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Dimensions of Community Structures in the Parish
Extracted from the Experience of
Anglo-American Small Christian Communities in the Roman Catholic Church

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Summary

Community may be a major organizing principle of church. In more general terms, community may be defined as a sustainable group of moderate size, with capacity to foster mutuality and trust. Larger communities may be clusters of several smaller groups. In the past the family served as the basic community in the parish and in the rest of society, but today this is not an accurate way to describe neither society, nor church. Presently small groups have appeared (spontaneously or provoked by clergy) and have become a manifest feature of the Roman Catholic Church and of many Protestant and Evangelic denominations all over the world. These new groups cannot compete with families or similar economic units, which are based on biological or sexual relations. But as a community structure in the parish, they are occasionally a substitute for the family. People join more intentionally and withdraw easier but the groups are far more committing than the traditional parish life and they may also connect the individual to the larger parish and society and in this way they operate as a mediating structure. The groups feel they are the small church in the parish, with their own authentic ecclesiality.

The task of this thesis is to improve the existing tools that describe and distinguish between the new community structures. The improved tools make it possible to compare these groups to other parish-based groups. The existing typology is formed exclusively for the American Roman Catholic Church and is neither helpful outside this sphere, nor consistent to ecclesiological parameters. The tools are based on a model, which is bias and has a normative perspective that does not allow for a group to simultaneously score high on inner and public life. Therefore I have identified some indispensable dimensions and built a model where the variables can vary freely. The most interesting dimensions are: cohesivness, churchliness and publicness.

Keywords*: Community, cohesivness, churchliness, publicness, belonging, ecclesiola, Small Church Community, Basic Ecclesial Community*

Contents

1. Introduction

Churches define themselves essentially as *communities of baptized*.[1] Communities are generally structured into a variety of smaller units, with capacity to mediate the experience of the larger society to the individual, but at a meta level most community structures (as nation, church and even parish) are to be understood as *imagined communities*.[2] *The ecclesial community* is most often built upon the *structure of households* and for most people the household has equalled the *family* or the clan, while *the religious houses* have constituted the household for some people.[3] But the religious orders are declining and core families cannot alone provide *the primary community* of the churches any longer, due to increasing diversity and decreasing family bonds.[4] The primary experience of being a Christian is by large not enhanced by close relationships in everyday face-to-face community any longer, but instead often just nourished during parish programs or Sunday morning mass – and that is a declining experience of a diminishing minority.[5] The loss of *experienced communities*, as actual families, that mediate the experience of the larger community in church and society, is thus threatening to empty the *imagined community* of its experience. According to the research of Wuthnow surrogates of *intentional community structures* seem to replace older forms of more *mandatory or generic community structures*, as family, household, neighbourhood and clan, at least in some respects. Two people out of five of the adult American population belongs to a small group providing support, mainly arranged within a parish, congregation, synagogue or a mosque.[6] These *intentional structures* are accompanied by *network* and *territorial based structures*.[7]

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[1] The identity of *Church as community (communio sanctorum)* is asserted for example in *Apostolicum* and *Niceanum,* the ancient ecumenical creeds. See also The Roman Catholic Catechesis where it is stated that the community of the faithful under the leadership of the pope and the bishops is church, Mom 899. Many rites are also intended to sustain community as the initiation sacraments, especially the "Holy Communion". The kiss of peace, salutation, the communal offering and liturgical features as *missa versus populum* and "common prayer" express different aspects of church as community, as well as the holding of each other's hands during prayers.

[2] Anderson 1979 described the imagined community. Berger & Neuhaus 1977 described the movement between micro- and mega structures. See also Lee & Cowan1986 pp 90-112.

[3] *Family* has no unambiguous meaning, but can both connote a single parent with children and a large clan, either living together or living apart, while a *household* is people living together regardless how they are related, Sjöberg 2003 p13. Family members are (often) related biologically, families are often economic unities with responsibility for its members over long time, usually for several generations, Wuthnow 1996 pp 12 f. According to Catechesis mom 2202 *a married couple is with their children a family*. But the family is also a metaphor for pastoral relations. Pastors and religious leaders are called *father* or *mother,* while the members are called *sister, brother* or even children, Whitehead & Whitehead 1993 p 3 *et passim*.

[4] Present work Ch 3.a

[5] The average Sunday morning service attendance in US decreased from a top notion plateau of more than 45 or almost 50 percent of the inhabitants between 1954 and 1964 to 37 percent or less 1999 according to Putnam 2000 p73 and Bellah 1996 p 324. The Roman Catholic mass attendance a typical Sunday these days will be about 32 percent or below, Lee 2000 p 60. The rate of people involved in religious groups beside the parish has decreased from 23 percent in 1955 to between 13 and 8 percent in 1996, Putnam 2000 pp 74, 156 & 483.

[6] Wuthnow 1996 pp 6, 12 ff *et passim.*

[7] New generations find new textures of community, based on new technology as cellular telephones or internet. *Flash mobbing* is a way for young people to mobilize hordes of peers in short time, using cellular telephone text messages. Church of the Apostles is an example of a parish in Seattle, Washington, combined Lutheran and Episcopalian, which is network based, meeting in homes as well as in pubs and other public places. It is an utterly Generation-X-community with an average age of 26, (www.apostleschurch.org 2005-04-15). For territorial principles see also note 40.

a. *Anglo-American Small Christian Communities in the Roman Catholic Church*

By focussing how Anglo American middle class Catholics reconstruct community in the parish, I will highlight the *essential dimensions of Christian community*. In a not negligible minority of Roman Catholic parishes in America lay people intentionally gather in their homes as *Small Christian Communities, (abbreviated SCC)* – establishing new forms of community to *experience* Church, despite of large parishes and lack of priests.[8] Because of their claim to be the church in miniature with full ecclesiality it seems to be principally fruitful to study the SCC, since one could expect most *ecclesial community dimensions* (but necessarily not all) present in there due to this assertion.[9] SCC is sometimes strategically arranged by the pastor, sometimes spontaneously gathered and worked out by responsible lay people and lay-networks without support of formal structures.[10] In USA a tiny minority of the groups even celebrate Eucharist on a regular basis, with or without an assigned pastor.[11] The vast majority of the SCC or 75 percent are parish connected, just as most small groups in the research of Wuthnow are connected to a parish, a congregation or a synagogue.[12]

b. *Outline*

After I have dealt with aim and method, and reviewed some research in present chapter (Ch 1), I will establish what community means in this context, thereby also give the first hints of essential aspects of community and indicate some critical points for ecclesial *community structures*. I will also describe the *analyze model* for Christian community of Cowan & Lee, which is my point of departure (Ch 2). Then I will sketch the features of SCC, showing how SCC is understood and worked out in the American Catholic context by means of a brief history and some sociologic and ecclesial definitions (Ch 3). A critical presentation of the study made by Lee will lead to my critique of *the small group typology* of Vandenakker and Lee & D'Antonio and eventually to my critique of the *analyze model* of Whitehead & Whitehead and Cowan & Lee (Ch 4). In the following discussion I will describe a realm where all small groups could be found and recognized in terms of *dimensions of community,* and briefly discuss potential variables for the operationalization (Ch 5). After my conclusions (Ch 6), it will appear an appendix that extends the discussion to indicate pastoral relevance also outside the RCC and USA and propose further research.

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[8] Lee approximates the number of groups to 37 000 and the Catholics involved to one million, Lee 2000 p 10.

[9] Baranowski 1996 pp 80ff and Lee 2000 pp 114, 120, 128 *et passim*

[10] The existing national SCC-networks illustrate these different perspectives. NAPRC (National Association of Parishes Restructuring into Communities) organizes pastors and parishes who intentionally work for a new parish structure based on the SCC-experience, while Buena Vista is a grass root network of people and small groups that not necessarily have any support from their parish or diocese or any parish connection at all. See for example Lee 2000 p 34.

[11] Also many of these belong to a network of Intentional Eucharistic Communities Lee 2000, p 5. This seems to be even more common in Flemish, francophone and Hispanic communities in Europe. See note 103.

[12] An overwhelming large number of the two largest types of small communities had some sort of parish connection, 81 percent of the general type (GSC) and 91 percent of the Hispanic/Latino type, Lee 2000 p 10 and p 61. "Nearly two-thirds of all small groups have some connection to churches or synagogues. Many have been initiated by clergy," Wuthow 1996 p 6

c.   Research Survey

Practical handbooks with *methods* and *models* Concerning Small Church Communities (SCC) are abundant.[13] But scholarly research or theoretical reflection on these small ecclesial groups or on their theological implications and prerequisites are scarce; there are just a few studies on SCC or the modern *house church,* only Vandenakker, Wuthnow, Lee and Cowan have treated the American experience of small groups, SCCs and *house churches*:

Robert Wuthnow, Princeton University New Jersey, conducted a research project studying all sort of small groups without respect to denominational affiliation but with a special interest of their relation to the sacred, *Sharing the Journey* 1996.[14] He found that 40 percent of the adults in US were currently involved in at least one small group providing support, five percent had been involved within the past three years and approximately seven percent would likely join one within a year.[15] According to Wuthnow the new communities contribute to make community something non-mandatory which people intentionally chose.[16] He clustered people's self designation into four major categories, where *the Bible Study group* includes the label *House church*.[17] Robert Putnam, Harvard subscribes to the results of Wuthnow but argues after analysis of several sociological researches that the rate of people involved in religious groups *beside* the parish actually has decreased from 23 percent in 1955 to between 13 and eight percent in 1996.[18]

John Paul Vandenakker made a systematic overview of the North American Roman Catholic SCCs in his doctoral dissertation *Small Christian Communities and the Parish; An Ecclesiological Analysis of the North American Experience* 1994. He assesses the ecclesiality of parish-connected SCCs in US. His empirical data is limited to interviews with leaders of American networks and movements. His systemization of SCCs has guided subsequent studies of SCCs in their typologies (see Ch 4a).[19] He acknowledges that the claim of ecclesiality on behalf of the SCCs is one of the most important points to distinguish between SCCs and other parish based small groups.[20] He also elaborates the differences to the Latin American BEC. Vandenakker admits that the Latin American base groups are quasi-churches

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[13] Some more practical pastoral theologian's resources provide some theoretical reflection. Whitehead & Whitehead, O'Halloran and Baranowski have contributed to the pastoral resources, with some reflections. There are also the more reflective reports and proceedings written or edited by Ivory, Moriarty, Pelton, Lee and Cowan.

[14] Wuthnow 1996 pp367-369: Two representative samples of people who were members and non-members of small groups respectively were interviewed. The samples were both around 1000 persons, distributed and weighted to be representative for Americans over 18 year, regarding age, sex, education and race in each area

[15] Wuthnow 1996 p 49

[16] Wuthnow 1996 pp 11ff

[17] The labels were (in falling frequency of occurrence): *Discussion group, Support group, Special interest group, Prayer fellowship, Bible study group, Sunday school class, Women's group, Self-help group, Youth group, Men's group, Couple's group, House church, Therapy group, Singles' group, Anonymous group, Covenant group*, The categories were *the Sunday school class, the Bible study group, the Self-help group* and *the Special interest group*, Wuthnow 1996 pp 65-76.

[18] Putnam 2000 pp 74, 156 & 483

[19] Vandenakker 1994 pp vxif

[20] Vandenakker 1994 p xiii

in a canonical sense, whereas the North American SCCs are not.[21] He concludes that the SCCs deserve an official statement that they are a "significant ecclesial locus in the church."[22]

Michael Cowan and Bernard Lee wrote*: Dangerous memories* 1986, Bernard Lee: *The future Church of 140 BC* 1996, Cowan & Lee: *Conversation, Risk & Conversion; The Inner & Public Life of Small Christian Communities* 1997. In this work they elaborate the *analyze model* of Christian community (see Ch 2.b), that James Whitehead and Evelyn Whitehead provide in *Community of Faith; Models and Strategies for Developing Christian Communities* 1992 and *The Promise of Partnership* 1993. Whitehead & Whitehead describe the mixed style of a small group that works as a community, separating them from pure primary groups and secondary groups.[23] Bernard Lee directed the research that resulted in the report *"The Catholic Experience of Small Christian Communities"* 2000. Cowan & Lee have also written *Gathered and sent* 2003. It is a summary of the joint meeting that occurred in San Antonio Texas 2002, where the most important networks and organizations for SCC combined their convocations.

d.   Problem, task and method

The prerequisite for this thesis is the claim of the churches to be *communities*, while concrete *community structures* of trust, mutuality and longevity historically have been provided by *household structures* constituted of *families*, which now are increasingly lacking.[24] The lack of community in large urban parishes is compensated, reconstructed or ignored.[25] Parish programmes may represent a way to *compensate for community*, while focussing on the pious minority is a way *to ignore the lack of community* among the majority of the parishioners. Different ways to deliberately *reconstruct* community substituting *household structures* of *families* with *small group structures* is the arena of my thesis. The objective is to explore the dimensions of community in small scale arrangements for community in the parish. The task is three folded; to establish a fair and operationalizable understanding of the *community conception*, to evaluate current systematization *typology* and *analyze model* of Small Church Communities (SCC) and eventually to construct *a new analyze model* with capacity to contain all sort of ecclesial groups or communities.

This is a methodological thesis. As a theoretical background I use the scholarly work of Cowan & Lee, elaborated in the context of the Roman Catholic experience of SCC in US. As a general method, I will reflect on recent research reports. I will assess the *analyse model* of Cowan & Lee against the empirical data of the research directed by Lee & D'Antonio, which he generously has entrusted me.[26] I will eventually propose a more helpful *analyse model*. Vandenakker's and Lee-D'Antonio's systemization and definitions of Small Intentional or

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[21] He finds it "remarkable [---] when one finds some Roman Catholics trying to argue, on the basis of Catholic ecclesiology, that BECs/SCCs which are not regular centers of eucharist, and which either lack or do not want the presence or input of ordained ministry, nonetheless can be equated with church in the same manner as a duly constituted parish community," Vandenakker 1996 p198, se also pp110ff. Vandenakker 1996 p105

[22] Vandenakker 1996 p239 has an all-or-nothing-approach to the ecclesiality of the SCC. The sociologist as Bellah recognizes the ecclesiality of the local church: "The local church is a community of worship that contains within itself, in small, so to speak, the features of the larger church" Bellah 1996 p227.

[23] Whitehead & Whitehead 1992 pp 19f. Unlike the task group the primary group has a value in it self. The conception of "primary groups" was coined by Charles Horton Cooley: Groups "characterized by intimateface-to-face association and cooperation. [---] they are fundamental in forming the social nature and ideals of the individual. [---] it is a "we" Cooley 1909 pp 25 ff

[24] See Ch 3.a

[25] My analysis of community strategies is inspired by, and corresponding to three kinds of ways to cope with the authority quest, as rendered by Jeanrond 1996, p 76: the shepherd model, critical loyalty and radical brake.

[26] Lee & D'Antonio 2000

Small Christian Communities will initially help to orientate in this unknown landscape, but their typologies are also tightly connected with the North-American social structure, individualism, demography, intentionality and ecclesial volunteering organizations, since they used organizational and ethnical criteria. The research of Vandenakker and Cowan & Lee is deliberately biased by an underlying pastoral aim within the context of the Roman Catholic Church (RCC), while denominational aspects are ignored by Wuthnow, Putnam and Bellah.[27]

The scarceness of scholarly work is obvious.[28] An operational *analyze model* built on close-to-practice-research is needed to observe how churches adjust to reality, adapt to a changing society and to new secular community-structures and arrange its community. My unique contribution will be to provide a new perspective of community and describe a multidimensional realm, where each value is free to vary independently regardless of denominational contexts. It has also a focus make visible the possible intermediate role of small groups between the individual, the parish and the society. My thesis is that there is a set of more general dimensions usable when studying small groups from a community perspective and with capacity to contain a diversity of community forms. Different types of communities will appear as volumes of coordinates in the so defined multidimensional space. This thesis will not include an operationalization of the model, but give some hints to how it could be constructed, suggesting suitable variables. Other ways than SCC to create community in a parish are also currently left out of my scope, as well as Basic Ecclesial Communities (BEC) and evangelical cell groups, but it is anyhow the purpose that the analyse model will have capacity to contain also them. The outcome is a clearer view of all sorts of *community structures* of the church in all sorts of denominations in all countries.

2. Community

What is a decent meaning of Community? How do people relate to a *primary community* and to a larger community and society? Community is a very wide concept, ranging from the construction of a global community to the experience of mutual support and warmth of single persons in a small group, where the experience of the individual is likely to be more concrete. A popular understanding may thence be very different from how community is understood in classical theology, ecclesiology or sociology. But it must be possible to find a reasonable understanding of community that approximate for both a scholarly and a popular meaning of experienced community and simultaneously serves an operational purpose.

a. What Community is in General

An all-agreed-on understanding of community involves at least face-to-face meeting, mutuality, vulnerability and longevity. Present people are thus constitutional for community.[29] The concept of *experienced community* is shaped by the sets of community

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[27] Vandenakker 1994 pp xiiiff, Lee 2000 pp 26ff

[28] Lee would just acknowledge the work of Vandenakker before his own report of 2000, pp 25f. The style of practical theology reflected in all other consulted literature is much applied. The "Phronetic Practical Theology" that is part of the programme of Lee, is aimed to make a change in the world, just as Liberation Theology, Lee 1998 *passim*.

[29] There are many other ways to understand community. The virtual community should not be disregarded. People meet over Internet, in videoconferences, with e-mail and so on. Rheingold has pointed to the "new social revolution" he expects, when young people combine new technologies in surprising ways to "gather" into instant "smart mobs" who never meet, but nonetheless act simultaneously in community. Compare with note 7. The community could also be latent or ideal, as a community of language, or a cultural community and so on. That sort will appear or materialize as soon as two or more people belonging to it meet. Community could also be spiritual. Church could also be understood in this way. In mass the assembled congregation sings "together with

which a person has experienced and belonged to; family, neighbourhood, profession, company, congregation, denomination, ethnic group, nation and so on. Robert N Bellah[30] defines *community* as

a group of people who are socially interdependent, who participate together in discussion and decision making, and who share certain practices *[---] that both define the community and are nurtured by it. Such a community is not quickly formed. It almost always has a history and so is also a community of memory, defined in part by its past and its memory of its past. Practices are shared activities that are not undertaken as means to an end but are ethically good in themselves (thus close to* praxis *in Aristotle's sense). A genuine community [---] is constituted by such practices [31]*

The members of a community thus interact, share practices and memories. Community is contrasted with another type of group: *the Life Style enclave*, which is

formed by people who share some feature of private life. Members of a lifestyle enclave express their identity through shared patterns of appearance, consumption, and leisure activities, which often serve to differentiate them sharply from those with other lifestyles. They are not interdependent, do not act together politically, and do not share a history.[32]

Whereas a community attempts to be an inclusive whole, celebrating the interdependence of public and private life and of the different callings of all, lifestyle is fundamentally segmental and celebrates the narcissism of similarity. [---] Such enclaves are segmental in two senses. They involve only a segment of each individual, for they concern only private life, especially leisure and consumption. And they are segmental socially in that they include only those with a common lifestyle.[33]

Where history and hope are forgotten and community means only the gathering of the similar, community degenerates into lifestyle enclave.[34]

As a contrast, thus, a community is characterized of interdependence, inclusiveness, diversity, connectedness between public and private, shared history and possible joint political action.

Larger or *imagined* (sic!) communities need a distributed structure of groups, since groups are the locus of the qualities of community. Community needs to be nurtured in safe, human sized *groups* of perhaps just "two or three". Community is found in many types of groups.[35] Groups are sociological defined by 74 as "a number of persons, or members each of whom, while the group is meeting, interacts with every other, or is able to do so, or can at least take personal cognizance of every other."[36] This doesn't definitely limit the size of a group, but gives an idea of the size of a functional group, generally between 8 and 16 people.[37]

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all faithful from all ages and with the Angels of the Heaven". The community of church transcends time and space, and connects people all over the world without regard to time or geography.

[30] Bellah has in *Habits of the heart - Individualism and commitment in American life* penetrated the American mood and ethos, community and individualism The title draws from a sentence of the French sociologist Tocqueville, who described the American society in the 1830:s, and who coined the modern term *individualism* after his visit in the US.

[31] Bellah 1996 pp 333ff

[32] Bellah 1996 p 335

[33] Bellah 1996 p72

[34] Bellah 1996 p 154

[35] Aurelius points at the proximity between civic engineers' view of neighbourhood community and ecclesiology. Aurelius 1998 p 64

[36] George C Homan 1974 p 1

[37] The number of possible ways of bilateral interactions or relations in a group can be described as an *arithmetical serial* and calculated by Gauss' formula. Every time a new person is added to the number of a group, the number of interaction ways grows with the number of group members before the newcomer is counted. A group of three has three bilateral ways of communication or interaction. When a fourth person makes entrance, the number of relations rise to 1+2+3=6. After the fifth person added the possible relations are 1+2+3+4=10, so six persons make 15 interaction ways and an eight-group will sum up its bilateral relations to 28, but if you double the number of the group to 16, the number of relations will raise to 120. That is *probably* at

A more liberal definition is provided by Turner who suggests self-categorization as the basis of definition; a group exists if at least two people think they belong to it.[38] Brown added that the group has to be recognized (as a group) by at least one person outside it.[39] *This is the dimension* of publicity *for the group. The group has to be known to exist.* A functional group could be structured in terms of territory and proximity and made up by people living in a specified neighbourhood, where people can experience community.[40]

Beside structures for interaction as size and proximity, also frequency may contribute to the continuity and function of a group. If people are attracted to each other, they may stay in a group and be proud of it. This force is called *cohesion*, a term first used by Lewin. Hogg discriminates between the more individual attraction, and the admiration of members with virtues or qualities that typify the group.[41] In this way the ethos of a group, its history, memory, tradition, values and behaviour code decide how the group will keep together. This is appealing to the quality of *conformity* in terms of shared orientation, values, goals and definitions that Whitehead & Whitehead are emphasizing.[42]

Michael Cowan notes that *the sense of community* has its root in the experience of mutuality that "refers to the ability of persons to engage in direct and non-manipulative dialogue, each understanding and respecting the other's frame of reference."[43] The level of mutuality depends on several factors: The goals of the group, the readiness to share and behaviour rules or patterns and interpersonal skill among the members. He also characterizes mutual relationships as lateral and resembling friendship. He specifies three levels of mutuality:

- Self-disclosure and empathy
- Challenge and Self-examination
- Immediacy and exploration of the relationship

The first level is characterized by ability to share and hear feelings, thoughts and values, irrespective of agreement, letting attention have priority over evaluation. The second level includes the reciprocal invitation of challenge and accepting or receiving the challenge.

In a way small groups function as a "surrogate source of intimacy and primary identity" while families have decreased in number. Wuthnow stresses the different mood or understanding of community that occur in the small groups. There is another sort of commitment than in the family. He remarks that the intentional community lacks the economic commitment and more or less life long longevity that used to characterize a family, a tribe, an ethnic group and so on. Small group members are seldom related biologically; small groups are not economical units that bear legal responsibilities for their members. Community within small groups is something over which the members have a great deal of control. They may easily move between groups or take leave of it all. The joining of a particular group is a personal choice,

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the top of what people normally can cope with. The Gauss formula says that the number of bilateral relations is $S(n)=(n-1)*n/2$, where *n* is the number of the members, adapted from Karush 1962 p21.

[38] Turner is cited in Rosander 2003 p 13

[39] Rosander 2003 p 14

[40] The community Bert in Glasgow describes itself as a "walking distance community," everybody living in the distance you can carry a pot of food (personal communication with Ian Milligan, Glasgow). The pastoral teams of Adelaide in South Australia (RCC; *Twist in the Tale*, No 2, 2003 and personal communication with Gerry Proctor, Liverpool), Liverpool, as well as the Small Groups of Christ the King (ELCA) Kenner, LA are other examples of groups organized by a territorial neighbourhood principle.

[41] Rosander 2003 p 17

[42] Whitehead & Whitehead 1982

[43] Cowan 1982 p 132

people may be involved in more than one group, especially over lifetime. Their interdependence is more likely to involve emotional care than physical or economic support.[44]
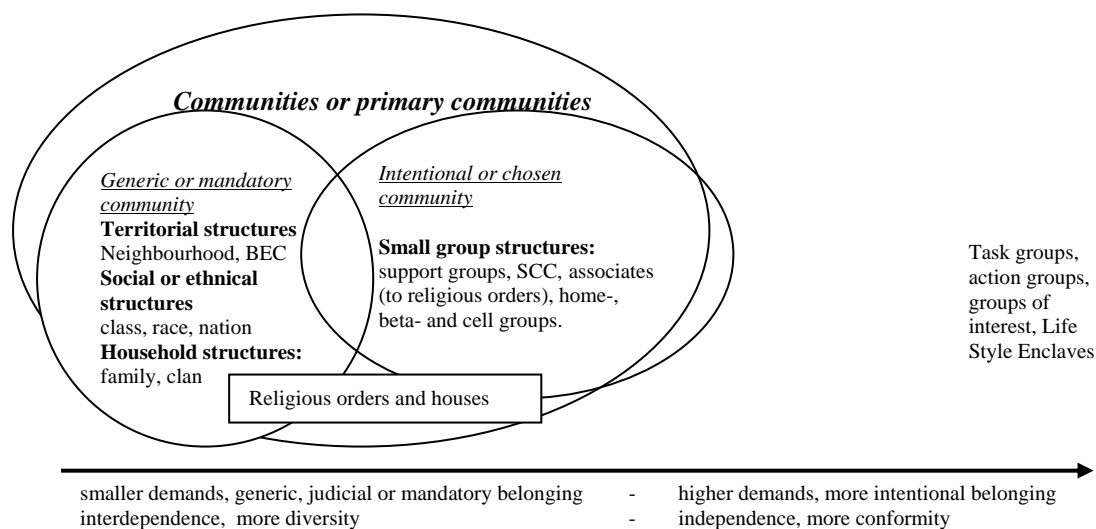
Robert D Putnam, Harvard, seems to agree with Wuthnow, and warns for decreased *social capital* as a consequence of privatized religion and frequent changes of denomination.[45] He also identifies a difference between how the elder generation, born before 1946 and the generation born after 1964 experience *belonging*. It is minor regarding the "stronger bonds" - how family, friends and work-mates contribute to the experience of belonging, but the impression of the "weaker bonds" - neighbours, church or synagogue, local paper, local community, groups or associations almost went halves for the younger generation.[46]

To understand people's interaction and community in parishes and in the larger society, the finer structures, or the *experienced communities* have to be explored. A family as well as an intentional community will both provide *experience* of community, albeit different. I assume that the finer textures that communities usually are structured in have *primary group features*, and call such small groups *primary communities* or just *communities* as shown in figure 1. The experience of community is provided at a basic level, while the community at a meta level, like nation or global church, is rather imagined or constructed.

Meta-structure	Main structure	Basic structure
Major community	*Local community*	*Primary community*
Tribe, race, nation	clan, neighbourhood	Family
global church,		Family, household, Small
denomination,	local church, diocese,	Christian Community or Basic
province	parish	Ecclesial Community
	Religious house,	religious community, small
religious orders	cloister	group of associated

Figure 1. Successively finer textures in selected examples of structures, with aggregated small groups

Communities are characterized by sharing, being and belonging, more than activity and doing. Membership of a community is more like *citizenship* than for example *employment*, and more like *hanging around* than activity. The demands on the community member are lower than in task groups or action groups and diversity is more generous, as shown by figure 2.

smaller demands, generic, judicial or mandatory belonging   -   higher demands, more intentional belonging
interdependence, more diversity   -   independence, more conformity

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[44] Wuthnow 1996 pp 12ff
[45] Putnam 2000 p76 as a comment on Wade Clarc Roof and William McKinney
[46] Putnam 2000 pp 288 ff

Figure 2. Primary community is provided by different types of basic structures of community.

To sum up a feasible concept of community would be something that occurs in groups with

- ✓ a size
    - o large enough to assure longevity and continuity and
    - o small and frequent enough to enable all members to interact with every other
- ✓ **a safe athmosphere** allowing for mutuality, vulnerability, interdependence, inclusiveness, diversity, mutual attraction, and experience of *belonging*
- ✓ **shared practices** as rites, meals, tradition, behaviour codes and even economic commitment
- ✓ **group identity**, expressed with self-categorization, proudness, shared orientation, values, goals, definitions, history and memories, and also admiration of members with certain virtues or qualities
- ✓ **public appearance** and external recognition possible joint political action or some degree of connectedness between public and private

All characteristics either correspond to the group itself or its integration in, interaction with or correspondence to church or society.

b. A model to describe Christian community

The ecclesial experience of community ranges from the sitting after one another in pews in Sunday morning to the intense sharing of one another's stories. Many Sunday morning masses are formal, temporal and face-to-neck instead of committed, long-term and face-to-face. Christian community will have to take small groups of longevity in account, and it has to be found somewhere else than in mass, even if mass is the ultimate celebration of community.

Evelyn Whitehead and James Whitehead model the Christian community as a hybrid with a blend of primary and secondary group characteristics.[47] In figure 3 either extreme means that the group is a pure primary or secondary group respectively (The illustration is mine). The primary group characteristics are longevity and emotional bonds. The most typical primary group is the family. The secondary group is more task-oriented and could be exemplified by a work team or an action group. A Christian community would be located in between of them.

Primary group characteristics   Secondary group characteristics

Figure 3. The hybrid model of Whitehead & Whitehead

Bernard Lee and Mike Cowan build a model that resembles Whitehead's & Whitehead's primary/secondary group model. But at the extremes of the scale appear instead inner life and public life (See fig 4, the illustration is my attempt to interpret the model). "Inner life" is all the spiritual life (bible reading, sharing and reflecting, praying), the social life (group dynamics, communication, decision making, conflict and so forth). The "public life" is about concerns and actions of mercy and justice outside the community.

Inner life   Public life

Figure 4. The Modified hybrid model of M Cowan and B Lee

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[47] See note 23

Cowan & Lee also offer a model of the Small Christian Community (SCC) as a mediating structure in accordance with the description of Peter Berger and Richard John Neuhaus.[48] The current society is so large, impersonal and alienating, that it is hard to understand, reach a personal meaning and belonging, unless you turn to a smaller and more personal structure (family, friendship, association, small group, and community), that will allow for more mutuality and confidence. Persons move back and forth between small micro systems and large mega systems. These smaller structures can either in effect isolate the individual and further alienate her from the larger society, or mediate to it. In the latter case the community can help reflect and relate to the larger society in a way that makes it possible to intelligence and cope with it. Lee and Cowan characterize the mediating structures as follows: "Mediating structures have both internal and external dimensions. They are a place where persons are known personally and related to mutually (the internal dimension), and where they can address the larger political, economic and cultural forces of their age in solidarity with others (the external dimension)." They are a way to participate in the larger structure, in the larger world.[49] Also Wuthnow means that the "small groups are a significant feature of what holds our society together." Small groups put people "in the presence of others where they can share their needs and concerns, make friends, and become linked to wider social networks."[50] In the extremely individual society of US, different intermediate groups are needed for any citizen participation to fill "the gulf between the individual and the state".[51] Bellah talked about a social ecology, where "[The] larger community was formed out of a variety of smaller communities."[52] In the ecclesial context the SCC often claim an intermediating role.[53]
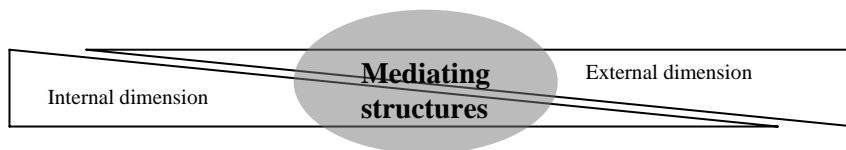

Figure 5. Mediating structures

Reflection on society and interaction with it, as well as an effective inner life is necessary for a Christian community to have a good balance between inner and public and to function as a mediating structure (See figure 5). Thence are these two dimensions the most important analysis tools for Lee and Cowan; Inner and public, gathered and sent.

But I doubt that this one-dimensional model can describe the complexity of a small community accurately, without enhancement or improvement. To make my point clear I will represent the model of Lee and Cowan as a coordinate system with two axes, one for the internal dimension and one for the external dimension (Figure 6).

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[48] Berger & Neuhaus 1977 pp 1 ff
[49] Lee & Cowan 1986 pp 104 ff
[50] Wuthnow 1994 pp 1-16
[51] Bellah 1996 p 212, referring to Tocqueville, whose interest centered on the family, religious bodies and associations of all sorts. It was one idea of Tocqueville that a variety of associations would balance the power of the centralized government. See for example Tocqueville 1997 pp 149-166 or as interpreted by Bellah 1996 p38. Early on in the book Bellah draws on the idea of Thomas Jefferson to "subdivide counties into 'wards' of approximately 100 citizens that would be 'small republics' in which every citizen could become 'an acting member of the Common government [---]'," p 31
[52] Bellah 1996 p xxix and pp 283ff
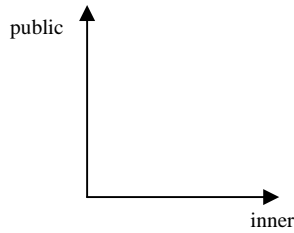[53] Vandenakker 1994 p 166

public

inner

Figure 6. The Inner-public-field

It is my interpretation of Cowan & Lee, that if you score high in one variable, you automatically score low in the other and an increase of both variables seems to be excluded by the model. The "inner" decreases while the "public" increases as demonstrated in figure 7.
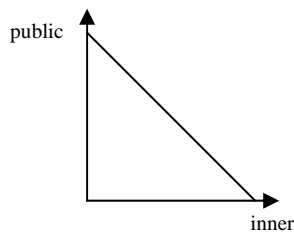
public

inner

Figure 7. The Hybrid model with dependent variables

Furthermore there is just a limited interval that is credited to be community (See figure 8).

Task group

public
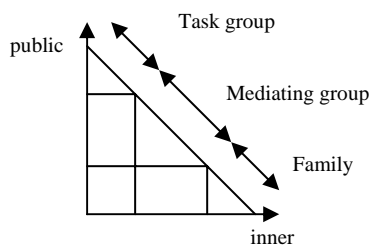
Mediating group

Family

inner

Figure 8. The community interval

But I will subscribe to the possibility to find dimensions that indicate public or ecclesial involvement, as well as dimensions that indicate small group dynamics. I suggest that there are no fixed relationships, like high scores of inner life will exclude high scores of public life. A model that allows all variables to vary freely describes different forms of groups better.

3. Small Church Communities

a. *A Brief History*

Perhaps consciousness of the dependence on secular or "natural" community structures has been limited in Church from time to time, but nevertheless it has always related its own structure to these.[54] For a long time the household remained the basic structure of the parish and the first experience of Christianity for the individual. The home was a sacred place of worship, prayer, catechism and community, as well as of shared meals and work. The household has in shifting guises during the history been the agent of teaching Christianity and catechism, transferring spirituality between generations and nurturing it in an informal way.[55] The household became "the domestic church" representing "the little church", the

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[54] Jeanrond 1998 p 77 *et passim*
[55] Aurelius 1998 p15

ecclesiola.[56] The church trusted that the family was the smallest part of the church.[57] The children were socialized into citizens and Christians at home, and what happened in school and catechism-classes was secondary to what took place in the family.[58]

A hundred years ago a typical Protestant church in US had typically between 80 and 100 adult members, and all would actually meet in Sunday morning.[59] If that was not the case, people from the same church or denomination tended to live in the same area, cluster in the same neighborhoods with bonds in different parts of life or have a strong communion within an extended family, which lasted long and shared a strong community. The basic community level of church was earlier on realized in a household with biological, economic or moral bonds. But lately family life and the role of the family have changed irreversible. According to Bellah

The family is no longer an integral part of a larger moral ecology tying the individual to community, church and nation. The family is the core of the private sphere, whose aim is not to link individuals to the public world but to avoid it as far as possible.[60]

Putnam has shown that less time is spent together and more at work; In 1998 American married couples worked 14 hours more every week than 1969.[61] Adult Americans also spend 72 minutes every day in a car; it is twice as much as average parents are together with their children.[62] Between 1977 and 1999 the rate of families (with married parents) who "usually eat dinner together" decreased from 50 percent to 34 percent, and the time spent by children at dinner table decreased with 20 percent between 1981 and 1997, while the time family members talked to each other went halves.[63] Families and marriages are more fluent, "dual-career couples may feel less economic responsibility to each other than in earlier times."[64] The percentage of single households in the US doubled from 13 to 26 between 1960 and 1998, while households of two persons decreased from 74 to 53 percent.[65] Putnam identifies especially the generation of the 1960s as being late to marry and fast to divorce.[66]

The changed demography and domestic habits has thus also changed community within Church. The urbanization meant that city parishes grew from familiar enclaves of kinsmen to enormous entities, while church attendance decreased. The interface between liturgical life and lay people diminished, the social control collapsed and Church reacted with professionalization.[67] Putnam has found that there is a statistical connection between

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[56] The Catechesis mom 2204 (equals the Apostolic exhortation *Familiaris consortio*), see also USCCB 1995
[57] The second Vatican Council names the family "Ecclesia domestica" and it is also named "the Urcell of society": The Catechesis mom 1656 and 2207 respectively.
[58] The home is the first school of the Christian life, according to the Catechesis mom 1657
[59] Wuthnow 1996 p 41
[60] Bellah 1996 p112
[61] Putnam 2000 p 201
[62] Putnam 2000 p 224
[63] Putnam 2000 pp 105 and 492
[64] Wuthnow 196 p14
[65] Putnam 2000 p 492
[66] Putnam 2000 p 271
[67] "Another continuing trend is toward large parishes where staff people specialize in education, worship or outreach – and this specialization can easily become compartmentalization." Baranowski 1996 p 2. There are also abundant references to Swedish experiences: Straarup notices a distinct producer-consumer-perspective, where "the parish" equals the staff of employees, who produce programmes, which they trade on the market, where the parishioners are the customers. The church is like an insurance company, which should be cheap and cool as long as it is not needed, Straarup 1997 p 50. He emphasizes emerging large parish staffs as a background. Jeanrond 1998 p 162 uses the social security agency as a similar metaphor for church. Aurelius comments on the development of suburban missions to parishes: "The staff were in increasingly degree employed [---] [*it became*] crucial if the employed as a substitute or a support for the voluntary ministry. In the former case the parish risked to appear as "the church of employees" [---] the parishioners interface with the church wasn't a meeting with

decreased religious engagement and the weakening of the family, while marriage and parenthood seems to stimulate ecclesial activity, but it is unclear which one has caused the other.[68]

Rootlessness and breakdown of earlier family and neighborhood structures has called forth that church members intentionally seek to establish new small communities out of their need for community.[69] Wuthnow has shown that there is a public need to recover community. There is a need for caring, support and deepened faith, perhaps in lack of what has earlier on been provided by small parishes or the core family, and that it also is the probable force behind the small-group movement.[70] These groups may be far more intentional than the family, but still more committing than traditional parish life. They will typically not have access to an ordained priest on a regularly basis, but will develop a shared leadership, often meaning consensus decision and taking turns in facilitating the meetings.

Lee estimates the existence of at least 37 000 small Christian communities within the RCC on the continental US, with a membership of over a million adults and children.[71] One major impulse to the US small group experience is the base communities that were encouraged by the bishop's conferences of Medellin and Pueblo, as well as by the papal encyclic of Paul IV *Evangelii Nunciandi* and the texts of 2nd Vatican Council.[72] The National Conference of Catholic Bishops in the US also stated the need for an ecclesial community larger than family, smaller than parish.[73] The most important factor in the US development of SCC within RCC, beside Vatican II and the sociological factors, seems to be the impact of RENEW.[74] It is a three year parish program for renewal in the parish. People gather once a week in six weeks in six sequent terms during advent and lent.[75] 3.5 million Catholics took part in about 350,000 groups and many groups became permanent.[76] The Cell groups inspired by the Korean pastor Yonggi Cho have had their greatest impact on evangelically styled congregations but they have also had influence on Charismatic Catholics.[77]

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peers any more [---] instead they met employees with ministry as their job [*my translation*]," Aurelius 1998 pp 60 f. Ekstrand coined *the service oriented popular church outlook* in his characterization of the current set of different theological outlooks in Church of Sweden, Ekstrand 2002 p 101. The former manager of the church employees' union Gerda Kuylenstierna uttered that *it is the employees who are church*. Without employees there is no church [my translation and italics] Wallander 2002.

[68] Putnam 2000 pp 75, 292 f

[69] Vandenakker 1994 pp 79 ff, Wuthnow 1996 pp 11 ff, 33 ff *et passim*, Baranowski 1996 p 1 *et al.*

[70] Wuthnow 1996 p36

[71] Lee 2000 p 10

[72] Jeanrond 1998 p 76. In *Evangelii Nuntiandi* Paul VI states that Basic Communities appear from the need for a more human dimension, not available in large urban parishes. He contrasts the groups that contributes to the spiritual life and unity of the Church, with those who oppose the hierarchy. The former types are encouraged, named a hope for the whole church, Paul IV 1976 p 56. With references to this statement John Paul II repeatedly endorses the importance and role of small groups or basic ecclesial communities, as in the 1977 *Synod on Catechesis*, the 1979 Apostolic exhortation *Catechesi Tradendae*, the 1980 *Message for Basic Christian Communities* (visiting Brazil), the 1980 *African Bishop Challenge* (visiting Kenya) the 1985 Extraordinary Synod of Bishops, the *1986 Letter to the Brazilian Epioscopal Conference*, the 1987Synod on theLaity, the 1988 Apostolic exhortation *ChristifidelesLaici* and the 1990 Encyclical *Redemtoris Missio*, *et aliter,* Vandenakker 1994 pp 181 ff

[73] USCCB 1995

[74] Lee 2000 p12

[75] The initiative was taken by Tom Kleissler, see Kleissler 1997 p xiv *et passim*

[76] Lee 2000 p 33

[77] D'Antonio 2000 pp 174 f, Cho 1999

b. Sociological Definitions

Wuthnow defines "house churches" as a subdivision of the larger category "Bible study groups" in his study of small groups in the US. They are also described as prayer fellowships or covenant groups. 58 percent meet every week, 66 percent meet for an hour and a half or longer. The house church is a specific kind of Bible study group, where

all or most of the functions of a religious service (worship, education, prayer, ministry, and growth) [are] included] but in a smaller, more informal, and more intimate atmosphere than in a traditional church service.[78]

He estimates that there are about 900,000 Bible study groups with 15 to 20 million people involved in US. *24 percent of the bible study members describe the group as house church.* Wuthnow ranks the bible study groups as the most important kind of support group, because of their number and total meeting time. Wuthnow finds that "Bible study groups are the most likely of any type of group to include people of diverse ages. But they are also most likely to be composed only or mostly of women (42 percent). Bible study groups contain a higher than average proportion of religious conservatives (42 percent) and are least likely to include a mixture of religious liberals and conservatives (29 percent)."[79] By their vast occurrence the small groups are a major factor in the US society, shaping the members identity.[80]

Vandenakker has shown that there is a "remarkable similarity in basic structure and format" among North American SCCs. There is "fundamental similarity in the size, setting, frequency, format, and ways in which SCCs meet and carry out their affairs."[81] He investigated the organizations and programs promoting the growth of SCCs, namely RENEW, Buena Vista and so on. The optimal size was considered 8-12 people, few enough to allow for a good dynamic and many enough for stability over time. The home of fellow members was seen as the natural setting. As an average a biweekly frequency was advocated, the frequencies ranging from every week to every three weeks. A meeting consists of prayer and/or Scripture reflection, faith-sharing on the Scripture and/or life and some form of teaching/catechesis. Some form of social outreach was seen as a necessity for the members. All members had a shared responsibility for the group. The leader has the role to help animate the meeting and keep in touch with the parish pastor. Since Vandenakker studied parish-based SCCs, it follows that they all had connections to the parish. The connection could consist of the facilitators meeting with the priest regularly, for formation, the SCC having representatives on parish council or its use of catechetical material from the parish.[82]

Bernard Lee used a similar pattern to trace the Roman Catholic SCCs in USA. But he didn't stop at the organizations, but made a thorough investigation at individual group basis, after a careful randomized statistical selection process, conducted by the sociologist William D'Antonio. The main organizations were contacted and their channels were used to invite people to participate in the study. All groups defined with a set of characteristics were identified. The socially interesting category within US Roman Catholic church was defined as "the sort of community that meets often enough to create a relational texture that provides a context within which people find their faith and lived experience interacting." The characteristics were

- Self-identification as an SCC
- Meeting frequency
- Regularly engaging in

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[78] Wuthnow 1996 p 68
[79] Wuthnow 1996 p 82
[80] Wuthnow 1996 p 26
[81] Vandenakker 1994 p 193
[82] Vandenakker 1994 pp 173f

- o prayer,
- o reading and
- o discussion of scripture and
- o faith sharing.[83]

The functional descriptive definition above is conforming to the description of Lee and Cowan 1986 in *Dangerous Memories*:

> *They are small groups of Christians who gather regularly. They pray, sing, and share their human stories. They bring their stories and The Story into serious dialogue. The members know each other personally. They offer support to one another. Together they often confront injustices of their world. With other groups they form a network of communities. [---] They do not think of themselves as extra-ecclesial, but as genuine church, as basic ecclesial units.*[84]

c.   Ecclesiological Definitions and Discussion

It seems not sufficient to characterize the SCC solely by means of their format and activities. A definition out of what people and groups do will fail to explain what they are or want to be, their self conception, self esteem. A definition has to take in account the ideological dimension of the SCCs, their objectives and scope. Neither Lee & Cowan, nor Vandenakker stops at this functional description.

Lee & Cowan define the intentional Christian community as a relatively small group of persons committed to ongoing conversation and shared action along four distinguishable but interrelated dimensions: - They are consistently committed to a high degree of mutuality in the relationships among them. – They pursue an informed critical awareness of and an active engagement within the cultural, political and economic mega systems of their society. – They cultivate and sustain a network of lively connections with other persons, communities and movements of similar purpose. – They attend faithfully to the Christian character of their community's life.[85] This is a way to a substitute a more contemporary language for their theological view that the SCCs express *koinonia, diakonia, kerygma* and *leitourgia* and thus in essence is church.[86] They elaborate their arguments further in Conversation, Risk & Conversion. They stress that *koinonia* is not just the internal community of the group members, but how communities are connected. SCCs form local, national and even international networks. Lee & Cowan also stress justice more than mercy as the proper expression of *diakonia.* The habits to share news, global, national and local, as well as the engagement in broad faith based organizations to make a difference in the local society are consequences of *koinonia.* Most of all it is important to note the role of the liturgy of the Word, as the expression of *leitourgia.*[87] Lee & Cowan and Vandenakker conclude that the sum is something more than the parts. SCC meetings are not prayer meetings, even if communal prayer always is present at the meetings. They are neither Bible studies, even if reading of and reflection on the Scriptures constituting what a SCC is. The SCC is not a support group even if mutual support is an important part of the community. It is not a catechetical program, even if evangelization and teaching is a natural part of the gathering. It is neither an action group even if social outreach and political action is on its agenda. The fingerprint of SCC is that it combines all of this to comprise an ecclesial community.[88]

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[83] Lee 2000 p 26
[84] Lee & Cowan 1986 p 2
[85] Lee & Cowan 1986 p 92
[86] Lee & Cowan 1986 pp 24 ff, Vandenakker cites their argument.
[87] Cowan & Lee 1997 pp 42 ff.
[88] Vandenakker is surely in dept to Lee and Cowan in this analysis. See for example Lee & Cowan 1986 p 93.

In official statements on small groups there is a tension between a eucharistic or sacramental theologic view and a judicial or canonical view, but both of them are represented in for example Evangelii Nunciandi. All the typical activities of SCC make up the agenda of a church and are commented in the encyclical letters Evangelii Nuntiandi and Redemtio Missio. One by one the activities are picked as virtues for a well functioning sub-group of a parish "contributing to the building up of the local Body of Christ."[89] Pope Paul VI mentions Basic communities as contained within the church, especially the local church and the parish. One of the criteria for calling them ecclesial is that their locus is in church and their focus is to join her and contribute to her growth.[90] In the papal encyclical letter Redemptoris Missio John Paul II writes on the Base communities that they "decentralize and organize the Parish community, to which they always remain united."[91] While *the canonical outlook* seems offer an option to distribute the community into smaller units, tied to the local church, keeping community with the clergy, still the parish is *the primary community*, even if it is thus defined *from above*. From *a canonical point of view* it is an exception when small ecclesial communities or base communities are awarded the role as parish, with the right to register baptism and marriage. It presupposes that the diocese assigns a pastor to the community, either a priest of their own (often a religious) or a pastor of a regular parish that annexes the community. This status as *quasi-parish* is awarded some Latin American Basic Ecclesial Communities.[92] But also some US CTA/ECC-communities seem to have or seek this status.

The sacramental outlook, on the other hand seems to represent a view *from below*, since the community is defined by the eucharistic community – but still this perspective will never go beyond the parish, since it is in the parish church the Eucharist is celebrated. Vandenakker recognizes that the SCCs embody ecclesial elements, and his point is whether they are church in relation to the parish.[93] His answer is that they ought to be honored for their contributions to the parish, but that they cannot be called church *per se*, since they lack some constitutive parts of a church communion, as presence of the ordained ministry and the sacraments. From *a sacramental point of view* the local church (the diocese) or the parish is regarded as the basic building block of the church. So, when it comes to small groups, the sacramental view will still appear as *top-down*, and the parish constitute the basic, essential and *primary community*. Small communities have to be seen as a way to distribute the community that is constituted by the Eucharist into smaller units of the community.

The community of small groups, will thus in both instances always be secondary to the parish. So the real tension is not between these two alternative, but between both of them and the

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[89] Vandenakker 1994 p 218
[90] Paul VI XXX Ch V par 58
[91] John Paul 1994 XXX
[92] Vandenakker 1994 p 239
[93] Vandenakker 1994 p 220

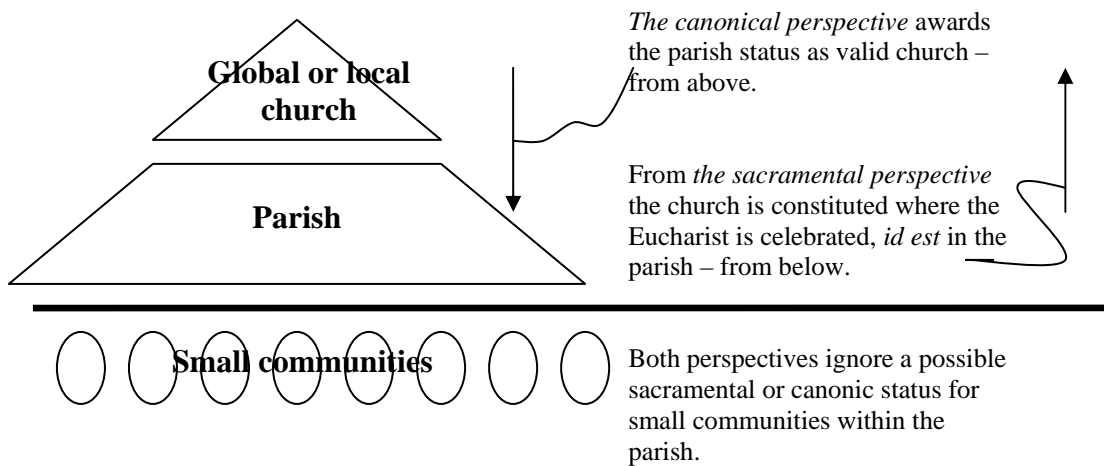experience of small groups of Christians to be church, as illustrated in fig 9.

The canonical perspective awards the parish status as valid church – from above.

From the sacramental perspective the church is constituted where the Eucharist is celebrated, id est in the parish – from below.

Both perspectives ignore a possible sacramental or canonic status for small communities within the parish.

Figure 9. Different perspectives in the papal statements ignore the horizon of the small communities.

In the sacramental and the canonical views the community is complete just in the diocese or local church. For some theologians the perspective is the opposite and the SCC is the primal horizon and community for the Christians and embodies the fullness of the church. The Parish is (just) the framework that complements the basic experience in the base community. The SCCs build up the parish as the parishes build the diocese; the SCC is not just a fraction or subdivision of the parish, just as the parish is not just a "local office" of the diocese.[94] This is represented by the jigsaw puzzle in fig 10, where each piece is needed to build up the total.
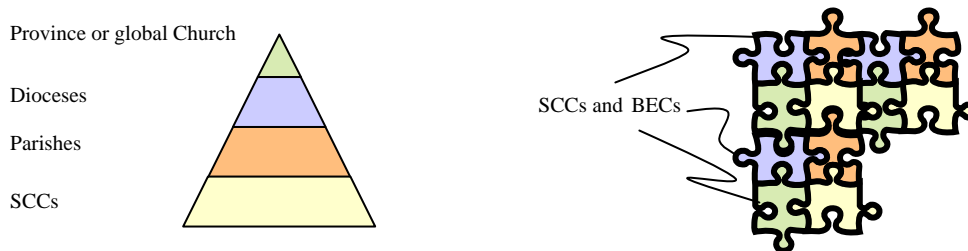

Province or global Church

Dioceses

Parishes

SCCs

SCCs and BECs

Figure 10. Built up or split down?

The Sunday parish Eucharist is the "unifying experience of all these small communities".[95] O'Halloran interprets the Medellin-statement as the Church in nucleus as "small scale and at the center of more enlarged Christian and human groupings". He describes Church as a series of communities "rippling out in ever-widening concentric circles from the small Christian community".[96] Vandenakker notes that most advocates want the SCCs to be an integral part of the parish. These SCCs are different from groups affiliated with religious or lay movements and from more or less purely private associations.[97] According to Vandenakker SCCs neither have nor need a canonical status, but would benefit from official statements that "they are a significant ecclesial locus in the church" and support for parishes striving to become an effective "community of communities."[98] The question of the canonical status of the BECs (as quasi-parishes) is not to be compared with the situation of the SCCs of North America. They are important pastoral units, but don't need to claim any canonical status, according to

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[94] Baranowski 1996 pp 14, 91
[95] Baranowski 1996 p 16
[96] O'Halloran 1984 p 25
[97] Vandenakker 1994 p 189
[98] Vandenakker 1994 p 239

Vandenakker. Anyhow they are considered as "little churches" or "the church in miniature" or even a new "level" of the church community by their advocates.[99]

The *built-up* perspective expresses that the experience in small groups is indispensable to the life of the larger parish as well as for the individual Christian. The ecclesial community is not primarily defined of those who gather for communion in the parish church in Sunday morning mass, but of those who share a palpable community, where the members know each other's name and history. The joint Sunday morning Eucharist *celebrates* that concrete community, tangible only in small groups. But the community in the houses of the parishioners precedes the celebration of the Holy Eucharist in the parish church. To say that the small communities sum up to the church (and the parish) seems to be in opposition to that she is constituted by those who attend Sunday morning mass (the sacramental outlook) or those whom a pastor is entrusted the care of (the canonical outlook). Neither way can completely define the parish by it self. Non-catechized, ignorant, non-observing, non-practicing Catholics are still members of a parish. A combined sacramental and canonical outlook is needed to include those and the ecclesiology of the SCC is not competing with, but complementary to these.

About 75 percent of all SCCs in the study of Lee and 81percent of the GSC groups have some kind of parish connection and are thus at least accepted or tolerated within the church organization. 93 percent of the GSC members participate regularly in mass (in the parish), while only 32 percent of the general Catholic population.[100] Often a meal is shared, sometimes a semi-sacramental meal in the small group.[101] Some small groups are not parish based and will either invite a presider or just break the bread and share the cup "as part of their regular ritual, to maintain their orientation toward the Lord's Supper". In three percent of the GSC is home Eucharist celebrated. A higher frequency is only found in the ECC (Eucharistic centered communities) type groups. In 34 percent of them were home Eucharist celebrated every time the group met, but the type does just include less than 100 groups in US.[102] It is likely to find groups who are formal quasi-parishes with the bishop's permission to celebrate the sacraments in the community with a specially assigned priest. But it is also likely to find some groups that celebrate the mass without an ordained catholic priest.[103]

4. The Catholic Experience of SCC

Bernard Lee directed the most recent research on SCC performed by one team of theologians under direction of himself and one team of sociologists under William D'Antonio Catholic University of America, Washington DC. The study had as primary objective to find out why some people participate in small Christian communities: Who are they, what are their practices, why do they engage and what difference does it make? Why do people create these groups in the first place and why do they join and remain in them? The overall question in the research of the study was why some people do more than parish life asks.[104]

The main outcome of the report on study is a clearer picture of the characteristics of the SCCs within RCC: The US SCCs hesitation to engage in social commitments is obvious. The

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[99] Vandenakker 1994 p 191 with reference to Baranowski 1988 pp vii and 74
[100] Lee 2000 pp10 and 60 f
[101] Lee 2000 p 5
[102] Lee 2000 pp 36 and 84, identifyed by asssociation to the network Intentional Eucharistic Communities.
[103] This is also frequently the case in European groups. At the European Meeting of the Christian Base Communities, Edinburgh 25-26 October 2003 representatives for over 150 groups in Basque, Belgium, Spain and Swiss assured their Eucharistic habits in this respect. "In most communities [*in Belgium*], each member in turn presides." Collectif Européen des CCB 2003 p12. Portugal: see Fraser 2003 p101.
[104] Lee 2000 p 9

typical SCC member is likely well educated, rather affluent and deeply engaged in parish life.[105] About every twentieth churchgoing Catholic in US has an experience of SCCs.[106]

Lee and D'Antonio suggest five or six main types, crystallized out of their census.[107] The classification depends most on the source for the addresses of small group contacted in the census, but is well correlated to sociological data, as age, income, education and ethnicity. All groups defined with a set of characteristics were identified. The characteristics were: Self-identification as an SCC and Meeting frequency, regularly engaging in: prayer, reading and discussion of scripture and faith sharing.[108]

The weakest point is that only Catholics are considered, and perhaps that some groups are more or less systematically underestimated, because of the method of the census, which identified groups by their network contact and by advertises in journals. Some groups may not be networking in the same degree, and may even hesitate to answer. Regarding the control group of general Catholic population it would have been desirable to give appropriate weights to the ethnic groups since the special type of Hispanic/Latino SCC is distinct in many ways from the GSC. But in the general population the differences were almost negligible, for example between people who designated their selves as Latinos and those who did not.[109] In the Lilly study all efforts were done to provide a randomized sample of RCC SCCs to produce a representative quantitative picture. Any analyses of the Lilly material will be representative for the actual type of SCC in US.

a. The Lee-D'Antonio-Typology

Lee and D'Antonio suggest four or five main types, crystallized out of their census.[110] The classification depends most on the source for the addresses of small group contacted in the census, but is well correlated to sociological data. The types suggested are

1. The Broad General Type of Small Christian Community (GSC), which were identified by their contacts with the major national networks or by responses to notices in Catholic Journals. They have an average composition of well educated middleclass white Americans and 65 percent of the researched groups were counted in this type.

2. The Hispanic/Latino Communities, which were identified by their ethnical or lingual composition. Many of them were also sprung from the same origins as the GSC-type, but some owe their existence to initiatives by the National Council of Catholic Bishops. This ethnical homogenous subgroup constitute a fifth of the total SCCs.

3. The Charismatic are the most ethnically diversified groups, characterized by their special spirituality and identified by their connection to Charicenter. Thirteen percent of the groups belong to this type.

4. Groups identified by the directory of the national Call To Action organization may but mustn't have an origin from the II Vatican Council movement for lay responsibility and social action. The Eucharist Centered Communities, characterized by their regular celebration of the Eucharist were loosely identified by a national gathering in Washington DC. Each type counting less than 100 groups, lumped together constitute less than 1 percent of the researched SCCs.

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[105] See Ch 3.b.
[106] Lee 2000 p 10
[107] Lee 2000 pp 33 ff
[108] Lee 2000 p 26
[109] Private conversation with William D'Antonio, May 2001.
[110] Lee 2000 pp 33 ff

College or University Campus Communities were eventually excluded from the study, but was originally proposed as a special type.

Lee's and D'Antonio's typology is similar to Vandenakker's and basically built on association to various networks or organizations, instead of internal ecclesial criteria. Vandenakker sorted out communities of associates, small groups associated to religious orders by definition and almost without discussion. Reformed, protestant or evangelical variants are not even mentioned. This is in my view a couple of mistakes repeated by Cowan & Lee.[111] The largest type suggested by Lee and D'Antonio is the general type (GSC). In some ways it might be said that the other groups just were subgroups, sorted out from this general or majority type, characterized by White Anglo-American Middleclass Catholics.

There are two major problems with this typology:

First, in my view the typology in this way is irrelevant and unable to analyze the dynamics of small groups in the parishes; it does just mirror the biases of the American society, due to the fact that SCC membership is densely ethnical biased. Different socio-ethnical groups live segregated in different communities, different districts, and will accordingly belong to different parishes. As expected in other part of the American society people with different ethnical heritage very much live apart from each other, separated in living, work and ecclesial belonging as well. In terms of racial or ethnic composition the SCC-types seem to be quite homogenous. The GSC-type consists of 92 percent Caucasians, 4 percent Hispanic or Latino, 2 percent African American, 1 percent Asian American and 1 percent other. There are separate Hispanic/Latino groups with 98 percent Hispanic or Latino people. Few SCCs were found in predominantly African American parishes.[112] The structure is a mirror of living and other social parameters in the greater society.

The second problem appears already in the division into types, since there are some indispensable variables independent from these types. Most American groups of all categories will show a high degree of intentionality and lack of social action and territorial structure. But there are also some features in these types that are correlated to the different types and relevant to an ecclesial classification according to essential dimensions of community. Some would be found by an analysis of the minor or even marginalized kind of groups in the study; the Eucharistic Centred Communities, or the Intentional Eucharistic Communities as their self designation is. They seem to be close relatives to the European Basic Ecclesial Communities. They are featured with Eucharistic worship on a regular basis, and a high degree of intentionality. Another type of Lee's with Ecclesial distinguishing features are the Charismatic groups, which are akin to the evangelical cell-groups, especially the St Boniface system.[113]

b. The Cowan-Lee-Hybrid-Model

There is no really sharp edged analysis, in terms of significant models of the affinity to either position of the scale of the (**Whitehead-) Cowan-Lee hybrid model in** the report of Bernard Lee, but anyhow is the Tendenz clear: On the scale between inner and public seems the average SCC tend to be rather comfortable family like, mostly occupied with its inner life. At the same time there is a growing consciousness of what the Prophetic Scriptures demands of them, in terms of ministry to the poor or oppressed. Lee finds a heightened **sense of social responsibility** for between 20 and 35 percent of the groups. Lee also found out what members

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[111] Vandenakker 1994 pp xiv and 129, Lee 2000 p 31
[112] Lee 2000 pp 52 f
[113] D'Antonio 2000 pp 174 f

found to be Very important values. But his analysis is restricted to the notion that family, prayer and spiritual matters, and helping others are high while money and having nice things are low (except for in the Hispanic groups). Helping others are high while political issues are low and he concludes that there is scarce trust in systemic influence on human need.[114]

An interesting notion, that ought to be done, which *Lee doesn't*, is the discrepancies between the general population and the SCC members. It is clear that the political engagement seems to be almost unaffected by membership. Compared with the general Catholic population it is also obvious that a traditional Catholic value as "Family" was ranked as very important by 96 percent of the SCC members and 95 percent of the general Catholic population. But one group of values raised importance frequency in the SCC-part of the Catholic population, and one group sank. "Prayer" as a value rose from 66 percent to 90 percent, "helping others" from 73 percent to 83 percent, "spiritual matters" from 56 percent to 78 percent "parish" from 47 percent to 73 percent and "Bible study" from 28 percent to 39 percent. At the same time values as "environment" sank from 70 percent to 51 percent, "job career" from 56 percent to 34 percent, "money" from 34 percent to 7 percent and "having nice things" from 16 percent to 3 percent.[115] It is a move from "matter" to "spirit". This doesn't oppose the hybrid model, except for the notion that SCCs don't really qualify as communities, if the public-inner-field is operationalized as an environment/prayer-field, because of their bias to the inner life, which is densely verified in the study. See figure 11.
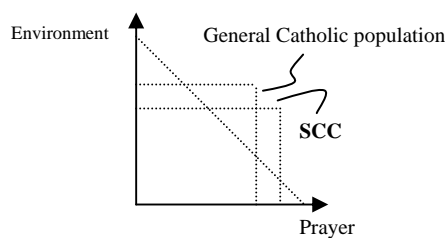

Figure 11. Values of American Catholics, above the hybrid-model-line in an environment/prayer-field.

The most effective critique of the hybrid model of Cowan & Lee is derived from Lee's own findings: Lee just concludes that SCC members pray more often than the general Catholic population. But I would also stress that they participate five times as often in Catholic social justice meetings according to the tables in the report.[116] This is one of few notions of enhanced social or political action in the SCCs. The values wouldn't fit in the public/inner-function, as shown in figure 12.
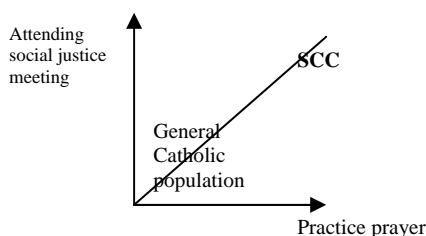

Figure 12. Practices of American Catholics, in a social-justice-activism/prayer-field

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[114] Lee 2000 pp 54 f
[115] Lee 2000 p 54
[116] Lee 2000 p 55

5. Mediating Structures in Three Dimensions

The study of these groups demands recognition of their intermediate function, between individual, parish and society. This is an indispensable perspective from Cowan & Lee. Small ecclesial groups ought to be studied in regard of their contribution to the needs of the individual, of the group it selves, of the parish, and the local society. My view is that some groups may score high both on "inner" and on "public", as I also have shown above – which calls for a model that allows for that. The blend of "inner" and "public" involvement will provide a hallmark of the group and will be crucial to characterize the community, but there is not an "either or not" here and no specific mix that will make up a community, but a neighborhood of different blends that all can claim to represent **different styles of community**. If a group has less or no public involvement, it seems to be an immature community, less fit for a mediating task, but still a community. In the same way an uttered public involvement may be combined with a developed innerness, and an elaborated innerness doesn't exclude a possible public commitment. It will be my contribution to this discussion, to draw a field or even a space and allow for any values where ever. This space will be spread out by three axes of the three major dimensions where ecclesial communities are located, preliminary called: cohesivness, churchliness and publicness. See figure 13. These are critical to classify small groups of community or localize them at the map of communities.

1. The individual or personal dimension, is not to be mistaken for the Lee/Cowan "*Inner Life*" but will have some components from it: *Cohesivness* predominantly describes *the subjective attitude, motivation and way of belonging* to a certain group, but will also preliminary contain *signs of the internal relations at a group level*. Cohesivness is thus partly about the glue of the group.

2. The ecclesial (or parochial) dimension, *churchliness* may contain some of the "*Inner Life*"-components of Cowan & Lee. This dimension must have two or three foci: *ecclesial reflection* (awareness of parochial role), *the connection/connectedness to the parish* and *the resemblance to the wider church.* Note that strong resemblance can be combined with weak connection!

3. The civil and societal dimension, *publicness* describes public commitment and involvement in surrounding society, either work of charity or justice or both, or how the group relates to the Society. It is close to the concept of "*Public Life*" of Cowan & Lee. Does the group reflect on, conversate or interact with the greater society? How does society perceive the group?Also this dimension will have three foci: Does the group *reflect on*, *mirror* or *interact* with society?
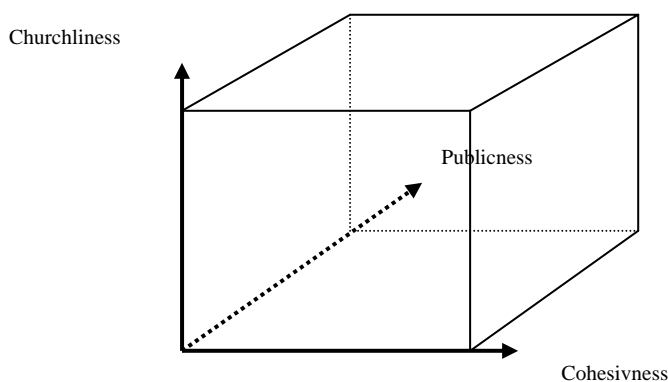

Figure 13. The realm of three major ecclesial community dimensions

These three dimensions provide the space of community for every ecclesial group.[117] Each small group of community may reach a certain value on either axis, and the volume of possible values expresses the variety of small group-dynamic and involvement in parish and society. The values along the three axes will provide the fingerprint of the actual community. There may be limits wherein it is decent to call a group a community or not, but this is still to be examined as well as other possible uses of the model.[118]

How the dimensions relate or are unrelated to each other will be clear from how a person is part of a group in the parish, located in the society. A person is part of a group and has a place in it. In the same manner the individual group is a part of the parish and the surrounding society.

1. The group and its cohesivness – how its members belong and contribute to the group and its cohesivness. The relations between members are just one of several components in the total of belonging to a group. If the relations develop on a personal plane, they will have an impact on the attachment to and the belonging to the group and the cohesivness of the group itself.
2. The parish and its cohesivness – how the small communities reflect on, belong to the parish and contribute to its life. The whole group can also be assigned tasks in the parish. This will institutionally integrate the group-structure in the parish.
3. The greater community or the society and its community – how the individual groups belong and contribute to the life of the society. It is thence important *how the surrounding community perceive the groups* and which role they are attributed.

The parish in it self, which certainly is larger than the sum of its small groups, may also have a role in the local society, but this aspect will be ignored here. The following figure will illustrate these three independent relations by three concentric circles (see figure 14).
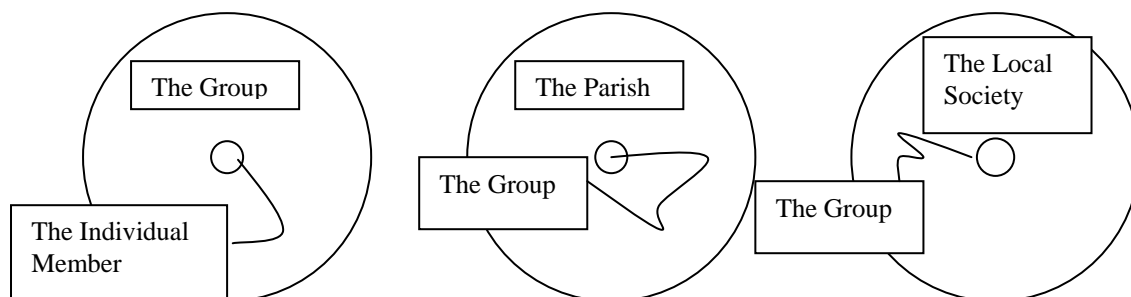

Figure 14. The individual is placed into a group, the group into a parish and in the surrounding local society.

Methodically it is beneficial to look at two dimensions each time: The individual in the group in the parish and the individual in the group in the society respectively (figure 15). This representation will also give a more proper picture of *the mediating function* of the groups. The individual is more or less involved in the parish and the society respectively by his or her involvement in the group. The group as a total may contribute to the liturgical life or the ministries of the parish. In the same way the group as a total may contribute to the needs of the surrounding society, analyse and interact with it.

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[117] With small adaptations the model naturally will fit any group where-so-ever, within a civil society structure. A more general way to describe the dimensions would be *cohesion*, *intra-structural* (how the group relate to the organization or larger community) and *inter-structural* (how the group relate to other organizations, locally or globally).
[118] For example the centre of gravity in the volume described by a set of groups may mirror their cultural context. It has also to be examined which dimensions set SCC apart from evangelical groups, from other parish-based group and from Latin American BEC; what discriminates between different cultural and ecclesial contexts.
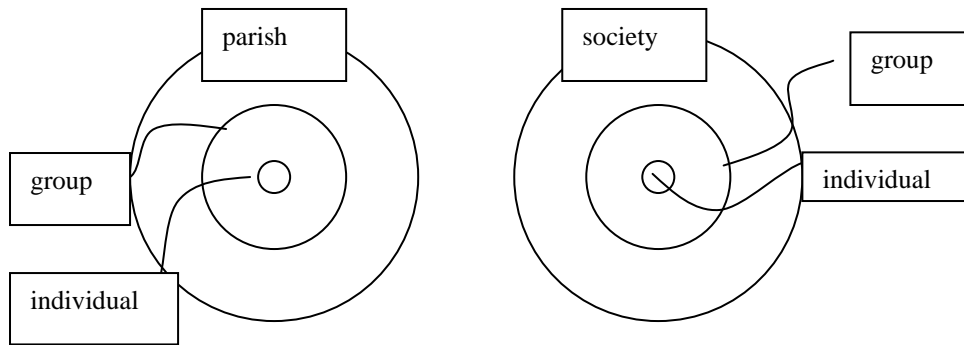
Figure 15. The individual is successively placed into a group, in a parish *and* in the surrounding local society.

All dimensions will have to be measured by structural, behaviour and experience- or attitude variables, as well as background variables, and each variable has to be measured in a decided level (group or individual). At an individual level the three dimensions may be represented by just one variable in each dimension, each time, controlling for the rest; e g three variables as "social impact of the group on the individual's life", "the individual's assignments in the parish" and "the individual's political or social involvement in local society" – at a group level the variables preferably chosen may be "diversity in the group", "resemblance w/ parish habits and rites" and "resemblance w/ society" ***or perhaps*** "cohesion of the group", "connection to the parish in terms of collective assignments or formation" and "connection to the society in form of political or social involvement". When some major types are located in the community-space, it will be convenient to compare two "families" within the same type, controlling for one dimension. In this way the political and public involvement will be held constant, when comparing American Eucharistic Centered Communities and European Base Communities concentrating on how they are integrated in the parish. In the same way will the involvement in the parish be held constant when studying "the public life" of a couple of groups. Another suggestion is to blend several variables, presumably pointing in the same direction. But the risk is to do a prejudiced choice of variables, if it is not done after careful regressions of larger statistical material.

a. Cohesivness

Cohesivness is about the *participation* of the individuals in the group, how persons are *integrated* in the group. How do people get involved and stay? What is the essential glue that keeps the group together – which are the *cohesive* forces – the *cohesiveness*? Critical to a community are its size, atmosphere, practices and group identity, as I concluded in Ch 2.a. The cohesivness dimension needs structural, behaviour, experience-, attitude and background variables to quantify and discern these qualities.

Structural variables could be variables as size of group, frequency of meeting, gender composition, kind of membership criterion (ranging from dogmatic consent, over ritual status to geographic place of living, demanding a lot or less to nothing from the individual), enrolment structure of the actual group (ranging from intentional, over deliberately gathered parish based groups to territorial distribution), capacitivity (ranging from exclusive to inclusive, or from selective to open).

In a socio-psychological definition of a group, the opportunity for each member to interact with all other members is presupposed. It is often observed that there is an optimum for functional groups at 8-10 people. More people in each group will diminish the individuals' opportunity to interaction; fewer people will hazard the continuity and make the group too vulnerable for absence or leaves. The sizes of the groups give a clue about the shape of the groups and will also limit the communication possibilities. Already from the average size of

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SCC Lee concludes that "every member has a chance to be interactive at each gathering" regarding the American Catholic experience.[119]

Frequency of meetings can vary, but somewhere there is a limit for when sufficient bonds can be built and managed, which may be found out by observing at which frequency the self conception as community. SCCs generally meet often which serves the "cohesiveness of community". About 35 percent of the SCCs of GSC-type meet weekly and 37 percent biweekly. 2 percent meet every three weeks, 17 percent monthly and 10 percent "other". From these figures and the interviews Lee concludes that "the SCCs are a major context for members' faith life. [---] They are not just one more committee meeting."[120]

Bias in gender or age is densely felt in the American Catholic groups, but may also mirror bias in assignments, mass attendance and so on.[121]

Small communities may either be very intentional designed or more mandatory. Some groups may be spontaneous shaped, and gather friends, mates and colleagues and also non-Catholic spouses and neighbours. Other may gather a specific night every week recruiting new members at annual calls in the parish in a more structured way.[122] Still others may be strictly territorial, and gather parishioners from some nearby blocks or streets.

Some groups intend to be including and universal, not excluding anybody, others may be outspoken homogenous. Baranowski advices to let the SCC be *a mirror*, a cross section or a small scale copy of the parish.[123] The Roman Catholic "emphasis on the common good precludes the exclusion of anyone from society's care and concern [---] none is rejected because of inability."[124] "Denominations" and "sects" with an "emphasis on purity leads to splits with those felt to be impure, whereas the stress on the objectivity of the sacraments in the church type can operate to maintain the unity of the more pure and less pure in a united body."[125] Probably member criteria play a role here. Evangelical styled small groups are likely to have a mode of belonging that is dependent on the member's agreement on central statements of faith or confession, while belonging in a sacramental church is based on the sacramental or baptismal status of the member, which is irreversible. Once you are baptized you will always belong. This might open the sacramental group to a larger degree of dialogue and diversity, while the evangelical group has a need to regulate or define accepted behavior or faith in an authorized way. Leadership may be more distinct in an Evangelical cell group while it has a lower profile in the SCC.

Behavior variables are interaction in meeting (time used in speaking per individual), structural interdependence and internal relationships (helping each other, paying, giving and sharing material resources).

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[119] Lee 2000 pp 49 f, The average number in the GSC type of groups are 8 women, 5 men and 6 under 18 years.
[120] Lee 2000 p 82
[121] Women outnumber men (as usually) and the middle aged and above (40+) are 77 percent Lee 2000 p 49.
[122] Baranowski 1996 p 42: "Ask people to sign up for a particular evening or day of the week."
[123] Ibid. This attitude could also be observed in the Lutheran context in the writings of Dietrich Bonhoeffer. In his wordings it is essential that a Christian community doesn't become a movement or a *collegium pietatis*, but sees it self as a part of the only and one Catholic Church, in deeds and suffering sharing the straits, struggle and promise of the whole Christianity. Any selection and delimitation is a great danger for a Christian community, if not motivated by common work, geography or relatedness. To lock out the weak and the insignificant, the apparently unusable could be to lock out Christ in the guise of a poor brother Bonhoeffer 1984 pp 27 f.
[124] Bellah holds that many protestants and the Catholic tradition are opposed by an influential Protestantism tends "to exclude those who are considered morally unworthy" – or just economically misfortuned from the society altogether Bellah 1996 p x.
[125] Bellah 1996 p 245 The Catholic ways to define community is suited for calling "to wider and wider circles of loyalty, ultimately embracing that universal community of all beings." Bellah 1996 p xxx, with reference to H Richard Niebuhr The Responsible Self, 1978 p 88.

Satisfaction, cohesiveness and sense of belonging and reasons for joining and remaining would be obvious *experience- or attitude variables*, as experienced inclusiveness or openness, appreciation, tolerance, experience of meaning, affective mutuality, some of them probably more or less dependent on size and frequency. To belong to a small group is very rewarding. In the GSC type 69 percent are deeply satisfied.[126] A finding that is apostrophized by Bernard Lee is the experience of community and relationships in SCCs.[127] The desire for belonging to a small group is the prime cause for joining a SCC. 37 percent actively sought for a group, 29 percent had friends who were members.[128] "Religious motivations were named more often among reasons for joining an SCC than for remaining a member. Community and relational support ranks higher in reasons for staying than those for joining."[129] Attitudes may also be visible in values, ranking, status and leadership.

b. Churchliness

Churchliness is about how the community *resembles* the larger church but also about how the groups are *integrated* in the parish. The former focus includes the diversity among members, the self conception, the objectives, visible in habits and activities in terms of rites, place of meeting, agenda and leadership. The latter focus is about assignments to the group, structural links and enrolment. What is the interface to the rest of the parish?

Also the churchliness variables should be sorted up as structural, behaviour-, experience-attitude- and background variables. The place of meeting may be counted as a structural variable, home meeting indicating independence and self esteem, but if the meeting place is in parish church it will also indicate large amount of acceptance or even support in the parish, and be included in a group of variables of other structural parish connections (pastoral facilitators, resources, education, workshops). But meeting at home does not by itself indicate less parish connection or support. Use of rites could be both structural and behavioural. The place of Eucharist in the life of the members and in the life of the group is more than symbolic in this regard, and has to be carefully evaluated. Leadership related variables are essential in this dimension and range from a flat and egalitarian leader style, over a loose system with contact persons or facilitators to a totally structured leader style with appointed "lay pastors". Self esteem, aims and objectives of the group may be structured according a scale ranging from instrumentality to ecclesiality, dependency to independence and from temporality to longevity. Activities and rites typical for the larger congregation or parish may be variables that together indicate a higher degree of ecclesiality. Also diversity in group compound, tolerance, dialogic style and a wide (national and international) networking are variables indicating aims to be Catholic or ecclesial. Critical signs of integration would be certain parochial assignments or other structures for the group to provide something for the parish. An assignment could be if the group plays a role in the formation process at the first communion or in the initiation process, with responsibility for catechizing of converts, being part of the welcoming environment of the catechumenate.[130] The groups could take turns in performing parts of the parish liturgy, charity and so on. Leaders in the group cold be assigned and formatted by the parish pastor. Some pastors distribute bible study material to the groups. The groups may be recruited in a structural way by the parish through a yearly

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[126] Lee 2000 p 56
[127] Lee 2000 p 9
[128] Lee 2000 p 59
[129] Lee 2000 p 44
[130] Baranowski and Ivory have reflected on the role of SCC in he RCIA (Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults) and Kleissler has built methods for this with reference to the experience of Fr Thomas Caroluzza, Holy Spirit Parish, Virginia Beach, Virginia. Vandenakker 1994 p 140, Baranowski 1996 pp 5f, Ivory 1988 passim, Kleissler 1991 pp 191 ff and Moriarty 1996

call. Are the groups essential or instrumental in relation to the parish? Are they helping father or performing responsible laymanship? Wuthnow identifies a screening function that helps the group to recruit new members within the parish. The parochial context diminishes the obstacle for people to join a group – group members are kindred and safe for the prospective member.[131]

The SCCs usually have the self-esteem as being church, not as self-contained sects, but as Catholic "small" churches, "little churches" or *ecclesiola* in communion with the larger parish "*ecclesia major*" and the global church.[132] Vandenakker judges "[w]hat differentiates SCCs from the wider category of small groups and small group programs is not so much their function, but their self-perception of 'being church'."[133] SCC may serve as an essential level of church (just as the global church, the province, the diocese or the parish), with critical signs of ecclesiality in structural interfaces to the parish. This is asserted by for example Boff, Baranowski, Cowan & Lee and reluctantly shown by Vandenakker.[134] Latin American BECs would typically have a canonical status as quasi-parishes, usually not granted US SCCs. Strong ecclesiality could either be strong bonds to parish or relative independence or even isolation combined with strong resemblance in rites.[135] It is a question if the latter really is to be ecclesiality or secterism. If the members chose to take part of the liturgical life of the group, but never attend the parish Sunday morning mass, the individual person can contribute to dissociate the group from the parish, and the other way round (which appears to be the rule in USA) through individuals being committed in the parish, who accepted assignments and doing ministries, there can be a mutual support.

According to Lee the SCC members tend to be more affluent than the general Catholic population, a conclusion that anyhow is not unambiguous. In short, with regard to the great deal of missing cases, the most obvious bias is not the part earning more than $50,000, but the part earning more than $100,000, which is 20 percent of the GSC and just 8 percent of the general population. At the same time the poorest part is twice as big among the GSC members (12 percent) than in the general population (6 percent).[136]

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[131] Wuthnow 1994 pp 105 f

[132] Baranowski, Lee et al

[133] Vandenakker 1994 xiii

[134] Boff 1986 pp 10 ff, Baranowski 1996 pp 14 f, Cowan & Lee 1997 pp 39 ff, Vandenakker 1994 p 239

[135] The test case is perhaps the Eucharistic Centered Communities. If the diocese assigns a pastor to minister and preside at the Eucharist and grant the EEC a quasi-parochial status, with right to register marriage and baptism there is both strong resemblance and strong bonds. But if the EEC is schismatic and practice Eucharist with lay presider, the ritual resemblance may be strong but the connection non-existing. If the members frequently attend parish mass but never practice home mass, resemblance may be weaker but the bonds stronger.

[136] Lee 2000 p 51. From the publicized data alone it appears that the conclusion depends on how you divide the income levels. Lee says that "half of GSC [---] members are in the income bracket of $50,000 or above, compared with about a third of the general population." That is true save the missing cases for GSC members are 6 percent and 21 percent for the general Roman Catholic population. Still about one in five of the GSC members are in the income bracket below $30,000, while the corresponding group in the general population is one in six. Also one in eight of the GSC members earn less than $20,000, while the corresponding figure for the general population is one in sixteen. So there are slightly more poor people, under class and lower middleclass in the GSC groups than in the General Catholic Population. Another observation could be similarities: that 9 percent of the GSC population are in the income bracket between $20-29,999, to compare with 10 percent in the general population or 45 percent between $30,000 and $74,999 among the GSC members corresponding to 46 percent of the general population, 8 percent of the GSC members between $75-99,999 corresponding to 9 percent in the general population. Anyhow the missing cases in the general population survey are so many that they could make up for the differences in either extreme. The General survey was done with another method (telephone interview) and presumably the poorest (who perhaps even didn't have a telephone) and the richest fell away in more cases than the mid fielders.
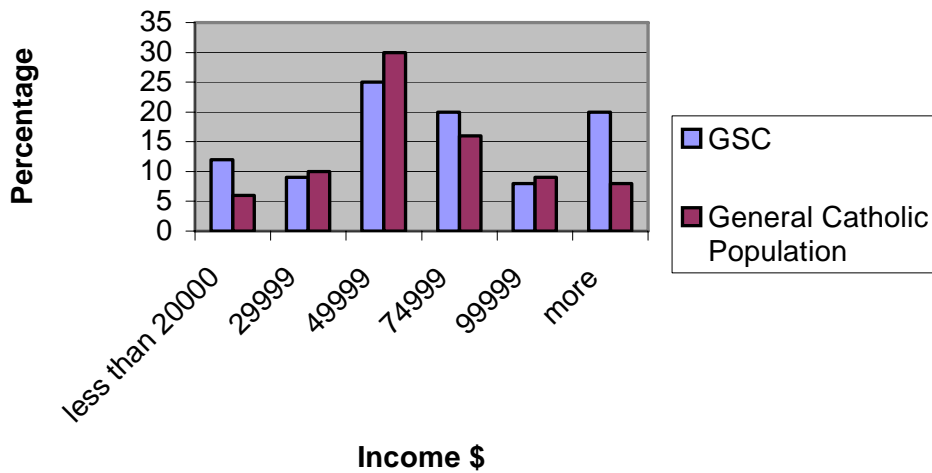
Figure 16. Both the richest and the poorest are overrepresented in the SCC population.

There is also presumably a correlation between education and income. 89 percent of the GSC members had at least some college to compare with 55 percent of the general Catholic non-group member population. There are more than twice as many low educated in the general population than in the GSC population.[137]
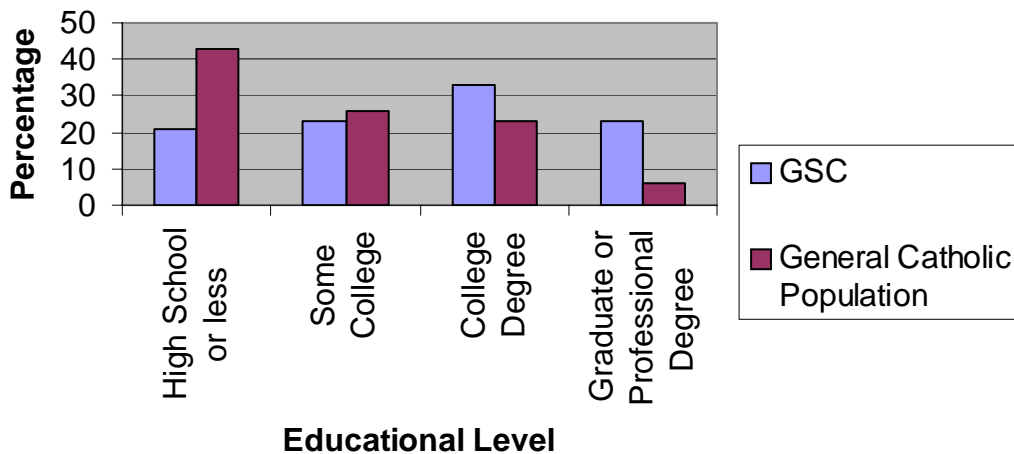

Figure 17. SCC members are generally more educated.

This indicates that the GSC-SCC actually have another social mix than the larger church due to the social bias between SCC-types. This also highlights the problem of diversity.

c. Publicness

How do SCC:s relate to the Society – or rather how are the communities integrated in the life of the larger society? Their reflexion on society, but perhaps also their public appearance (ranging from secret or private to announced). Are the group imbedded in parish or do they have a public appearance of their own? This dimension is probably to be understood in the same way as the "public life" of Cowan & Lee. The Publicness dimension would engage a set of variables ranging from attitude- and motivation variables as social awareness, ethos and culture over behavioural variables as external activities in charity work, public opinion and politics respectively, but also internal activities as informed analyze on social situation on a

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[137] Lee 2000 pp 51 ff

local, regional or global level to structural variables as formal connections to different associations or organizations. Background variables should indicate if member stock is bias in relation to the general population in terms of income, education and political preferences.

Structural publicness, how the groups are connected with the society would be association to any exterior organisation, with a political or social agenda, as IAE. The publicness of a group may involve the capacity to be politically involved in and reflect on the larger society and the affaires of the actual neighbourhood. The groups may have relations to other actors, organizations and groups in the larger (secular) community, as politicians, business people, people in need of support or action groups and political parties. Cultural associations, employers and unions, families, ethnical communities and so on may also be a part of the local ecology. All these contacts and activities make up structural variables that measure the integration in the society. These activities are in their self contra cultural in the US environment. Even if the biblical language still is a "part of American public and political discourse"[138] religion in it self is irreversible exiled to the private sphere or civil society in USA as a result of disestablishment.

How do groups mirror the society? Probably are the individual income and education level also appropriate background variables.The Roman Catholic Church of United States has "the most diverse membership in terms of class background,"[139] compared to the protestant churches. Lee analyzed the social background of the members, in terms of income, education and political standpoints. Some of the social biases mirror the American society and are due to the fact that SCC membership is densely ethnical biased: Different socio-ethnical groups live segregated in different communities, different districts, and will accordingly belong to different parishes. This fact might contribute to the low public involvement. Middle class Catholic SCC members are less committed to justice and more to charity. Probably the typical SCC member is better off and not personally affected by injustices in society. That is another reason for education and income as an important background variable in this dimension. But another explanation is cultural: The ideal of the self made man rewards charity as a sign of prosperity, while political activism or justice is not on the common agenda. Perhaps the prophet readings and methodological capacity to handle justice questions may usher to a change, and there is evidence for some consciousness despite the low commitment.

6. Conclusion

I established an understanding of community, basically as found in human-sized, long-term, face-to-face groups. I found that the systematization and model of Small Church Communities as elaborated by Lee & D'Antonio and Cowan & Lee, could be improved, especially to be usable outside the American Catholic horizon and constructed a new model. I showed that there is a set of more general perspectives or dimensions usable when studying small ecclesial groups. I preliminary elaborated these dimensions, into a model that makes more justice to different kinds of groups. I eventually gave some hints to how an operationalization might be constructed. As a conclusion, there are definitely ways to cope with the information of these communities, to make a representation that has capacity to describe and analyze most parish based communities. The model describes the cohesion of the parish based group and the intermediary role of it in relation to church and society.

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[138] Bellah 1996 p 220
[139] Bellah 1996 p 226

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Appendix – A Research Proposal

I have suggested an improved model for sociological discernment of small groups. It is sustainable, reflected and generalizable, even if it surely has to be refined and sharpened. It is my deliberate intention to develop the model in two stages and several minor steps, involving operationalization and assessment of the model, discerning existing empirical data as well as gathering new empirical material and comparing groups astride the Atlantic Ocean.

Operationalize the Model and Explore the American Communities

Next step from now is to verify the usefullness of the model by operationalizing it, paying attention to the dimensions here conveyed. It could easily be tested on the huge statistical material that Lee generously has provided, arranging the questions of his questionnaires according the three dimensions. That attempt to adaptation will lack a lot of precision, but still give a dense hint of the location of American Catholic SCC in the small community realm. Small tests in this respect have shown prosperous results. This first step could be done with small means and a restricted budget.

Further research would demand gathering of new empirical data and involve a second measure in the US RCC population, almost 10 years after the Lilly study. Even if the careful randomization, performed by D'Antonio couldn't be repeated, the discernment of the development of identified individual groups in selected areas will give a unique picture of what is going on in the Roman Catholic Church of America. Also this step will be possible to perform with rather small means, especially if Internet is used for the gathering of data.

To find other small groups to study, will take more efforts and also economic cost. But research among communities of other non-Catholic churches and denominations, controlling for the cultural environment of North American, middle class communities is necessary to spread out the realm. The number of studied groups can be held rather low, since it is the distribution in the community realm that is researched. It is not an attempt to survey all types of ecclesial groups. In the US it will be enough to gather a small amount of data from carefully selected small groups. For example protestant populations, both in historical sacramental churches and evangelical as well would be most interesting.

Calibrating the Instrument and Explore the European Communities

Most challenging would be to explore **churchliness** in terms of loyalty, assignments and rites in relation to **public involvement** and **belonging** in terms of territorial, baptismal and confessional belonging criteria in a set of comparative studies. Regardless if there is a major difference in the cultural environment in reality or not, tests should be done in Europe in selected groups, corresponding to three American types. A qualitative approach with structured and unstructured interviews and observations will be used, combined with small scale enquette researches using an adapted questionnaire battery. There is no need for large populations for this purpose. There are effective networks to use for the selection of groups.

To explore the dimensions of churchliness and public involvement, controlling for a territorial belonging, the first interesting point to begin with would be where ordinary lay groups establish community on a territorial basis, for example the pastoral teams in poor blocks of Liverpool in England, or the rural Dalecarlian parishes of Sweden with lay-performed village services. There are American counterparts with more or less territorial structure, for example the Lutheran congregation Christ the King in Kenner, Louisiana. Also Catholic parishes could

be found. It would be most effective to compare with Latin American, African or Asian community structures, probably also too expensive. The Iona family-groups should be compared with Marianist lay communities, as exponents of associates. This will enable a study of churchliness controlling for another form of belonging and public involvement in a religious context. Alternatively carismatic or reviwal groups should be researched.

If one ecclesiality-variable is kept constant it is possible to study the variety of approaches in terms of churchliness, controlling also for cohesivness and public involvement. In the continental Catholic BEC of Europe, the Eucharist is celebrated on a regular basis, with or without ordained Catholic priest, apparently without serious conflicts with the parish or the clergy. A comparison with the American Eucharistic Centred communities should be accompanied with qualitative research. In US more severe clashes with excommunications have been the result of the ECCs in some dioceses. The American ECCs represent less than one percent of the groups, but their European counterpart, seems to be the norm in Europe.

Relevance for the Swedish Ecclesial Context

The results of this thesis, as well of the planned research, are by their generalized nature relevant for all groups in ecclesial environments, but the model may be adapted to other areas as well. The instrument will especially be usable for organizational discernment of parishes at the grassroots level, helping to focus the popular identity and distributed community of local church structures. It can be used to discriminate between different types of ecclesial groups in academic study, but also be used by operating pastors, evaluating their organization for community. In this way the model has its academic, as well as its ecclesial practical theological relevance.

This study, centred on US RCC SCCs, has also its special relevance for Church of Sweden, due to the theological, cultural and structural affinity between the US Roman Catholic Church and Church of Sweden. Both are Episcopal and popular churches in a Western, industrialized and urban context. Church of Sweden is also in a process of de-establishment and will get even closer to a situation more similar to the American. Until late 19th century church of Sweden had a totally unquestionable and monolithic position in harmony and symbiosis with the parliament and the state, but ever since then Church has detracted from public sphere, step by step.[140] Church leaders and laypeople in Church of Sweden can both get warned and inspired by the American examples in the empirical material I have gained. RCC is the Church body in the USA that is best comparable to the Church of Sweden. North American white middleclass, English-speaking SCCs are also easier to compare with church entities in Western Europe, than for example Latin American Ecclesial Basic Communities, because of the socio-economic and cultural-religious context. The comparability is a major aspect, since these structures of SCCs are not as frequent and dominant the old sacramental churches of Europe as in the other continents.

The demographical development and the urbanization have in both counties, as all over the industrialized world, had the consequence of growing parishes, with thousands and thousands of families in each. The dimensions of the parishes will urge people to gather in smaller units, but also paralyze and make people passive. Both tendencies are observable in USA. The same sort of mega-parishes that provoke the mould of small communities in US RCC is at hand in Church of Sweden. In Sweden it has made people expect church do something for them, to produce services. This is at least what parish staffs percept and try to respond to. A couple of

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[140] 1789 were Jews allowed to become citizens, and for foreigners to commit their religious services. 1860 it became lawful to dissent from church of Sweden to some accepted churches, and 1952 to dissent without enter anything else.

the research efforts done at the turning of the century have established this fact. The dissertation of Per Pettersson "Livslånga tjänsterelationer" has for example a theological approach to this, labeled *the service focused popular church outlook* by Thomas Ekstrand (See note 67). But perhaps people don't just ask for services, but also for community? There is certainly a quest for community in Sweden as well as in USA: In a broad socio-religious study in the Diocese of Västerås in Sweden 1998 it was shown that 83% of a representative sample of parishioner agreed in the statement that it is the task of the parish to provide opportunities to community.[141] This corresponds to the findings of Wuthnow, treated above in the thesis. From a Lutheran horizon, the community perspective might be both essential and strategic. Strategic since community is what people expect church to practice; essential since community is what church is, according to its creed:

The Lutheran document *Confessio Augustana* (CA) specifies church as *congregatio sanctorum.*[142] Luther's view of the Church appears clearly from the Schmalcald Articles. Part III Art XII reads: "…a seven-year-old child knows what the church is, namely, holy believers and sheep who hear the voice of their shepherd." [143] The Gospel, in turn is specified as the spoken Word, the Sacraments and "the mutual conversation and consolation of brethren. Matt 18:20, 'Where two or three are gathered,' etc."[144] The community he refers to is not the larger assembly or the parish, but two or three brethren. To make community real in a large parish, and thus make church real, small units are needed.

In a theological sense "the parish *is* by virtue of the Word of God,"[145] and it is made up of people. It is no staff, no priests or councils that *built* the parish. The Lutheran theologian Bonhoeffer offers a radical view of what Christian community is, where the belonging is undisputable founded in the baptismal grace. The community of Christians is what God has meant, and what he grants. What people do, say or feel cannot add anything to what this community is by grace. The Word of God is laid in human beings mouths. Therefore every Christian needs a fellow Christian to tell him or her Word of God. Thence the meaning of all Christian community according to Bonhoeffer, is that people meet each other as heralds or preachers of the Gospel. This creates their community.[146] This represent the cohesivness dimension of a small community, from a Lutheran horizon with perspectives as baptism as an undisputable criterion for membership (see note123)

Aurelius designates the parish as an open, narrative, prayer- and meal-community. Aurelius uses a citation from Olov Hartman as a pattern for how the liturgy should be interpreted.

> *You are not going home from worship, but going home continuing it [---] the law and gospel of God have included everything beneath one single vault. Liturgy as "the task of the people" includes all life supporting activity outside the walls of the church, not least what happens for the sake of the oppressed. Thence is all diakonia the task of the whole parish. All work of charity, each bread broken and given is connected to the meal in the church. It is not the sacrament that become profane, it is the world that became holy.*[147]

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[141] Wuthnow 1996 pp 31-58 and for Sweden, see Hillert & Straarup 1998 p32

[142] According to Leif Grane the reason was not to confuse the two possible translations "communion in the holy [things]" (*i e* in the sacraments) and "communion of the saints" (*id est* the baptized) and to prevent the former. Still it is a community gathered around Word and sacrament. Grane 1979 p70 The main content in this sentence is that church is a community.

[143] Luther 1989 p 534

[144] Luther 1989 p 527

[145] Aurelius 1998 p 65 Aurelius cites Luther: "*Tota vita et substantia ecclesiae est in verbo dei*" [The life and beeing of the church rest in the Word of God].

[146] Bonhoeffer 1984 pp12 ff

[147] Aurelius 1998 pp66f

Abbreviations

BEC	Basic Ecclesial Communities (generally Latin American)
CTA	Call To Action
ECC	Eucharistic Centered Communities
E g	*Exempli gratia* – latin for "for example"
ELCA	Evangelic Lutheran Church of America
Et al	*Et aliter* – latin for "And others"
GSC	General type Small Community (Lee 2000)
H/L	Hispanic/Latino type (Lee 2000)
Ibidem	At the same place
NAPRC	National Association for Parishes Restructuring into Communities
NAFORUM	North American Forum for Small Christian Communities
P	Page
Pp	Pages
RCC	The Roman Catholic Church
RCIA	The Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults
SCC	Small Church (or Christian) Community
US(A)	United States (of America)

Figures