they witnessed was that it became clear to him what was happening around him, namely that there was a movement of disciples making disciples, sharing Jesus in the networks of their existing relationships, and that they were teaching others what they had learned for themselves. John says that, instead of labeling the new churches Pentecostals or Baptists, he started calling them pregnant churches – easy to reproduce, and with a vision to start new churches.

John is married and has three children. His role in the movement has changed over the years. He has been a disciple-maker, a mentor of disciple-makers, a pastor of disciple-makers, and now he looks at himself more as a facilitator, or catalyst, trying to help the movement to keep multiplying. This means that he works together with people, training them and equipping them, listening to their struggles, and finding solutions together with them.¹¹⁰

One of the most successful strategies for the Bhojpuri movement has been working with Community Learning Centers (CLC). By starting a CLC, the mission workers gain credibility

¹⁰⁸ Interview with Kuhn 2024-09-10.

¹⁰⁹ John & Coles 2019.

¹¹⁰ Interview with John 2024-09-20, John & Coles 2019.

by doing good for society, meeting needs, and connecting with people in new areas that sometimes are closed to the gospel. This way, people get to see the gospel lived out and see the love of God, and then they are more open to also hearing the gospel.¹¹¹

As mentioned, the movement has grown rapidly and is estimated to be over 20,000,000 disciples.

4.2.1 Ecclesiology

John describes a church as a group of disciples who are obedient to Christ; they are baptized and meet according to Acts 2:42-47 – to worship, for fellowship, for breaking of bread. They depart with one commitment: until they meet again, they will be applying the teachings of Christ in their daily life. They have identified leaders who recognize themselves as leaders. Sometimes, the leaders are the ones who founded the church. He states that a church needs to meet regularly. It can be small, with just five people, or it can be big. The number is not relevant according to John, but the function is. Where they meet doesn't matter. It can be at a coffee place or under a tree.¹¹² He describes that the people visiting a house church can be disciples, people who are being discipled, as well as people who are interested. Many house churches have attendants who are not yet baptized. A house church meeting usually contains worship, praying, praying for the sick, Bible reading, and sharing testimonies. John explains that even if someone teaches or preaches, it is not a one-man show, but everyone participates. In the movement, John describes that a typical house church has 40 – 100 members.¹¹³

4.2.2 Leadership

In the movement, there are different leadership roles. John states that a leader emerges when he or she is making more disciples, leading people to Christ, and teaching them the commands of Jesus. A leader has a passion for lost people. John explains that this represents one type of leadership. Another type of leadership, John asserts, is church leadership.¹¹⁴ In the house churches, there are usually four to six leaders, called elders. The elders can be both women and men. In the movement, both women and men are leading in various functions.¹¹⁵ John underlines that when it comes to leadership, the most important book in the Bible is the book of Matthew. He explains that the book of Matthew contains what is important for discipleship,

¹¹¹ John & Coles 2021, chap. 17.

¹¹² Interview with John 2024-09-20.

¹¹³ John & Coles 2019, 239 – 241.

¹¹⁴ Interview with John 2024-09-20.

¹¹⁵ Interview with John 2024-09-20., John & Coles 2019, 240.

such as forgiveness, dealing with money, prayer, and relationships. John argues that leadership is first and foremost about discipleship. One cannot separate them.¹¹⁶

In the movement, they encourage people in a church to practice the five-fold gifts as they are referred to in Ephesians 4. According to John, they teach the church how these gifts should be understood and help them discover the gifts. Furthermore, John asserts that they don't appoint leaders in the movement. He explains that if they were to appoint leaders, the leaders would think of being hired and paid, as the appointment is connected to employment. John underlines that leadership isn't about employment or church buildings. Although he states, that sometimes a leader who leads several churches in an area gets financial support from the local church.¹¹⁷

Leaders in the movement gather annually, and they gather between 8,000 and 10,000 leaders from different areas. They meet for prayer, fellowship, and accountability. Instead of building hierarchical leadership, John asserts, they build it horizontally. If a leader has the same DNA, vision, and teaching, they connect. They have leadership training on different levels and focus on reproductive leadership, offering mentorship.¹¹⁸

John underlines that leadership is about being humble and serving others. He stresses that if humbleness and servanthood aren't significant for leadership, leadership will be about position, hindering the work since everyone will try to control everyone.¹¹⁹

John talks about simple leadership and explains that this doesn't mean that they avoid the word of God, maturity, counseling, or discipline. It doesn't mean a weak leadership. He emphasizes that someone willing to go to jail for their faith can't be called a weak leader. There is commitment and passion. A leader is passionate about reaching people and sharing Christ. He stresses that the core of leadership is discipleship.¹²⁰

4.3 Brother E

Brother E is working with the Turk people along the Silk Road. Since he's working in an area with much persecution, he has asked not to use his full name and to be cautious about using too much information about the work he is a part of.

Brother E grew up a Muslim but became a Christian in high school. He explains that nowadays, he often refers to himself as a Muslim who follows Christ, since the word Christian

¹¹⁶ Interview with John 2024-09-20.

¹¹⁷ Interview with John, 2024-09-20.

¹¹⁸ John & Coles 2019, 213–214.

¹¹⁹ John & Coles 2019, 212.

¹²⁰ Interview with John, 2024-09-20.

is often associated with what a Muslim would see as negative aspects of Western culture: infidelity, heavy drinking, and promiscuity.¹²¹

Brother E has worked with disciple-making and church planting for about 25 years. He is married and has three children. The organization Global Nomads, which he started, currently works among marginalized groups in several areas. They are training church-planters, leaders, and ministers in different ways to help with various needs. For example, they help Roma people with sustainable agriculture for healthy eating and help people start up their own businesses – helping people to help themselves.¹²²

The focus group of the organization is Turks in Europe, especially in the Balkans and Turkey. Brother E describes how they work in many different areas, including Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, and Afghanistan. He states that they also work in Iran, in Northwest China where the Uyghurs live, and all the way up to Siberia. They work with almost 60 distinct Turkic people groups, all of which are unreached by the gospel. The goal, Brother E explains, is to engage all of them and see church planting initiatives in all the people groups. His role in the organization is, what he describes as a church planting trainer. This means that his role primarily is to be there for the leaders, to equip the leaders, encourage them, and be someone who comes alongside them. He explains that he makes sure that they focus on the vision, train people, and help them to train others.¹²³

4.3.1 Ecclesiology

Brother E explains that church can be defined in different ways, but that the way he is most fond of is defining it as a spiritual family: “People that come together and they're they're sharing their lives. They're sharing meals. Encouraging one another, lifting one another up, and, in order to go out, and bring the Kingdom, into their spheres of influence.”¹²⁴ He states that one can look at church on three levels: the Universal church of all times, the whole body of Christ in a region, and the immediate church where people meet regularly – which he calls a house church. He continues to explain that even if the Bible doesn't give a direct recommendation of how many people a church must consist of, there are some guidelines: the place where the church meets limits how many can gather, but there is also a limit when it comes to how many can participate and read the Bible together, giving interpretation and talking about application. The church also needs to be able to share meals and make sure everyone is being cared for. When

¹²¹ Brother E, seminar 2024-11-06.

¹²² Global nomads, online: <https://nomads.global/en/>

¹²³ Interview with Brother E, 2024-11-05.

¹²⁴ Interview with Brother E, 2024-11-05.

people can't participate in this, it is too big. He explains that this can differ between cultures and that the church is organic in its structure. Instead of bringing new people to an already existing church, they try to start new churches.¹²⁵

Brother E stresses that the term *ecclesia* is interesting and that one needs to think about what people heard when Jesus said, "I will build my *ecclesia*." He points out that for those people, *ecclesia* was a political term, not religious. When Jesus said that the gates of hell will not prevail, Brother E indicates that it means that Jesus put his government over the gates of hell – the other government – and that this means that there is a fight between the two. He underlines that this has nothing to do with religion. Instead, it is about God's people coming together to be equipped to bring God's orders into this world. Based on this, Brother E explains that he finds the whole concept of the Kingdom more interesting than the church as we usually see it. However, he asserts that the church as it is viewed in the New Testament is an interesting idea as God's government.¹²⁶

4.3.2 Leadership

On the house church – level, Brother E talks about leadership in terms of mothers and fathers who open their hearts, homes, and fridges to take care of the flock. He explains: "It's not really leadership as we know, like preparing themselves, you know, to give a sermon or something, anything like that. It's more facilitating..."¹²⁷ When they have a network of house churches, they appoint elders, overseeing the network and ensuring every house church has what it needs. In contrast to the other informants, Brother E states that, as far as he knows, there are no women elders in the networks. He also underlines that they always make sure that the leadership is always in the hands of the locals.

Besides elders, Brother E explains that there are apostolic teams, making disciples and starting churches in new areas. The apostolic teams are the ones who lay hands on and appoint the elders in the networks. In the apostolic teams, both men and women are functioning. There are also people functioning as evangelists, prophets, shepherds, and teachers. Their task is to equip the church to function in these areas on its own. That is, a shepherd's role is not just to take care of people but to equip and train the church to care for one another.¹²⁸

¹²⁵ Interview with Brother E, 2024-11-05.

¹²⁶ Interview with Brother E, 2024-11-05.

¹²⁷ Interview with Brother E, 2024-11-05.

¹²⁸ Interview with Brother E, 2024-11-05.

4.4 Aila Tasse

Tasse describes himself as a former Muslim who met Jesus when he was 14 years old. He is now married and has three children. Tasse has been working on the mission field focusing on unreached people groups – mostly Muslims and Animal Tribes – since 1991. He is the Founder and President of Lifeway Global and the Regional Director for New Generations in East/Southern Africa. Tasse has an M.A. in Missiology, a Th.M. in Leadership from Presbyterian University in Seoul, and a Doctorate in Transformational Leadership from Bakke Graduate University in Dallas.

Tasse describes how he, in 1989, had an encounter with God and saw, among other things, a vision of cabbages growing in the Chalbi Desert in Northern Kenya – a place where no cabbage could grow, and the passage from Isaiah 43:18 – 20 came to his mind. He felt God saying to him: “I will cause these rivers to grow cabbages in the desert.”¹²⁹ This became the starting point for Tasse to do missions in areas with unreached people groups in the desert in northern Kenya. He was convinced that God would give the growth and that it wouldn’t depend on his effort. He would only join God in his work. Tasse states: “After decades of mission efforts, God is now growing cabbages in the deserts of North Kenya!”¹³⁰

Tasse explains that when God called him, there was no movement. The churches he and the ones he worked with planted became missional, sending Indigenous people to the unreached people groups with a focus on Muslim people. Tasse describes how he was inspired by reading books about CPMs, and in 2004, they started seeing movement in the region in which they were working. In 2008, Tasse started learning about DMM – and now, in 2024, he declares that they can see how a DMM is spreading.¹³¹ He describes his role as a catalyst, which means he travels to different places and casts vision, does training, and brings people together until people start adopting movements. He then helps teams in those locations and builds networks and collaborations around the movements. Another role he has is mentoring movement leaders, helping to increase their capacity, and coaching them.¹³²

4.4.1 Ecclesiology

Tasse defines a church as a group of baptized people, but it can also involve gatherings of not-yet believers. He says that the church is not determined by where it meets, or by its size, but by

¹²⁹ Tasse 2024, 22.

¹³⁰ Tasse 2024, 24.

¹³¹ Interview with Tasse, 2024-09-24.

¹³² Voice message on WhatsApp from Tasse, 2024-11-22.

its functions. The church – the group of believers comes together and does the functions of the church, which are found in Bible passages such as Acts 2:42-47: worship, fellowship, breaking bread, learning, and obeying the scriptures. Tasse continues: “(...) they're also willing to go out and share their faith with others.”¹³³ Tasse also states that baptism and the appointment of leaders are important for a church to become and be a church. He explains that many times, in the movement, they start with a DBS group of people who are getting to know Jesus, but they don't call the group a church unless they are functioning in a way that the Bible describes a church. Tasse explains that the church isn't an institution but a body and a family. He says that what we often call a church today is not in line with what the Bible describes as a church. He refers to what happened with the church and its institutionalization after Constantine and criticizes what he describes as the organized religious system that became the church. When asked about the differences between a biblical church and an unbiblical church, he says that a biblical church is an organism, not an organization. He describes that some churches that have started in the movement meet in buildings, and some meet under a tree. He explains: “We don't need anything to have a church. We need people, we need God's word, and we need God's spirit.”¹³⁴ He states that the biblical understanding of ecclesiology is that the group of people in the church is self-sustaining, that their needs were met, and that they went out and shared the gospel with their friends and family. He expresses that this is lost in the organized church: “Because organized church, or traditionally it all depended on clergies. Rather than depending on ordinary people, that's a big difference.”¹³⁵

4.4.2 Leadership

Tasse explains that when he talks about leadership development, he refers to leaders who will develop from the lost people – leaders from the inside, not the outside. He asserts that leadership is not about positions but about functions, roles, and responsibilities. He looks for people with leadership qualities on the inside. Tasse states: “Am I willing to pour my life into them to develop what God has put in them without creating a believe of a position so that they can start changing how they think and act? How am I going to coach them towards what God is growing them without, you know, pride and all those? So those are the things in movement that we do and majority of very productive leaders are leaders that you raise from inside.”¹³⁶ He states that when he searches for new leaders he doesn't look for perfection, because no one is perfect. He

¹³³ Interview with Tasse, 2024-09-24.

¹³⁴ Interview with Tasse, 2024-09-24.

¹³⁵ Interview with Tasse, 2024-09-24.

¹³⁶ Interview with Tasse, 2024-09-24.

searches for a gift to lead, a passion for the lost, a passion for the Great Commission, commitment to the cause, and obedience to Christ. If someone wants to go in that direction/they can be a leader. Tasse explains that leadership is about serving and refers to when Jesus washes the feet of his disciples, telling them to act as servants.¹³⁷ He describes different levels of leadership that they have observed in the movement:

1. Person of peace – the one who opens the door for the gospel in their sphere of influence.
2. Discovery Bible Study Group Facilitator – the one who facilitates a DBS group in his/her home.
3. Multiple Group Leader – an outside leader who coordinates DBS – groups
4. Mentors and Coaches – leaders who have been mentored and developed and now oversee several Multiple Group Leaders.
5. Movement Leaders – when the ministry has grown into at least four generations of churches that reproduce churches (including at least 100 churches), with multiple leaders in each generation, these leaders are trained to structure the movement in a healthy way. This includes deeper training to develop pastoral gifts, such as basic Bible knowledge – reaching beyond DBS.
6. Catalysts – a leader who launches new movements.¹³⁸

In the movement, both men and women are leaders. Tasse points out that some of the key leaders are women. Regarding the gifts mentioned in Ephesians 4 – apostles, prophets, evangelists, shepherds, and teachers – Tasse emphasizes that they are not about positions, but rather about gifts given to the body of Christ. It's not given to the individuals but to the whole body; given to serve the church and equip the saints.¹³⁹

4.5 Summary

This chapter has provided information about the informants' backgrounds. I have given examples of their ecclesiology and understanding of leadership.

One can conclude that all the informants give examples of some type of organic structure. The word organic or organism is used by Kuhn, Brother E, and Tasse. Even though John doesn't use this label, he describes the church in terms that could have a loose structure. Kuhn, John, and Tasse all mention that the church is defined by its functions according to Acts 2:42 – 47. Brother E and Kuhn both describe the church as a spiritual family. All informants mention the function of the ministry gifts found in Ephesians 4 (APEST). However, how these roles function differs between the movements. All the informants, except Brother E, say that the movements

¹³⁷ Interview with Tasse, 2024-09-24.

¹³⁸ Tasse 2024, 236–241

¹³⁹ Interview with Tasse, 2024-09-24.

they are part of have women leaders in all functions. In the movement Brother E is a part of, they don't appoint women as elders.

In the next chapter, the results from the interviews will be presented.

Chapter 5: Interview results and insights

In this chapter, the answers from the interviews will be presented and analyzed. This chapter has been structured around different themes that emerged from the interviews. It is divided into five sections. The interviews were focused on letting the interpreters speak freely about their view on the Bible, how they use it, asking questions, and follow-up questions about a given subject. In the first section, *Understanding Biblical Perspectives*, the informants' perspectives on the Bible will be demonstrated. In the second section, *Exploring Biblical Practices*, the focus is on how the Bible is used by the informants and if they use any specific Bible reading methods. The third section, *Insights into Teaching Approaches*, will focus on the informants' understanding of teaching. In the fourth section, *Interpretation*, the informants' view on where and how biblical interpretation should take place is viewed. In this section, the question of heresy is interwoven. Finally, in the fifth section, titled *Hermeneutical approaches to the Old and New Testament*, the focus will be on how different Bible reading methods handle the Old Testament and what kind of interpretation different methods lead to regarding women and leadership.

In Chapter Six, the insights from the interviews will be further analyzed using the theoretical perspective presented in Chapter Two, structured with the purpose of answering the research questions.

5.1 Understanding Biblical Perspectives

In this section, the informants' perspectives on the Bible will be demonstrated. The focus is on how the informants describe the Bible, their beliefs about the importance of its context, and the role of the Holy Spirit in reading and understanding the Bible. An essential point to emphasize before proceeding is that the informants express a mindset of multiplication. Kuhn and Tasse use the word multiplication to refer to a movement of disciples making disciples and placing themselves and their movements within this framework.¹⁴⁰ This framework can also be found indirectly in the answers of John and Brother E, in the way they refer to disciples and reproduction.¹⁴¹ This should be regarded as a foundational background for understanding how they respond to the questions presented in this chapter.

¹⁴⁰ Interview with Kuhn, 24-09-10, Interview with Tasse, 24-09-24.

¹⁴¹ Interview with Brother E, 24-11-05, Interview with John, 24-09-20.

5.1.1 The Bible as the word of God, revelation, and highest authority

Tasse, John, and Kuhn all describe the Bible as the Word of God. Kuhn describes his perspective as rather conservative. He defines it as a progressive reading of the Bible but with conservative values. He gives an example of this and refers to same-sex attraction. He explains that in his network, they have a conservative view on this and that they are clear about the Bible text; at the same time, they are welcoming people who identify as same-sex attracted. According to Kuhn, these people express that they don't feel judged, because the movement is a context of love and respect. Kuhn points out: "They say thank you for being clear about the Bible texts, because if you want to trust the Bible, we have to be clear on a full confidence or full respect of the Bible, not just some passages. So it's the full Bible is God's word, yeah".¹⁴²

John, Kuhn, and Tasse define what they mean by "the word of God" as a way that God speaks to us. Kuhn explains that this isn't the only way that God speaks; he also speaks in the prophetic ways, for example, in revelations, but that reading the Bible is the easiest way to hear God's voice. By reading the Bible, he states that we can be in personal contact with God, and that the foundation in their context is the Word of God.¹⁴³

Tasse reflects on how the Bible should be understood as the word of God: [...] I call it the word of God because it's changed my life [...] It's the word of God, and it's inspired by the Holy Spirit. Of course, it's a collection of books. God used individual people and inspired them to write it.¹⁴⁴

John defines what he means when referring to the Bible as the word of God: "I think when I read it, God speaks to me. When I apply it, it becomes the power of God. And when I live it, it becomes life." He states that the Bible doesn't change since it is inspired by the Holy Spirit.¹⁴⁵

Brother E doesn't use the expression Word of God to describe his view of the Bible. He describes it as God's revelation to us and the highest authority. He says that when reading the Bible God speaks and calls us into action: "The Bible is a dangerous book, because the moment we open it and we read it, we will see what God wants us to do [...] it's also calling us into action, be a doer of the word, not only a listener."¹⁴⁶

Thus, one can establish that the informants view the Bible as the Word of God, or as the Revelation of God, and that it is inspired by the Holy Spirit. Tasse, John, and Brother E also

¹⁴² Interview with Kuhn, 24-09-10.

¹⁴³ Interview with Kuhn, 24-09-10

¹⁴⁴ Interview with Tasse, 2024-09-24.

¹⁴⁵ Interview with John, 2024-09-20.

¹⁴⁶ Interview with Brother E, 2024-11-05.

link the Bible as the Word of God to the experience of God's power in different ways; to life transformation, and a call to action.

5.1.2 Scripture as Direct Word or Contextual Interpretation?

Three of the informants express that the Bible should be read both in its context and as a direct word. Kuhn declares that God sometimes uses it to “touch your heart and speak to you”. But he also states that understanding the context helps to spread healthy teachings.¹⁴⁷ Tasse underlines that the Bible is written in a certain context in a certain location and that it has a certain culture in it: “And the fact that God can use those same stories to speak to me of what happened in Israel or in Palestine today, it's a fact that the word of God is universal, but it has context in it. So, if you will read a story, you are reading that story within the context of that time and you look at how it speaks to you today.”¹⁴⁸ Brother E points out that even though there is a need to look at the context of the written text, that can be complicated. He underlines that looking at the context doesn't mean that “...certain things don't count anymore because it was written in that context.”¹⁴⁹ John has a different perspective and declares:

The heart of man has not changed. Times may have changed, context may have changed, but the heart of man has not changed. And what the Word of God does is that it really deals with you heart issue, you know, and the Bible is very clear. It says the heart of man is deceitful, and is totally evil [...]What the word of God does is surgery in our heart [...] It definitely brings transformation.¹⁵⁰

This shows that even though the informants emphasize understanding the context of the text, they also underscore that the Bible speaks directly and has the power to transform the reader's life.

5.1.3 The role of the Holy Spirit in Bible reading

All informants believe that the Holy Spirit is important when it comes to reading the Bible. Brother E declares that without the Holy Spirit, one cannot understand the word of God. The Spirit is the one who leads people into the truth.¹⁵¹ Kuhn points out that reading the Bible with the Holy Spirit helps to directly connect with the heart of God and understand the word of God. He states: “And if we have the author of the Bible helping us to understand the Word of God, I think it's the best way to be protected and also to understand or receive the messages we have

¹⁴⁷ Interview with Kuhn, 2024-09-10.

¹⁴⁸ Interview with Tasse, 2024-09-24.

¹⁴⁹ Interview with Brother E, 2024-11-05.

¹⁵⁰ Interview with John, 2024-09-20.

¹⁵¹ Interview with Brother E, 2024-11-05.

to receive through the word.”¹⁵² John underlines that the Holy Spirit wasn’t only active when the text was written, but every time the word is preached or the word is preached, read, or applied. He says: “You know his presence becomes real, his voice becomes clear, and his inspiration becomes clear.”¹⁵³ John continues and explains that if you just talk about the Holy Spirit without the word of God, you can get carried away. The Word of God is needed to discern between the presence of the Holy Spirit and your feelings. Thus, the Word of God needs to be read with the Spirit, at the same time, the Word of God works as an instrument of discernment of the Spirit.¹⁵⁴

Tasse asserts that since the Holy Spirit influenced the people who wrote the Bible. He is the author of the Scriptures. So, when reading the Scriptures, Tasse says, “I’m also listening to the Holy Spirit.” He also states that the Holy Spirit highlights different things when reading the Bible, “And also, the Holy Spirit still shows us things in our lives, and things that the word is speaking to us.”¹⁵⁵

5.1.4 Conclusion

Three of the informants describe the Bible as the Word of God. Brother E doesn’t use this expression, as he refers to the Bible as God’s revelation. All informants believe that God speaks through the Bible. Brother E focuses on how the Word of God calls us into action. Three of the informants think that one should look at the context of the Bible. Kuhn underlines that God can speak through his word in a direct way but that it is good to read it in context to have sound teachings. John has a different angle and refers to how the Bible affects the human heart.

All informants believe that the Holy Spirit is needed to understand the Bible correctly. Three of them point out that the Spirit was active when the Bible was written, and they all believe that the Spirit is active when reading the Bible.

5.2 Exploring Biblical Practices

In this section, the focus is on the biblical practices of the informants and the Bible reading methods they use.

¹⁵² Interview with Kuhn, 2024-09-10.

¹⁵³ Interview with John, 2024-09-20.

¹⁵⁴ Interview with John, 2024-09-20.

¹⁵⁵ Voice message on WhatsApp from Tasse, 2024-11-19.

5.2.1 Personal Bible reading

All of the informants state that it is important to read the Bible individually. Brother E declares that he wants to be immersed in the Word so that the Word shapes his way of thinking and acting. He wants to know how to obey God and understand what God wants him to do and behave. Brother E states: “I think we should be reading it individually, that's for sure. Just to hear God speaking to us individually. And also for nourishment.”¹⁵⁶

Kuhn describes how he reads the Bible both individually and corporately. He states: “I personally live different ways to to, read the Bible.” He explains that he and other people in the movement have various ways to read the Bible. Sometimes they read shorter passages and sometimes long passages to understand the context better and to understand the Bible as a whole story.¹⁵⁷

John describes that he reads the Bible regularly, does Bible study, or meditates on a verse. He explains that he often listens to the Bible on his phone. He says: “Because I feel that sometimes it cleans the atmosphere, with too much pollution, too much evil, too many other spirits that have come into my atmosphere interfering with my relationship with God and with one another.”¹⁵⁸ John points out that for him, prayer is equally important to reading the Scripture.

Tasse describes that he reads the Bible for personal growth and obedience. He explains that the Bible should be read chronologically: “[...] so that you will be able to follow stories after stories. Many people try to run through the Scriptures [...] the best way to read and study the Bible is [to] get through from passage to passage. So, pick a book, start reading the background, read the verses, try to understand, listen to God, to what it speaks to you, and to your situations, and [...] share with people.”¹⁵⁹

5.2.2 Reading the Bible corporately

The informants emphasize different aspects of reading the Bible corporately. John explains that the movement in India isn't consistent. He says: “[...] it's not a cookie cutter, not everybody is doing the same thing, they get influenced [...] so they like to preach [...]”.¹⁶⁰ He underlines that he would rather see the churches using DBS than have people preaching. Kuhn uses cooking

¹⁵⁶ Interview with Brother E, 2024-11-05.

¹⁵⁷ Interview with Kuhn, 2024-09-10.

¹⁵⁸ Interview with John, 2024-09-20.

¹⁵⁹ Voice message on WhatsApp from Tasse, 2024-11-19.

¹⁶⁰ Interview with John, 2024-09-20.

language when talking about Bible reading. He explains that when they meet as a church or community, they like to cook together:

Meaning we have a topic, and then three of us are searching the New Testament, three of us are in the Old Testament, the non-believers, or maybe [...] the seekers are [on] chat GPT and Google. And afterwards we put everything together, and some of us know the topic a little bit, so you can maybe make a very good message out of it. It's [...] a good spiritual meal for people, it's very interesting. But it's never someone [who] comes and cooks alone, and everyone is eating and going home."¹⁶¹

Brother E states that it is very important to read the Bible corporately to learn from one another: "We're the body, so God is not only speaking directly to me but he uses my brothers and sisters to speak through them to me."¹⁶² He declares that the house church is, and should be, a self-theologizing group and that when the Bible is read corporately, it will also be self-correcting.

Thus, one can state that the informants read the Bible individually and corporately. Even though not all of them emphasize the importance of reading the Bible corporately, it will become clear in the following section that reading the Bible together with others constitutes an important feature in how the informants meet with other believers and not – yet believers. *How* the Bible is read corporately will be displayed in the following section.

5.2.3 Bible Reading Methods

As I have shown in the previous chapter, using DBS as a method in DMMs is common. Three of the informants have answered that they use DBS, although it varies slightly in how they use it. Kuhn answered that he doesn't use DBS as a method. Instead, he uses a method that he calls Bible Breakfast. Since he is the only one referring to another method other than DBS, I have chosen to demonstrate this under a separate subheading.

5.2.3.1 Discovery Bible Study

It is the principles behind the DBS method that are important for the informants, and they use it in slightly different ways. Tasse uses the method to reach non-believers with the gospel, and Brother E uses it mostly in house churches with new believers. John shares that he started to use inductive Bible Study with new leaders in the movement. This later became what is called DBS. John asserts that they use DBS in their house churches and among leaders in small groups. When doing DBS, John encourages looking for the principles in the text and how the text can change the reader's life. He uses questions about how to act upon the text, and how to share what one has learned from the text with others. He explains that the movement in India doesn't

¹⁶¹ Voice message on WhatsApp from Kuhn, 2024-09-17.

¹⁶² Interview with Brother E, 2024-11-05.

use DBS as an evangelistic tool. This differs from how DBS often is used in movements. Even though John believes that the principles of DBS is good, he doesn't think the method is the decisive factor:

You know, we must think beyond DMM and DBS [...] because [...] this is a catchword today. [It] doesn't mean [that] this is the [...] end revelation. You know there are other ways. [The] purpose is the same, the end result is the same.¹⁶³

He describes the end result as the start of a functional church.

Brother E establishes that they have been using DBS for 25 years. He says that the sets of questions probably change from one place to another, "but the principle is the same"¹⁶⁴. He explains, "So [it's] very important that we model this to the new believers, or not yet believers [...] how to approach the Bible, and to make sure that the Bible is interpreting itself."¹⁶⁵ While Brother E emphasizes the importance of non-believers learning how to approach the Bible, he says that normally they don't use DBS as a way of reaching non-believers. He explains that 95 % of their house churches have started through the supernatural: healings, casting out demons, prophetic words, and so on. When people come to Christ and become a part of a house church, they enter the process of DBS.

Brother E reflects on DBS and asserts that it is a method developed mostly by people from the Southern Baptists who don't allow the Holy Spirit to move strongly, although there are exceptions. According to him, they have a greater emphasis on the word. Brother E explains that he doesn't believe that emphasizing the word is wrong, however, he expresses that there is a need for balance: " [...] but I think we need to have a balance of prayer, fellowship, listening to one another, ministering in the Holy Spirit and reading Scripture. Not to do only one thing. [...] The word is very important, no doubt about that, but you also need to move in the Spirit and expect a word from God in the situation, prophetic words."¹⁶⁶

According to Brother E, they typically use some form of DBS in the house churches, although they are not always rigid in its application. They don't necessarily use it every time they meet; sometimes they don't have the time. Yet, he asserts that, when they read the Bible together, it is in some DBS form. Brother E emphasizes obedience when it comes to Bible reading, "I believe obedience is important because [...] we should be the words of the word. We have to think about how [...] we implement that. And also to bring God's orders into this world into the spheres [...] or sphere of influence that God has given me, my workplace, my

¹⁶³ Interview with John, 2024-09-20.

¹⁶⁴ Interview with Brother E, 2024-11-05.

¹⁶⁵ Interview with Brother E, 2024-11-05.

¹⁶⁶ Interview with Brother E, 2024-11-07 (extra interview).

family my neighborhood and so on.”¹⁶⁷ Brother E states that DBS is a good tool to start with, but that there will be some shift in the focus over time. He finds this natural and explains that when you read a passage and certain things are in order in your life, you will start to talk about the text in deeper ways and theologize about it. Unlike John and Tasse, Brother E says they don’t use DBS when training leaders.

Tasse uses DBS both in church when he trains leaders and with not-yet believers: “All my trainings are Discovery based. I do a lot of that.”¹⁶⁸ He explains that when they use DBS in church they usually start with the commands of Christ, but it depends on what the church needs. This means that Tasse guides the groups in which Bible passages to read. He also points out that he often follows a chronological order. When doing DBS with a new group, he usually starts with creation and goes through different passages leading into the NT and Christ. He explains that when he thinks the timing is right, he will move on to Bible passages about church and its functions. He underlines that learning in a group is important: “There is a group-learning and growing because there [are] diverse things that a group can learn together rather than an individual.”¹⁶⁹ He adds that at times he also does one-on-one disciple-making.

This shows that the informants who use DBS do it in slightly different ways but based on the same principles.

The informants have different answers regarding whether they see any negative sides to using DBS. Brother E declares that DBS can lead to legalism, where people constantly hold each other accountable in a negative manner. He says: “I think [...] we have to give each other certain freedom in Christ.”¹⁷⁰

Tasse says that if you haven’t trained the facilitator well on leading people through the process, that can be a challenge or shortcoming. He underlines that the facilitator isn’t there to teach. “But if somebody cannot tell a good story to be able to help somebody understand the meaning of the text [they] get lost in the whole talking. So those are [...]the [...] negative side of discovery.”¹⁷¹

5.2.3.2 Bible breakfast

Kuhn distinguishes himself among the informants. He is the only one who doesn’t use DBS. He says that some people in the movement use it, but he himself doesn’t. One of the methods

¹⁶⁷ Interview with Brother E, 2024-11-05.

¹⁶⁸ Voice message on WhatsApp from Tasse, 2024-11-19.

¹⁶⁹ Interview with Tasse, 2024-09-24.

¹⁷⁰ Interview with Brother E, 2024-11-05.

¹⁷¹ Interview with Tasse, 2024-09-24.

that Kuhn uses he calls “Bible Breakfast”. It is a way of reading the Bible both individually and collectively. In the Bible Breakfast, they gather people in a WhatsApp group. According to Kuhn, it can be between 5 – 50 people. They decide together what to read in the Bible. It can be a topic, a theme, or a chapter. They read it individually, and then write to each other what they experience Jesus tells them to do, based on what they have read. Kuhn states: “Listening and without doing it, I mean, the word is really clear about that. And the real disciples do what Jesus asked them to do. [...] then we have another WhatsApp group where you can just share testimonies because it's kind of an accountability in that group.”¹⁷² This method of reading the Bible can be defined as a form of inductive Bible reading. For Kuhn this is one way to read the Bible both individually and corporately, but not the only way.

5.2.4 Reading the Bible with not-yet believers and new believers

All informants but John state that they do some kind of inductive Bible study with not-yet believers.

Kuhn explains that he invites new believers and not-yet believers to join the Bible Breakfast. He also says that he helps people read the Bible together with him one-on-one. This takes about an hour. Kuhn says: “[...] we open the Bible and I try not to say too much and let [...] the Bible speak to the person and it triggers many questions. Then I can help and support”.¹⁷³ He states that this is something other disciples can do too and that he helps them to do it with others. Kuhn says: “[...] it's part of the learning curve of our disciples to start being able giving access to the word [...]”.¹⁷⁴

Brother E explains that when it comes to letting not-yet believers and new believers handle the Bible, they trust the Holy Spirit and that the church planters have modeled something reproducible. He points out that they teach their church planters not to correct too much because the not-yet believers and new believers need to learn for themselves. If questions or problems come up, then the church planting team – which he calls the Apostolic team – is available to help. Brother E explains that it will be important to give the new believers an overview of the whole scripture in time. However, he adds, “that's an evangelistic process for me.”¹⁷⁵ He continues to explain that they don't start with Christ, they start with creation because they are in a Muslim context and want to evangelize, looking for a common ground. Brother E declares that they emphasize obedience when they help people read the Bible by themselves. He explains

¹⁷² Interview with Kuhn, 2024-09-10.

¹⁷³ Interview with Kuhn, 2024-09-10.

¹⁷⁴ Interview with Kuhn, 2024-09-10.

¹⁷⁵ Interview with Brother E, 2024-11-05.

that they encourage people to read the Bible alone, but also together with their families and in smaller units, where they are accountable to one another.¹⁷⁶

Similar to Brother E, Tasse says that with new believers or not yet believers, he starts to read the creation story and journeys with them to Christ, using DBS. This is because he wants them to discover and get the full picture of the Scriptures. “So that by the time they come to believe in Jesus, they know the stories [...], God’s creation, the fall of man and why we need Jesus. Rather than say: you need Jesus.”¹⁷⁷

5.2.5 Conclusion

All informants assert that they think the Bible should be read corporately and not only individually.

Kuhn is the only informant who doesn’t use DBS. However, the method he uses has similarities with DBS. The “Bible breakfast” method includes reading a text, discussing it (even if the discussion occurs online), and acting according to the text’s message. This is a way of reading the Bible inductively. Kuhn also seems to be the only informant who prefers to disciple one-on-one rather than in a group setting. Tasse and Brother E use DBS with not-yet believers. This differs from John, who doesn’t use it with not-yet believers. Kuhn invites not-yet believers to take part in “Bible Breakfast.” Brother E and Tasse stress the importance of helping new believers understand the Bible story in its wholeness.

5.3 Insights into Teaching Approaches

The informants all underline that reading the Bible together in various inductive ways is foundational. In this section, the informants’ view on teaching and the role of the teacher will be displayed.

5.3.1 Various forms of teachings

Kuhn states that he encourages people to search for other forms of teaching than reading the Bible. Since there are many types of teachings available today, he explains that, in their movement, they want the disciples to be able to use those teachings in a good way. Kuhn asserts that when discipling someone, he tells them to look for teachings, like those found online, and then he comes together with them to discuss what they have learned. He states that, by doing this, discernment is being trained. He says: “And it is oftentimes really interesting to see that

¹⁷⁶ Interview with Brother E, 2024-11-05.

¹⁷⁷ Interview with Tasse, 2024-09-24.

there's a sharp discernment that comes when you read daily the word [...]."¹⁷⁸ Kuhn shares that they also have teaching days from time to time, where a teacher teaches on a specific topic; however, as pointed out earlier, they don't apply preaching in their churches.

John explains that their movement has many teachings on various things. For example, they have received teaching on emotions from a Christian psychiatrist. He asserts that they want to give teachings that can apply to the broader sense of life, helping people to lead themselves and their families.¹⁷⁹

Brother E explains that when they train leaders, instead of using DBS, they have what they call "initial training". This means that people (it can be whole families) come together for a more extended period – it can be one or two months – and they share life together. They cook and clean together, have Bible studies, let the Holy Spirit minister to them, and help them to minister to each other. Then they send them out two by two with empty pockets for about a week. When they come back, they share what they have experienced. Brother E explains that by doing this, people form strong relationships with each other, and they start to keep in touch with each other after the training. "So a self-learning group starts, because you always want to work away from yourself [...]."¹⁸⁰ Thus, they study the Bible, but not with one person teaching the others. When asked if they have more traditional Bible studies where someone teaches a Bible book, he says: "No, we don't do that."¹⁸¹

Tasse doesn't mention any other forms of teaching than DBS. He uses DBS in all his trainings.¹⁸² He explains that when they have their gatherings, he chooses Bible texts to do DBS on and lets people discover and draw out principles from the text in groups, talking about how they should apply them in their own lives, and who they can share them with. After this, if he is to share something, he summarizes the text they all have been studying and speaks about it. He says, "I don't tell them how they will apply it on their life. I don't tell them to apply [it] this way. Because the way people ally, it's so different because the Holy Spirit speaks differently from the same passage to different people."¹⁸³ He also stresses that not everyone waits for him to speak about the text since many leave to have their own DBS groups and they need to go and serve them.¹⁸⁴

¹⁷⁸ Interview with Kuhn, 2024-09-10.

¹⁷⁹ Interview with John, 2024-09-20.

¹⁸⁰ Interview with Brother E, 2024-11-05.

¹⁸¹ Interview with Brother E, 2024-11-05.

¹⁸² Voice message on WhatsApp from Tasse, 2024-11-19.

¹⁸³ Interview with Tasse, 2024-09-24.

¹⁸⁴ Interview with Tasse, 2024-09-24.

5.3.2 Role of the teacher

Kuhn explains that they have a fivefold ministry team, according to Ephesians 4:11. He states that the teachers in the fivefold ministry team have much knowledge in the Bible: “So we have these precious people helping us to mention when we are maybe in a little bit borderline interpretation of something.”¹⁸⁵ As mentioned earlier, Kuhn states that the teachers don’t teach when the church meets regularly, but sometimes they organize gatherings with teachings on a specific topic.

John is somewhat critical of how Christians in the West focus on teaching. He states that academia is suitable for self-learning, but when it comes to discipling new people, it can be a hindrance. When declaring the gospel, there is no need for deeper knowledge. The thing that is needed, according to John, is that the Holy Spirit provides understanding and knowledge to separate from sin and disobedience to become obedient to God. He explains that teaching shouldn’t be burdensome but simple to follow. John adds that teaching should never be knowledge-based and that it is important that teachings can be replicated:

Because I am able to exhibit my knowledge, I impress you. But nothing else comes out of [it]. [...] I can say, well, you are a very knowledgeable person, but what did I [...] gain out of it [...]? Can that be replicated?”¹⁸⁶

He continues to explain that he wants people to be able to replicate what he teaches and that this will be hard if he is looked upon as someone with much knowledge. John also states that he encourages every church to identify the gifts in Ephesians 4: apostles, prophets, evangelists, shepherds, and teachers. He doesn’t expand on the role of the teacher, but he points out that they try to avoid titles since the role of the teacher should be understood as a function and not a position in the church.¹⁸⁷

Brother E explains that in their movement they have the fivefold ministry, whose role is to equip the Saints to do the job. He says: “The teacher is there to help us to learn. To turn us into learners. But also to help us to teach our children [...] or teach our community.”¹⁸⁸ This means that the teacher is not the one who teaches, but someone who helps others to learn by themselves and in turn helps others to learn.

Tasse says that he acknowledges what the Bible says when it comes to the fivefold ministry in Ephesians 4, and just as Brother E, he stresses that the gifts are given to equip the Saints. Additionally, he states that in their movement, they emphasize that God is the one who

¹⁸⁵ Interview with Kuhn, 2024-09-10.

¹⁸⁶ Interview with John, 2024-09-20.

¹⁸⁷ Interview with John, 2024-09-20.

¹⁸⁸ Interview with John, 2024-09-20.

gives the gifts and that the gifts are given to the body, not to persons. When it comes to his own role, he explains that he doesn't teach people anything. Instead, he asks questions. Tasse asserts that asking questions is the way to mentor disciples and help them feed themselves in his absence: "Question is just the way you mentor people, you do not have to tell them anything. You just have questions to drive them through corners [...] [for example] Why do you think so? [...] what are you going to do [...]? [...] Why don't you read this verse and [...] tell me what it is saying and what you learned from [it]?"¹⁸⁹

5.3.3 Conclusion

Kuhn is the only one of the informants who mentions encouraging believers to search sources outside the Bible. Although John doesn't mention sources outside the Bible, he gives examples of teachings given by Christian psychiatrists. Brother E doesn't mention any teaching outside the Bible, but he gives an example of other forms of teaching than reading the Bible – this includes more hands-on character building, like living together, cleaning, and even going out on evangelization trips without bringing any supplies, depending on God to provide.

John gives some critique when it comes to academic teaching. He doesn't think of it as bad, but at the same time, he states that it cannot be replicated, which he considers a problem.

All informants refer to the ministry gifts in Ephesians 4 but in slightly different ways. Tasse and Brother E underline that the teacher's gift is to equip the saints for their ministry. John points out that the teacher's role is about function and not position. Kuhn states that they have teachers who are available to help with interpretation.

5.4 Interpretation

This section will focus on where interpretation happens, who can interpret, and how heresies are handled.

5.4.1 The Participants and Settings of Bible Interpretation

The informants mention different areas where the Bible is read: church gatherings, DBS groups, and Bible Breakfast.

Kuhn declares that in their Bible Breakfast group, different interpretations may come up, but this is not commented on directly in the group. Instead, he addresses the questions individually. When he talks to people about their questions and interpretations, he doesn't comment that they are wrong or have a flawed interpretation. Instead, he tries to ask questions

¹⁸⁹ Interview with Tasse, 2024-09-24.

to help them find answers themselves. Sometimes, he gives them a new passage to read that can provide deeper insight. Kuhn points out that if it is necessary, he offers answers.¹⁹⁰ This differs from John, who states that when someone comes up with something he finds unbiblical, he wants to correct the whole group and make it a learning moment. He says: “You know, I’m not going to correct the individual. I’m only going to correct the individual if there is a personal sin involved. [...] so I make it a point to bring the right biblical teaching in that context so everybody listens.”¹⁹¹

Kuhn underlines that if someone has questions about interpreting something, they can turn to the teachers in their network or find information outside their context. He points out that the teachers of the Word in their context have high knowledge and that there are many places outside their movement where people can go, connect, and learn more.¹⁹² According to Kuhn, when it comes to interpretation, it is good to read the Bible together, to be able to discern whether the interpretation is unhealthy or not: “It’s more about when you read alone on your own and no one is controlling everything, so [...] it’s just [a] private sphere. It’s difficult to know if it’s healthy or not. If we have the individual reading but in a community setting, like the Bible breakfast, [...] you have a little bit glance of possible strange things that can (...) pop up in some interpretations.”¹⁹³ He explains further that they have different interpretations of the movement and that they don’t want to control too much. They don’t expect one single interpretation from the people. For example, he shares that they have what he calls “high fly charismatics” and non-charismatics in their movement. At the same time, he stresses that when wrong doctrine pops up, there are ministry teams who will address this. He explains that this is easily done since they are a network based on relationships. When a faulty interpretation comes up, they discuss it together, and the ministry team tries to find a better or healthier interpretation of the text.¹⁹⁴

According to John, interpretation must come from the church’s own context. He also underlines that he doesn’t think of himself as the one who should give the right interpretation: “Just because I have a degree [it] doesn’t mean that I’m the best guy in town. They also have something to contribute [...]”¹⁹⁵ At the same time, he explains that he tries to be aware of syncretism and correct it if he sees it: “[...] I’m aware that it’s not syncretism, that interpretation

¹⁹⁰ Interview with Kuhn, 2024-09-10.

¹⁹¹ Interview with John, 2024-09-20.

¹⁹² Interview with Kuhn, 2024-09-10.

¹⁹³ Interview with Kuhn, 2024-09-10.

¹⁹⁴ Interview with Kuhn, 2024-09-10.

¹⁹⁵ Interview with John, 2024-09-20.

does not [...] adopt a Hindu idea [...].”¹⁹⁶ John explains that heresies haven’t survived in the Bhojpuri movement. He goes on to clarify that while he doesn’t control what happens, this doesn’t imply that everything is left unchecked. He explains that when he says he doesn’t have any control, this doesn’t mean that he doesn’t have a relationship. He compares this with having children: “[...] It’s like having children. You love them, but as they mature, you don’t control them. But accountability is there.”¹⁹⁷

Brother E expresses that interpretation should be done by the new believers or not-yet believers as long as possible. If someone else comes in with the right answers, that hinders reproduction. This means that he himself strives not to disrupt when there is a wrong interpretation but to wait for the group to handle it. He explains that the group almost always self-corrects. Brother E states that this is important for the reproduction of the churches. He says: “Because you don’t want to sit there as an expert. You want to be able to leave. And then to see the house church multiply.”¹⁹⁸ Brother E implies that he has a somewhat relaxed attitude regarding wrong ideas in theology: “And even if they have some wrong ideas, I don’t think that’s the end of the world. I believe that eventually there will be a correction coming in after some time [...] and I trust the Lord will work with these people and give them a a balanced view or the right view of things and certain things will.”¹⁹⁹

For Tasse, it is important for the church to gather around the Word and listen to the various ways that God speaks. He asserts that it is the nature of the church as a body to interact around the Word and underlines that when a group studies the Word, God speaks in various ways through the people. Tasse states that most heresies come from people building their own interpretation of verses of the Bible, which they build their theology around. He explains that when you do a DBS, you avoid this since the questions always point to the Scriptures. In a DBS, you train people to always go back to the text and other passages in Scripture, and to ask, ‘Where does the Bible say that?’ He says: “And that’s why in DBS there [are] all kinds of people talking, and people will take you back. [If] you say something crazy, people will say [to] you: which verse says that?”²⁰⁰

Tasse differs from Kuhn in pointing out that one shouldn’t search for interpretations outside the Bible: “There is as a group self-correction because of staying in the Scriptures rather than looking for an extra meaning of interpretation outside the Bible, because the Bible is

¹⁹⁶ Interview with John, 2024-09-20.

¹⁹⁷ Interview with John, 2024-09-20.

¹⁹⁸ Interview with Brother E, 2024-11-05.

¹⁹⁹ Interview with Brother E, 2024-11-05.

²⁰⁰ Interview with Tasse, 2024-09-24.

enough reference in itself to give itself backing of what you're saying.”²⁰¹ He adds that when they train leaders, they do it at different levels, teaching people how to interpret the Bible. They equip leaders who will be able to help others learn and understand. He explains that if questions emerge, all the leaders come together once a month and share what challenges need to be addressed.²⁰²

5.4.2 Conclusion

One can establish that the informants express a lot of freedom, given to different interpretations. They all strive not to give answers but to ask good questions to help people discover the meaning of the texts by themselves. However, if heresy should occur, there are ways to handle it. Additionally, the relationship is vital for guiding people when it comes to interpretation.

5.5 Hermeneutical Approaches to the Old and New Testament

In this section, the inductive Bible reading methods that are employed by the informants will be examined to assess how they are applied to the Old Testament, and what kind of interpretation they lead to regarding women in leadership.

5.5.1 DBS or Inductive Reading applied to the Old Testament

When it comes to reading and interpreting the Old Testament, all informants declare that they use DBS or inductive reading. They emphasize their belief that the Old Testament is the Word of God.

Kuhn asserts that in his context, they practice the method of Bible Breakfast on the whole Bible, including the Old Testament. He explains that even when reading the Old Testament, they ask the question: what does Jesus expect from me today? This shows that they have, what Kuhn calls, a Christ-centered reading. In the movement Kuhn is part of, they also practice what he calls “kilometric reading”. This means that they read the whole Bible in about a year. He explains that this helps provide an overview to understand the relationship between the different parts of the Bible and to understand the prophecies in the Old Testament that point to the New Testament.²⁰³

²⁰¹ Interview with Tasse, 2024-09-24

²⁰² Interview with Tasse, 2024-09-24

²⁰³ Interview with Kuhn, 2024-09-10.

John states that DBS should be used on the whole Bible and that the same principles should be applied to the Old and the New Testament. He underlines that one must look at the context when reading the Old Testament.”²⁰⁴

When it comes to doing DBS on the whole Bible, Brother E expresses some hesitation. He admits that he hasn’t thought a lot about it. He says that they are probably using it on all passages in the Bible, but that they use it more on the New Testament. He asserts that he thinks that the Old Testament is very important. Brother E states that when reading the Old Testament, it needs to be understood through the lens of the New Testament: “[...] what we really need to learn is what [...] goes through the cross into the New Testament, and what stays there? [...] There needs to be these explanations. But you know what, I’ve never thought about them.”²⁰⁵

Tasse explains that he loves to start a DBS in the story of the Creation. When doing DBS on the whole Bible, he says that he chooses passages to fit the readers. For example, he doesn’t start with the Song of Songs with new believers. He chooses passages that he finds relevant for the readers. As the readers mature, he can take them to passages that need deeper understanding. When it comes to interpreting the Old Testament, Tasse says: “[...] everything in the Old Testament might not be [...] applicable to me today, but there [are] a lot of lessons that I can still learn. So, I handle it that way.”²⁰⁶

5.5.2 The Interpretive Impact of the Method on Women and Leadership

All the informants, except Brother E, state that they have women leaders in every function of their movement. Brother E explains that they don’t have women elders, but that women can function as leaders in other ways. This implies that they have different ways to interpret texts about women and leadership.

When it comes to passages in the letters that can be interpreted as women shouldn’t lead, Kuhn stresses three things: understanding the context (using books that can be helpful), reading other passages in Scripture that can provide a broader perspective, and recognizing how experience plays a part in interpretation. He explains, “This is the part where people really want to know a bit more of the context,” and that they sometimes recommend books on the topic.²⁰⁷ Kuhn states that when women read the texts, they don’t just look at the restrictions of Paul, but also at how he honors and empowers them. He also emphasizes experience when it comes to interpretation of the texts and explains that when mature women multiply disciples, this

²⁰⁴ Interview with John, 2024-09-20.

²⁰⁵ Interview with Brother E, 2024-11-05.

²⁰⁶ Interview with Tasse, 2024-09-24.

²⁰⁷ Interview with Kuhn, 2024-09-10.

becomes a non-issue: “But for more mature ladies, multiplying disciples – they multiply disciples, sometimes [in very] high effectiveness – so it’s not a question anymore, it’s just a given. It’s established. [...] They can say that: ‘this is happening, [...] so these texts, I read them in another way, because I can see’.”²⁰⁸

When it comes to doing DBS on passages in the letters that could lead to the assumption that women shouldn’t lead, John underlines the importance of reading the whole Bible. He explains that the story about women doesn’t start with Paul, but with creation, and he says: “[...] I think this is where a lot of people goof. You know, they go out of the way because they don’t take the whole Bible as a whole. [...] So, when you talk about leadership, you go back into [...] the beginning.”²⁰⁹

Brother E asserts that they want to be as close to the text as possible without being too rigid and handle these things with an open hand, being open to the Holy Spirit’s correction. He states that when the Bible says elders need to be husbands of one wife – that seems to be an indication. As Tasse and Kuhn, Brother E also stresses that when reading difficult passages in the letters, one needs to look at other passages to get a better understanding. He gives the example of when Paul directs the women to be silent in church (1 Cor. 14:34–35) and explains that this must be read considering 1 Cor. 14:26, which is the passage where Paul commands that everyone should participate when the church comes together. Brother E explains that it is the job of the Fivefold Ministry to go around and help, where there are difficulties in understanding the text. He also states, “I have never heard of [...] splits over these questions within our work. We might be a little bit more conservative in comparison to the other guys that you have interviewed. I’m not sure what their positions are.”²¹⁰ Brother E establishes that when they have trainings, they teach the biblical understanding that only men can be elders, since an elder should be the husband of one wife. However, this doesn’t mean that women can’t be leaders in other ways, for example in their apostolic teams. When it comes to the five-fold ministry, Brother E explains that they haven’t experienced women in these functions. However, he argues that this is not due to theology. He underlines that in his view, men are to have leadership functions that involve directive and governmental work since women need to have protection. In their experience, women tend to collapse in difficult situations. Brother E explains

²⁰⁸ Interview with Kuhn, 2024-09-10.

²⁰⁹ Interview with John, 2024-09-20.

²¹⁰ Interview with Brother E, 2024-11-05.

that in the beginning they gave more freedom to women, but their experience was that when the situations became difficult, the women couldn't carry the burden as well as men.²¹¹

According to Tasse, they have women leaders in all functions within the movement. For him, this is a given. He asserts: "I will stand and defend that on with all the Scriptures that I know."²¹² He explains that many of his best disciple makers are women and that some of them are key leaders. He asserts that it isn't he who makes them leaders, but what they do. He explains that, even though the society in Africa is a top-down society, where the men are authoritative by culture, they will allow a woman to lead. He says: "But I'm not amazed, the Bible gives me a lot of stories about women being in Jesus' ministry. Women supported Jesus' Ministry. Out of the 120, there were women there, when Jesus was on the cross – they are the last people who lived left the cross."²¹³

Tasse says that when people read different passages like 1 Cor. 14:34–35, they ask questions why Paul says that women shouldn't speak. He explains that he then helps people to look at the context and the culture the texts are written in, and then discuss it together. Thus, Tasse points to understanding the context, understanding the passages in light of Jesus, and the experience of women in leadership.

5.5.3 Conclusion

All informants state that the Bible should be read together with others and that God uses the whole church to interpret it. Kuhn is the only one encouraging people to look at other sources outside the Bible when it comes to interpretation.

The informants imply in different ways that they don't control interpretations or doctrines, even though they (or other people in their movement) can help guide in the right direction when necessary. Brother E and Tasse point out that the new believers studying the Bible should learn self-correction from the start. They train people how to determine whether something is truly taught in the Bible or not, by asking "Where do you find that in the text/Bible?"

The informants find it important to read the Old Testament. They all express that they use an inductive method when reading it.

All informants state that it is important to interpret the texts about women in leadership with the help of other Bible passages. It can be noted that, despite this, they arrive at different interpretations. Both Tasse and Kuhn mention that experience is also important when it comes

²¹¹ Voice message on WhatsApp from Brother E, 2025-01-03.

²¹² Interview with Tasse, 2024-09-24.

²¹³ Interview with Tasse, 2024-09-24.

to women and leadership. If women lead, then they can lead. Tasse points out that, even if they work in a context where men are in authority, they see women functioning as leaders at every level.

5.6 Summary

This chapter has shown that the informants all recognize the Bible as the Word of God or as God's revelation. They emphasize the role of the Holy Spirit to interpret and understand Scripture. All informants use an inductive method when reading the Bible; three of them comment that they use DBS regularly. Three of the informants use inductive Bible studies with both believers and not-yet believers. The informants emphasize the importance of reading the Bible corporately and individually. They assert that understanding the context of the text can sometimes be helpful, however, they emphasize that the Bible speaks to our lives today and that the word should be obeyed. Kuhn is the only one who encourages searching for teachings and interpretations outside of Scripture. The informants express that they have leadership gatherings and training. In some of these trainings, there are teachings on the Bible and on interpretation. Some trainings are more practical, with a holistic approach, and some trainings have a focus on discipleship formation through hands-on missions. Interpretation is mostly done in a community. The community can consist of both believers and non-believers. There is low control when it comes to interpretation, yet if an interpretation contradicts what is found in Scripture, some form of correction will take place. Most corrections will occur within the community, as participants are trained to discern interpretations that fall outside the bounds of Scripture. All informants use inductive Bible reading on the Old Testament. Different passages are introduced depending on the maturity of the community. All informants express that they read texts about women and leadership in the light of other Bible passages. It should be noted that this does not lead to a unified understanding of women and leadership. Two of the informants emphasize that their experience of women in leadership roles also influences how they perceive the issue of women and leadership.

The missional focus should be acknowledged as central to the informants, even though it was not directly addressed in a specific question in the interviews. This becomes evident as the inductive Bible study is being used by three of the informants, with both not-yet believers and believers. Furthermore, the informants all stress the aim to make disciples, and sharing what one has learned with others as a natural part of being a disciple.

Chapter 6: Analysis

To address the research questions posed in this paper, a more in-depth analysis of the collected data will be presented. In this section, the material will be critically examined and discussed in relation to theological hermeneutics. This chapter presents an analysis based on the perspectives of Fowl, applied to the material presented in Chapter Five and the ecclesiology and leadership theology presented in Chapter Four. In his model, Fowl focuses on the community of believers regarding interpretation. The interview material indicates that the informants place a somewhat stronger emphasis on the textual meaning than Fowl advocates. Fowl argues that historical context should have very little impact on interpretation, and that interpretation should instead be shaped by the Christ-like community. Even though the informants highly underline friendship, community, and accountability, they also emphasize the importance of biblical context. As mentioned, Fowl is writing in the stream of Theological Interpretation. Vanhoozer, Hays, and Davis contribute to the same theological stream, offering a complementary lens for understanding the hermeneutic found in the interviews. Naylor, who has written on the subject of the theological validity of DMMs, will also be included in the discussion to represent a missional understanding of DMM hermeneutics.

This chapter will be structured to answer the research questions of this thesis, adding the missional perspective in one of the subheadings.

6.1 Context of Biblical Interpretation

6.1.1 Reading Together and Individually

The interviews show that interpretation, first and foremost, occurs in some form of community. According to Fowl, interpretation needs to occur in a Christian community where the believers aim to live faithfully to, and in worship of God. Fowl argues that baptized believers, who are in an ongoing formation to become Christ-like, are necessary for an interpreting community. He also emphasizes friendship, charity in interpretation, accountability, confession, forgiveness, and reconciliation. It is worth noting that Fowl does not describe how this relates to church and ecclesiology. He does not illustrate what a church looks like based on his hermeneutics. However, how the informants describe the church may be seen as facilitating the kind of interpretive community that Fowl emphasizes. The informants describe the church by its functions according to Acts 2: 42—47 and emphasize the church as organic. They don't view

the church as a building or a meeting to attend. The church is the believers who have given their lives to Christ. It is lived in the everyday life, in community with other believers. DBS groups or house churches are the places where the Bible is read, and interpretation takes place. Close relationships in the Christian community are assumed. The informants give examples of helping each other with different needs, meeting the needs in their community, and coming together, sharing meals and fellowship. That close relationship is emphasized, and can also be found in how the informants describe the church in terms of family. Relationship is a key concept in understanding the context in which interpretation occurs. The material shows that the informants emphasize participation in gatherings and see this as a guideline when the church meets. In contrast to Fowl, they do not place the same emphasis on baptism as important for interpretation to the same extent as Fowl. However, they all describe church as a group of baptized believers who mature in discipleship together. Sometimes, interpretation takes place among a majority of not-yet believers. It is important to note that the informants distinguish between DBS groups and the church. The informants who use DBS groups see this as a way for not-yet believers to discover Christ, and to grow in discipleship in parallel with this. However, the aim is for the DBS group to become a church. The informants describe that their gatherings have a loose structure, where believers and not-yet believers are sometimes part of the interpreting community.

Even though the informants stress the importance of community, they also emphasize reading Scripture individually as a way to grow as disciples in their relationship with God. This is something Fowl leaves out in his model. This seems important for the informant's understanding of maturity in Christ and multiplication. They express that it is essential for them that the disciples learn how to “feed themselves” or read the Bible themselves. If the disciples don’t learn how to read the Bible by themselves, they won’t be able to help others read it, which will hinder multiplication.

All participants use some form of inductive Bible reading in their gatherings, with a focus on formation. Obedience to the Word is highly stressed. This is a way for disciples to become like Christ. The informants express an understanding that obedience to the Word of God shapes the virtues. Fowl has a much more interchangeable view on this, emphasizing that Christian virtues should form interpretation. Fowl also assumes that a certain level of knowledge about the Bible is necessary for interpretation. This is not expressed by the informants. For example, in a DBS group, interpretation occurs when the participants start reading the Bible. Thus, the interviews show that inductive Bible reading methods lay the foundation for knowledge and that interpretation occurs as knowledge is gained.

Fowl talks about self-reflection and the awareness of one's sins as important for an interpreting community. This can only be seen indirectly in the informants' answers. When inductive Bible study is applied, self-reflection is formed. This is something that both non-believers and believers grow into as they use the DBS method. The DBS questions facilitate reflection on God and one's life, in relation to the biblical text. The questions also call to action. How one has acted is accounted for when the DBS group, or the church, meets again. The practice of confession and repentance, accentuated by Fowl, is not explicitly mentioned by the informants. The informants' answers don't reveal whether they regard this as essential or not. One could argue that the context of inductive Bible study, where accountability is a key element, is an ideal setting for confession and repentance. However, it is not possible to determine whether this is already in place based on the informants' responses.

Vanhoozer underlines that the interpreter's prayer-life is important for interpretation.²¹⁴ This is, to some extent, also stressed by the informants. They all express prayer as an important element in their personal and communal life. For example, John points out that prayer is equally important as reading the Scripture. At the same time, three informants express that interpretation is allowed by not-yet believers who haven't yet developed a prayer life. This suggests that the informants have a more fluid than fixed way of understanding discipleship and engagement with Scripture.

Additionally, Fowl argues that interpretation must be done in a community where the believers all share the same understanding of Christ, as it is formulated, for example, in Phil. 2:6–11. Regarding having the same Christological understanding as a directive for interpretation, this is not something that can be established in the interviews. The informants seem to view not-yet believers as being on a journey of discovering Christ, which means that interpretation takes place even before they have fully recognized who Jesus is. The missional focus, as reflected in the interviews, seems to take precedence over the importance of having the right knowledge of Christ in order to interpret. The missional focus is absent in Fowl's model and will be discussed later in this chapter.

6.1.2 Discernment and Charity in Interpretation

The informants' experience is that discernment becomes natural when reading the Bible regularly, both individually and in a group. They all help believers to test different interpretations against the other passages in Scripture, and to be aware of interpretations that

²¹⁴ Vanhoozer 2024, Kindle edition: 20.

cannot be found in the Scripture. In the DBS groups, the participants are trained to interpret Scripture with Scripture and discern wrong interpretations from the start. Different interpretations are allowed to coexist within the framework of what Scripture says. The informants express that they don't want to control interpretation. This is similar to what Fowl calls charity in interpretation. However, the informants stress that if interpretations appear that aren't in line with Scripture, they have different ways to handle it. This is done in a relational setting where the interpretations can be discussed. The informants appear to suggest that there is a certain boundary for what extends beyond Scripture, yet they do not specify where that boundary is drawn. Brother E expresses that he is confident that God will lead and reveal the truth in his time and that he shouldn't try to control interpretation. This attitude seems to be shared by the other informants. Perhaps this is an explanation for why they don't specify the boundaries. However, this is something that could be discussed. What essential truths cannot be negotiated, and how far can different interpretations stretch?

According to Vanhoozer, a correct versus an incorrect understanding of a text is determined by the reading cultures that emerge. He writes: "I propose judging the rightness of critical methods by the kind of theological readings, readers, and reading cultures they beget. I define a bad exegetical method as one that forbids, forestalls, or frustrates any theological reading of the Bible, and a good exegetical method as one that is open to, facilitates, or necessitates some kind of theological reading."²¹⁵ This is close to Fowl's model regarding the focus on the reading culture, even though it differs in accentuation. Put simply, one could say that for Vanhoozer, the community depends on interpretation, whereas for Fowl, interpretation depends on the community. Vanhoozer underlines that it is the interpretation of the text that produces the outcome, not the other way around. This view gives more authority to the text than Fowl's view. This is more in line with the hermeneutics found in the research material, where the focus is on the fruit of the interpretation. The understanding of the text is expected to foster a deeper knowledge of Jesus, growth in discipleship, and a missional way of life. This can be seen as important in a context where church develops from not-yet believers who discover Christ, get baptized, and realize through Scripture that they are a church.

Further, Vanhoozer suggests that a reading is right when it leads to responsible action, which is answerable to God. Reading involves being addressed and confronted.²¹⁶ This can also be found in the interview material. The informants stress a changed life, obedience to the word, and accountability. They underline that this is something the Holy Spirit reveals for the reader,

²¹⁵ Vanhoozer 2024, Kindle edition: 5.

²¹⁶ Vanhoozer 2024, Kindle edition: 6, 14.

and that it is the reader who decides what actions to take. It is also up to the reader to account for and be open with the outcome of his/her decision.

6.1.3 The Role of the Holy Spirit in Interpretation

Fowl states that interpretation must be done by believers recognized as filled with the Spirit. What can be seen in the interviews is that the informants underline the importance of reading with the guidance of the Holy Spirit. However, since the interpretation of Scripture is carried out by both believers and not-yet believers in mixed settings, what does this suggest about how the informants view the work of the Holy Spirit in the lives of not-yet believers? This indicates that they perceive the Holy Spirit as active in people's lives before surrendering to Christ.

The informants all emphasize the Holy Spirit when reading the Word of God. They argue that Scripture cannot be truly understood without the Spirit. The Holy Spirit is regarded as active whenever the Bible is being read, yet the informants don't define when the Spirit starts to influence the reader. Since the informants do inductive Bible reading together with both believers and not-yet believers, this suggests that the informants have a fluid understanding of the Holy Spirit's activity in a person. However, this should not be interpreted as the informants believing that a person can be filled with the Holy Spirit before coming to faith. The interviews do not reveal their views on this.

Furthermore, Fowl asserts that interpretation by the Spirit can be judged by the character of the interpreter, which presupposes a close relationship. However, Fowl doesn't express a static understanding of interpretation and character. He argues that every believer should be able to interpret like Paul, in what he describes as a counter-conventional way. He suggests that this type of interpretation should assume an interpreter who has developed a Christlike character, recognized by others. This suggests that interpreting Scripture is something one can mature in; it is not only a matter of who is allowed to interpret and who is not allowed to interpret, but it is also judged by maturity.

Even though character is important for the informants, this is not stressed as necessary for interpretation. The informants accentuate the importance of maturing as disciples, sharing the biblical stories with others, and making new disciples. As both believers and not-yet believers participate in a DBS, the character is assumed to be formed in the process of reading and interpreting the Bible. The informants express how disciples mature into leaders and in their understanding of Scripture. Thus, a Christlike character can be seen as beneficial for interpretation and something that is expected to develop, but not as essential for the ability to interpret.

Moreover, Fowl states that reading with the Spirit involves testifying to the work of the Spirit in others and listening to other people's testimonies. Concerning testimony of what the Spirit is doing in other people's lives, the material doesn't explicitly show that this is important for the informants regarding interpretation. However, since interpretation is done in a smaller setting, where accountability is emphasized, one can see that listening to other people's testimonies is part of the interpreting community.

6.2 Authority of Scripture

In what way should the authority of Scripture be understood? Fowl's central argument is that the authority of Scripture can only be understood within the context of ecclesial communities. The authority of Scripture must be connected to the lives of believers in a Christian community as they struggle to live out their faith. Fowl defines this through three perspectives, which he refers to as Ecclesial authority, outlining what is necessary for a community to interpret Scripture:

1. Ecclesial authority must recognize that the Spirit has been working and is still working in the Christian community and the life of Christians.
2. The church needs to identify itself as the body of Christ and strive to do justice to this identity.
3. Christians must understand themselves as part of the global Church across history in how they interpret and live out Scripture.

Thus, for Fowl, Scriptural and ecclesial authority are inseparable and should be understood together.

How does this relate to the informants' answers in the interviews? The Holy Spirit is regarded as the author of the Bible, and the one who speaks through the Bible today. The informants also mention how the Holy Spirit is active today by referring to prophetic words, healings, and miracles. This aligns with Fowl's first point. Another example of how the Spirit is active today is given by John, who expresses how listening to the Bible helps him clear the atmosphere when he finds it being affected by evil spirits. This implies that the Word possesses inherent power and highlights a strong connection between the Spirit and the Word of God. However, can the activity of the Holy Spirit be stressed as an essential value concerning the authority of Scripture for the informants? The informants view the Holy Spirit as both the author of Scripture and as active when Scripture is read. One can argue that this dual role of the Holy Spirit is vital for establishing the authority of Scripture for them.

Although the informants emphasize church and community, they do not suggest that Scripture can only be understood within Christian communities. As previously mentioned, this type of reading and interpretation does not occur solely within the context of existing believers. The informants also express how the Spirit speaks to them in their personal reading of the Bible. Yet, they underline that when the Bible is read in community, God speaks to them through other people's interpretations. They stress this as highly important, in line with Fowl.

Regarding Fowl's second point, the church is identified as the body of Christ by the informants, and there is a focus on discipleship and obedience that can be described as "aiming to do this identity justice." However, the informants don't seem to stress this to the same extent as Fowl.

The informants do not emphasize Fowl's third point, which concerns the connection to the global Church across history. Kuhn is the only one who encourages the disciples he trains to seek knowledge about Scripture outside of Scripture. The other informants underline the importance of not adding anything to the Bible. They stress that reading and understanding the text without the influence of tradition is important. This can also be seen in how the informants describe and form the church; there seems to be a focus on living the church as it is viewed in Acts 2:42—47. Tasse expresses some critique of how the church is understood and organized in the West. John expresses a critique directed at Western theological education. He considers that theological education can hinder the multiplication of disciples. Fowl is also critiquing the academic world. However, his critique is foremost directed toward the division between different theological disciplines and the separation between the academic world and the community of believers. Fowl argues that the church should determine interpretation, rather than the academic world. Despite Fowl's critique, he finds reading theologians and learning from other recognized Christian interpreters throughout history is good. Hence, one can observe a difference between Fowl's perspective and the informants' perspective on the subject. As stated, Kuhn stands out among the informants, encouraging researching sources outside the Bible. Kuhn is also the only informant in a Western culture. Could this explain why he has a different view, more in line with Fowl's, regarding the search for other sources?

Additionally, regarding Scriptural authority, Fowl suggests a trinitarian grounding in interpretation, focusing on Scripture as the revelation of a trinitarian God who seeks to draw humankind into a relationship. The focus for Fowl is not on historical questions but on how Scripture draws people into a relationship with the triune God. This can be seen in the interviews, where the relationship with God is stressed by the informants, and where there is a focus on a transformed life, rather than on problematizing historical issues.

Vanhoozer suggests a view that, in many ways, aligns with the informants' view on Scriptural authority. He asserts that the Scripture must be acknowledged as the word of God and not only authored by men. To read the word of God is to encounter a living God personally speaking, with and through human words. He underlines that the texts shouldn't be understood just as God's words to the ones they first were addressed to, but as God's words to the readers today. Vanhoozer uses the term "speech-act" and establishes that the Scripture is the Word of God, because of what God does through his word. It is not the words per se that are divine, but the communicative acts of God, which are expressed through the words.²¹⁷ Vanhoozer suggests something very close to what can be found in the DBS questions. He writes: "Every divine speech act—indicative, interrogative, and imperative alike—poses a tacit question to the reader, namely, 'How will you respond to what has been said, and to the person who has said it?'"²¹⁸ This is evident in the interview material, as the informants convey an expectation that God will speak to them directly through Scripture. Tasse, for example, states that he sees the Bible as the word of God because it changed his life. Additionally, all informants express that reading the Bible should lead to a changed life and practical action.

Hence, concerning the authority of Scripture, one can establish that even though the informants view the community of believers as essential for interpretation, they seem to view the authority of Scripture as something separate from the community. This is more in line with Vanhoozer than Fowl. The authority of Scripture is viewed as the foundation for community, rather than something that is formed in community. The authority of Scripture is connected to the work of the Spirit, both in the formation of the Bible and the reading of it. There is a connection between the revelation of the Word and the transformation of the lives of its readers that establishes its authority. The authority is not reliant on historical-critical facts, even though the context is considered valuable for interpretation. The authority of Scripture is regarded as authority as it is the Word of God and the revelation of God. It is understood and lived out in the community, however, it also stands above the community.

6.3 The Hermeneutic's Faithfulness to the Wholeness of the Bible

In the book *Art of Reading Scripture*, Hays and Davis lay out nine theses important to interpret the Bible in its wholeness. Six of these theses are in accordance with what has already been

²¹⁷ Vanhoozer 2024, Kindle edition: 9–12.

²¹⁸ Vanhoozer 2024, Kindle edition: 15.

presented by Fowl. Yet three of them work as a complement to further analyze the material in Chapters Four and Five. First and second, Hays and Davis argue that:

- Scripture truthfully tells the story of God's action. It tells the story of his creating, judging, and saving the world.
- Scripture is understood as a coherent narrative, in light of the church's rule of faith – the canon of Scripture finds unity in the primary story of the work of the triune God.²¹⁹

The research material shows that the informants view the Bible as a narrative, and assume the Scriptural canon when referring to it. Regarding the rule of faith, this has not been an explicit question in the research. Moreover, the informants seem to take for granted the core doctrines of the Christian faith, such as the Trinity. It is worth noting that certain things in the informants' contexts differ from traditional Christian contexts. Church structure and leadership structures are re-interpreted, and the concept of Christianity is not in focus. Instead, the informants talk about discipleship, obeying the word of God, making disciples, and following Jesus with their whole lives.

Further, Hays and Davis claim that:

- Interpretation of Scripture demands engagement with the entire narrative of the Bible. The New Testament can't be understood apart from the Old Testament, and vice versa.²²⁰

The interview material reveals that informants who use DBS with both believers and not-yet believers strongly emphasize the process of discovering Christ through reading Scripture. As mentioned, two of them use a thematic reading called "From Creation to Christ" with not-yet believers. This highlights several important aspects. First, they view Scripture as one unified story culminating in Christ, which is in line with Hays and Davis. Second, faith in Jesus is comprehended and gained both through this unified story and the stories within it, rather than through doctrines or creeds. This rhymes with how the informants understand discipleship as a process and a journey. As the Bible is understood as an unfolding narrative that includes various people's journeys with and toward God, discipleship is likewise seen as a journey to be explored and shaped within this larger story. This can be comprehended in reference to Jesus' meeting with the disciples on the road to Emmaus in Luke 24:13—35 where he helps the disciples to discover him as the risen Messiah, by explaining what the Scriptures say about him. It can also be understood in line with Vanhoozer, who asserts, "The literal meaning of biblical narrative is

²¹⁹ Hays & Davis 2003, chap. 1.

²²⁰ Hays & Davis 2003, chap. 1.

the story itself, a function of the world within rather than behind, the text.”²²¹ Vanhoozer expresses his view of Theological Interpretation in the book *Mere Christian Hermeneutics*, where he implies that Scripture should be interpreted as canonical and as a unified story, read in Spirit and truth, forming readers who are answerable to God for their actions. In this story, the incarnation is central. According to Vanhoozer, authors, texts, and readers must be understood in relationship to the gospel of God. He explains that reading the Bible theologically is to be attentive to the effects of God’s word in the reader’s own context, not only to the original context or theological content.²²² This aligns with how the informants understand the Bible, and emphasize interpreting and acting on the Word in their context.

Moreover, Vanhoozer asserts that reading will always be affected by the reader’s context. Hence, there is a need for a framework. For example, Vanhoozer sees the need to read the Bible, both with historical context in mind and at the same time reading it through the lens of Jesus Christ.²²³ Vanhoozer does not critique a historical understanding of the text in the same way as Fowl. However, he considers the historical context to be of secondary importance.²²⁴ He also describes how the biblical canon provides the necessary context for interpretation and states that sound doctrine practically means the same thing as reading canonically and interpreting Scripture with Scripture.²²⁵ The informants don’t express any particular framework for reading the Bible. However, it is evident from the responses that they regard Jesus as central to understanding the wholeness of Scripture. Even though they find historical context valuable, they don’t emphasize it. The informants also have a canonical reading and view of Scripture. They interpret Scripture with Scripture rather than look at secondary sources outside the Bible.

Additionally, Vanhoozer gives two examples of how the Bible can be read canonically and refers to Christopher Seitz, who argues that the literal sense of the canon pushes the reader to an understanding of Christ, and Hans Boersma, who states that Christ can only be found in the Old Testament by first meeting him in the New Testament.²²⁶ When analyzing the interview, one can see that the former example aligns more with the informants who use DBS and inductive Bible reading to discover Christ.

When reading the Old Testament, Vanhoozer makes it clear that a Christian community must read it in an eschatological framework. By eschatological, Vanhoozer refers to the concept

²²¹ Vanhoozer 2024, Kindle edition: 118–199.

²²² Vanhoozer 2024, Kindle edition: 1–4, 47–48, 53.

²²³ Vanhoozer 2024, Kindle edition: 122, 126–127.

²²⁴ Vanhoozer 2024, Kindle edition: 122, 126–127.

²²⁵ Vanhoozer 2024, Kindle edition: 120–121.

²²⁶ Vanhoozer 2024, Kindle edition: 131.

of “already/not yet”. It is a way of reading with an understanding of what God will do at the end of history, and at the same time recognizing how God is active in the creation now, as the kingdom of God is “already” and “not yet”.²²⁷ This eschatological framework cannot be established in the interviews. However, the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus are central to the informants' interpretation and reading of the Old Testament. For example, Kuhn argues for what he calls a Christ-centered reading, where all Scripture is viewed with a focus on Christ, and Brother E states that the Old Testament needs to be understood through the lens of the cross. Two informants use a thematic model in DBS (from Creation to Christ), going through Scriptures from the beginning in Genesis to the life of Jesus, helping the readers discover Jesus. Tasse shows the importance of reading texts about women and leadership through the lens of Jesus, by referring to how Jesus met and viewed women. This can be seen as consistent with Fowl's description of how the Spirit brings Scripture to mind in light of Jesus and how he explains the Old Testament as pointing towards Jesus.

Hence, one can establish that the informants have a canonical understanding of Scripture and regard the Old Testament as important, reading it through the lens of Jesus.

6.4 The Influence of the Informants' Experiences on Their Approach to Biblical Texts

Experience plays a vital role for the informants. Primarily, the experience of the Holy Spirit. The experience of the Spirit while reading the Bible is considered necessary for interpretation. The informants all highlight the guidance of the Spirit when reading the different texts and point out that the Spirit can use the Word to speak in various ways. Hence, the readers experience the texts differently depending on what the Spirit reveals and leads them. This could be understood in line with Fowl, Hays, and Davis, who express that the scriptural texts don't have one single meaning limited to the original author's intention, but that God, the Author of the whole narrative, gives multiple meanings throughout time.²²⁸ However, for the informants, this is not done without guidelines. Scripture itself is used to discern what the Spirit reveals. The participants in a DBS are trained to discern and correct when a “revelation” goes beyond Scripture. John, for example, underlines that the experience of the Spirit needs to be discerned by the Word of God. This suggests that the experience of the Holy Spirit and interpretation cannot be separated but rather merge.

²²⁷ Vanhoozer 2024, Kindle edition: 133.

²²⁸ Hays & Davis 2003, chap. 1.

Brother E's reflection on the DBS method, as developed by Southern Baptists who don't emphasize the Spirit, is interesting.²²⁹ As stated, the method was developed by David Watson and Victor John, among others. Yet, the method has been spread and promoted in different ways, and it may be true that much of this has been done by the Southern Baptists. Is Brother E right in his reflection that the method gives little room for the Spirit? In the method, the Spirit isn't emphasized. However, the informants who use the method highly emphasize the Holy Spirit despite this. This implies that different people use the method in different ways that are suitable for their context.

To comprehend the informant's view on experience, a test case was used in the interview concerning the informant's view on women in leadership. Kuhn and Tasse describe how their view on women and leadership is grounded both in their understanding of the Scriptures and in their experience of women leaders. It is clear that for Kuhn and Tasse, experience, along with the canonical reading of Scripture, has affected their understanding of women and leadership. Tasse expresses that it is up to God, not to him, if women should lead. This indicates that the experience of the Holy Spirit equipping women to lead is important for his interpretation. Brother E views women and leadership differently from the other three informants. When he describes his experience of how women at the beginning of the movement handled difficult situations in leadership in a non-fruitful way, it suggests that his experience has influenced his view on women and leadership. It seems as if he changed his mind regarding what kind of leadership is suitable for women, partly based on his early experiences. Hence, Brother E's experience and reading of the texts seem to have affected his understanding, even though he doesn't express this directly.

It can be established that experience will always affect interpretation in some way. This is important to be aware of. When this is recognized, one can reflect on how this relates to different interpretations of texts and how to handle the tension between experience and textual meaning. This is something to reflect on further in movements that use DBS or other inductive methods.

6.5 Missional perspectives on interpretation

Naylor suggests in his article *Reflections on the Theological Validity of Disciple-Making Movements (DMMs)* that the concept of *Missio Dei* can be used as “an appropriate and adequate theological framework and hermeneutic to justify the methodological emphases of DMM

²²⁹ Noticeably, John states that he was part of developing the method.

principles and practices.”²³⁰ He states that *Missio Dei* is the reality that unfolds the biblical story where God’s mission is central, and the redemption of the world through Jesus functions as a lens that interprets the Bible. God’s mission for the world is the hermeneutical lens by which the Bible should be read and interpreted. The Father sends the Son, and the Son sends his followers to cooperate with him in the mission. DMMs, according to Naylor, are grounded in an ongoing missional praxis where the biblical text and the context are in constant dialogue, revealing God’s mission.²³¹

Naylor argues that the *Missio Dei* hermeneutic leads to understanding the Bible as a revelation of God, rather than a manual that addresses specific questions. The revelation and understanding of Scripture lead to action in every context where the Bible is approached. He asserts that God’s people are not to mimic specific patterns (for example, church organization) found in the New Testament, but to wrestle with the gospel within their own setting through a missional praxis that will lead to the advance of the kingdom of God. Naylor suggests that this must be approached anew in each context. He points out that DMM practitioners haven’t recovered the true biblical patterns for a lost church, but they have re-discovered missional principles that conform to the *Missio Dei*. Furthermore, Naylor states that the DBS approach in DMMs functions to avoid transmission of a church system to the readers, and at the same time, it emphasizes the function of the church as a community where Christ is the center. As the readers obey and practice what they read about the church, they learn how to be church. He points out that even if a DBS group encounters disagreement and struggles, the DBS process helps them handle it with an attitude shaped by obedience to Christ.

Naylor emphasizes that when applying the DBS method with not-yet believers in DMMs, it is essential to recognize that the New Testament apostles were on a journey of discovering Jesus as the Messiah. They grew in understanding and commitment to Jesus and learned to walk in his way. In DBS, the discovery process is often focused. People are invited to discover and follow Jesus on a journey. Naylor asserts that the disciple maker's role is to invite all to follow Jesus, not to discern who is chosen. He states: ”The DMM paradigm of a centered faith looks to obedience as the key indicator of faith, rather than the traditional paradigm of a bounded faith that requires adherence to particular doctrines for acceptance.”²³² This can be seen, Naylor

²³⁰ Naylor (fall 2021), Internet: <https://nimer.ca/reflections-on-the-theological-validity-of-disciple-making-movements-dmms/>.

²³¹ Naylor (fall 2021), Internet: <https://nimer.ca/reflections-on-the-theological-validity-of-disciple-making-movements-dmms/>.

²³² Naylor (fall 2021). Internet: <https://nimer.ca/reflections-on-the-theological-validity-of-disciple-making-movements-dmms/>.

explains, as a form of relational theology where the commitment to Jesus as a person, where faith is expressed through obedience, conforms to the *Missio Dei*. This stands in contrast to what he calls a bounded faith that requires loyalty to certain doctrines for acceptance. The disciple maker is to invite people to know the only true God and Jesus Christ and to lead the ones who are interested to be confronted with the living word of God through reading the Bible. This is how disciples are a part of God's mission. Jesus is the one building his church, and the Holy Spirit is the one who convicts of sin and chooses people to become children of God, according to Naylor.²³³

The research material reflects a missional perspective on interpretation and hermeneutics as formulated by Naylor in several ways. By referring to *Missio Dei*, Naylor gives a theological understanding of reading and interpreting the Bible with not-yet believers. Three of the informants express that they use inductive Bible reading with people who are discovering Jesus. The missional approach to interpretation is evident in how new churches are established in contexts with new believers as they discover how to be church through DBS. In this context, Naylor's "sending perspective" becomes clear. The informants also emphasize obedience to the word, growing in discipleship, sharing the gospel, and making new disciples. The informants express how they want people to grow by themselves, not being dependent on specific leaders, but learn how to read and act upon the word of God by their own initiative. This can be seen as a way of letting Jesus build his church.

Similar to Fowl's emphasis on the importance of an interpreting community, Naylor suggests that the DMM methodology should not lead to the rejection of Christian traditions, historical interpretation, or the contributions of what Naylor calls "godly men and women throughout the centuries and around the world."²³⁴ As accounted for earlier, this is only expressed by one of the informants, and it can be seen as a subject to reflect on further in the DMM contexts.

Hence, Naylor provides essential contributions to the hermeneutics of DMMs, emphasizing the missional perspective and giving input on how DMMs can relate to Christian traditions and historical interpretation.

²³³ Naylor (fall 2021). Internet: <https://nimer.ca/reflections-on-the-theological-validity-of-disciple-making-movements-dmms/>.

²³⁴ Naylor (fall 2021). Internet: <https://nimer.ca/reflections-on-the-theological-validity-of-disciple-making-movements-dmms/>.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

This thesis aimed to research what hermeneutical approaches are evident among key leaders in Disciple Making Movements. As stated in Chapter One, the research question this paper aims to answer is: *What hermeneutical approaches are evident among key leaders in Disciple Making Movements (DMMs)?* To answer this question, four sub-questions was formulated:

1. What is the context of biblical interpretation?
2. What is the perception of the authority of the Bible?
3. Does the hermeneutic do justice to the wholeness of the Bible?
 - How do the informants read and interpret the Old Testament?
4. How do the informants' experiences influence their approach to biblical texts?
 - How do the informants' hermeneutics affect their view on women and leadership?

Based on this, this chapter will present a summary and conclusions, and suggestions for further research.

7.1 Summary and Conclusions

This paper has demonstrated significant connections between Fowl's model and the hermeneutical approaches expressed by the informants. It has also shown similarities in how Vanhoozer, Hays, and Davis present Theological Interpretation. These are the main points of contact:

- They focus on formation to live faithfully to Christ
- They practice interpretation in a community where close relationships, friendship, discipleship, and accountability are essential.
- They view the whole Bible as the Word of God.
- They acknowledge Jesus' life, death, and resurrection as central for interpreting the wholeness of Scripture.

Regarding the first sub-question, this paper has shown that understanding Bible passages in their contexts is somewhat important for the informants. However, this seems to be something that disciples grow into. The Bible reading is a journey where the basic form of reading for new disciples includes reading Bible stories with Jesus as the center, learning to discern the main principles in the stories, obeying the word in action, and sharing what has been learned with others. As people mature, they learn how to interpret more difficult Bible passages without losing focus on obeying and sharing.

As for the second sub-question, this research shows that even though the informants acknowledge the historical context of Scripture, they emphasize how God speaks to people's

lives and contexts today. This is in line with both Vanhoozer and Fowl. However, the informants are closer to Vanhoozer in giving greater priority to the Bible's authority regarding virtues and the interpreting community. A vital similarity between the informants and Vanhoozer is the assertion that the interpretation of Scripture shapes the community of believers. This can be seen in how the informants describe how inductive Bible reading forms disciples and churches. There is a difference in emphasis between Fowl and Vanhoozer on this matter, with Fowl placing more emphasis on virtues shaping the interpreting community rather than the Word shaping virtuous communities.

Concerning the third sub-question, this research shows that all the informants apply an inductive approach to the entire Bible. Although Jesus is seen as the lens through which the Old Testament should be interpreted, the Old Testament is also regarded as an important text that guides readers toward a discovery of Christ.

With regard to the fourth question, the research shows that experience plays a significant role for some of the informants. How this affects their interpretation differs. Tasse expresses his experience of women in leadership in ways similar to a Pentecostal view on interpretation, where the Spirit's work is accounted for. In a Pentecostal hermeneutic, the gifting of the Spirit and the experience of women exercising these gifts serve as a basis for interpretation, supporting the biblical texts that affirm women in leadership, rather than those that contradict them.²³⁵ However, the informants did not reflect on the subject of experience deeply. It could be argued that reflecting on the relationship between a canonical reading and interpretation guided by experience would be a valuable consideration in their context.

One difference between the informants and Theological Hermeneutics is the view on how the interpretations of others, both globally and historically, should influence their reading of the texts. This is something for leaders in DMMs to reflect further. However, it is worth noting that this varies among the informants. Kuhn is the only one who encourages drawing on sources outside the Bible. Could this be related to his work in a Western context? Is it inevitable in a Western society that people will search for sources outside the Bible? Does Western culture demand more knowledge related to historical questions and research?

This thesis has shown that, in many ways, the informants exemplify the Christian communities Fowl describes. Yet, it also highlights the need for Fowl to develop an ecclesiology grounded in his hermeneutics. For Fowl's hermeneutics, a congregational life must be cultivated, creating space for the type of reading he proposes in traditional Western churches.

²³⁵ Thomas 2013, chap. 6.

In this context, exploring where DMM can contribute and challenge becomes important. For example, how should the church be organized, and how should leadership be understood in order to shape the interpreting communities Fowl suggests?

One perspective that is lacking in Fowl's model is the missional perspective. The missional perspective influences how the informants interpret the text and the context in which interpretation occurs. In DMMs, it is common to read and interpret the Bible together with not-yet believers who are encouraged to act on what they read. Discipleship often proceeds conversion. How does this correspond to a traditional church? How can the missional perspective challenge ecclesiology? Can a group of not-yet believers become a church without first becoming a part of a church? These are questions to consider.

This paper demonstrates that in DMMs, there is little control over interpretation. Bible reading takes place in smaller settings where readers are immediately trained to discern ideas that deviate from the text. However, the informants seem to assume certain boundaries for interpretation without explicitly defining them. Defining the bandwidth for different interpretations and clarifying the boundaries for interpretation are questions that remain for further reflection in DMMs.

It is essential to point out that this paper shows that inductive Bible reading is not done without influence from more mature Christians. However, the influence looks different from traditional churches, where a pastor or a team of leaders is responsible for the teachings. The informants describe a culture in which discipleship occurs through relationships, where a more mature disciple mentors a newer one. This process includes ongoing mentorship and leadership training. The leaders are trained not to give answers but to help people reflect on Scripture and discern interpretations with the help of the Spirit and the wholeness of Scripture. From this research, one can establish that there is common ground among the informants. This includes a high emphasis on reading the Word together and individually, reading the Bible canonically, and interpreting the Bible together in a smaller group where friendship and accountability are valued as important.

Although DBS allows for considerable freedom in interpretation, this interpretation will most likely be shaped by influential leaders within the context where it is practiced. This can be observed in how interpretations of women and leadership within the movements are influenced by the informants' views on the matter, and how they differ. This is something for DMMs to be mindful of. It is also something to be aware of when starting new DBS groups.

Fowl underlines the importance of confession since people's self-interest threatens the interpretation of the biblical texts. He also stresses the importance of self-reflection in order to

be aware of one's preunderstandings and how they might affect the interpretation. How does this relate to DBS and inductive Bible reading in DMMs? This was not something that emerged in the interviews. Even though accountability is emphasized by the informants, the connection between accountability, confession of sin, and interpretation was not something they highlighted. Is confession necessary for sound interpretation, and if so, how can this practice relate to non-believers interpreting the Bible? These are questions for communities using DBS and inductive Bible reading to reflect on further.

An important observation in this research is that, although education is not emphasized for discipleship or leadership, a more profound knowledge of the Word develops as disciples and leaders mature. Some DMMs provide training sessions where knowledge on different subjects is shared. This shows that in these DMMs, there is no aversion to knowledge per se, although there is criticism of the Western perspective on it.

7.2 Reflections

As the introduction mentions, there is an ongoing conversation about using the Bible in church and sermons in Sweden. What can this research bring to the conversation? To follow up on Josefsson's and Andersson's articles, it is clear that they view the sermon as a prominent and important part of the church's life. This represents the view in the majority of churches in Sweden. This research indicates that preaching, as it is typically carried out in a traditional church setting, is not practiced in DMMs. Instead, the focus is on reading and interpreting the Bible together. There is an expectation that every believer reads the Bible by themselves and together with the church, and that they can discern and obey what it says. DMMs challenge traditional churches regarding their views on preaching and sermons. Could it be that the weekly sermon, where interpretation of the Bible is solely carried out by one person – the pastor or priest – hinders individuals from feeling empowered to read the Bible by themselves and together with friends? If that is the case, should churches change their worship service structure to encourage more Bible reading and engagement with Scripture? Another question this survey raises is how churches can create space for cultivating close relationships, fostering accountability, and encouraging people to grow together in discipleship.

Moreover, if churches in Sweden want to use the DBS method as it is used in DMMs, there are some things to reflect on regarding theology and practice. For example, how does the DBS method align with the church's view on the priesthood of believers and its view on ministry? How does the method resonate with the view on obedience? Can a not-yet believer start obeying the word without first accepting Jesus as savior? Is the church willing to follow

through with the DBS process of seeing new simple churches form and giving believers a mandate to proceed with the process of making new disciples? If the churches in Sweden want to take Jesus' commission seriously, there is much to learn from DMMs.

Furthermore, this paper has shown that in DMMs, hermeneutics and ecclesiology are closely linked. How can churches and theological institutions in Sweden learn from this?

7.3 Further research

In this last section, I would like to make some suggestions for further research. This research has only involved key leaders in movements. Interviews with other leaders and people in DMM movements would help get a broader understanding of the hermeneutics in DMMs. It would also be interesting to interview women in leadership and hear about their experiences. This would be of special interest concerning the understanding of women and leadership. When searching for key leaders in movements, only men were recommended. Hence, further research on women catalysts in movements would be of interest, especially since this research has shown that the view on women who are leaders differs. Research on why it differs and how the key leaders' interpretation of the issue affects the movements could be studied further. Additionally, research on the connection between experience and interpretation would be useful for a broader understanding of DMM hermeneutics.

This research shows that there are points of contact between the hermeneutics emerging in DMMs and Pentecostal hermeneutics. Due to space limitations, this could not be developed further in this thesis; however, research on the subject could be valuable.

It should be noted that although there are commonalities in hermeneutics in DMMs, there are also variations. One should be cautious not to harmonize the differences. Research on the hermeneutical differences in movements and between movements would be beneficial.

Finally, research on how the DBS method is applied in a Swedish context would also be helpful. Can the method be used in any church setting without adjustment? Will the use of the method affect ecclesiology? These are interesting questions to explore further.

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Appendix: Interview guide

Background questions

Can you tell me about yourself?

Can you tell me about the work you are a part of?

How do you define church?

Can you tell me a bit more about leadership and how that works in that movement?

Do you have both men and women as leaders in the movement?

Questions about the view of the Bible and Bible usage

How would you describe your view of the Bible?

How would you describe how you read and use the Bible? In a community of believers /individually?

Do you think it is important to understand the context of the texts?

How would you describe the role of the Holy Spirit when reading the Bible?

How do you use the Bible in the movement?

Do you use DBS? If yes, how is it used?

Is DBS used on the whole Bible? How is it used on the Old Testament?

Is DBS used on texts about women and leadership in the New Testament, such as instructions from Paul? How would you say that this affect the interpretation of the texts?

Have there been times when you had to deal with heresies? What are your thoughts on that?

Do you use any other forms of teaching in the movement?

How do you help people with their own personal Bible reading

In your experience, is there any negative sides of using DBS?

Questions about interpretation

Can you tell me something about how to interpret the Bible? Where and how should interpretation take place?

What do you think is the role of the church when it comes to interpretation?

What is the role of the leader/teacher?

Do you think a community of believers/ a church is necessary when it comes to interpreting the Bible? Or can you interpret it individually?

How do you handle different interpretations in a gathering?

