



AARHUS UNIVERSITY



# Coversheet

---

**This is the publisher's PDF (Version of Record) of the article.**

This is the final published version of the article.

## How to cite this publication:

Johansen, K. H. (2018). Does Generation Matter? – Changing the Church from the Inside. *International Journal of Practical Theology*, 22(2), 211-233. <https://doi.org/10.1515/ijpt-2017-0002>

## Publication metadata

**Title:** Does Generation Matter? – Changing the Church from the Inside  
**Author(s):** Kirstine Helboe Johansen  
**Journal:** Journal of Field Archaeology  
**DOI/Link:** [10.1515/ijpt-2017-0002](https://doi.org/10.1515/ijpt-2017-0002)  
**Document version:** Publisher's PDF (Version of Record)

### General Rights

Copyright and moral rights for the publications made accessible in the public portal are retained by the authors and/or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing publications that users recognize and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

- Users may download and print one copy of any publication from the public portal for the purpose of private study or research.
- You may not further distribute the material or use it for any profit-making activity or commercial gain
- You may freely distribute the URL identifying the publication in the public portal

If you believe that this document breaches copyright please contact us providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.

If the document is published under a Creative Commons license, this applies instead of the general rights.

Kirstine Helboe Johansen\*

## Does Generation Matter? – Changing the Church from the Inside

<https://doi.org/10.1515/ijpt-2017-0002>

**Abstract:** In this article, possible generational differences between younger and older pastors in the Evangelical-Lutheran Church in Denmark are examined with respect to their understandings of the wedding and the ecclesiological implications of these understandings. Building on the generational theory of Karl Mannheim, the hypothesis is that despite in-group similarities between older and younger pastors, the two generations will show differences in the way they represent their office and thereby the church is changed not only from the outside but also from the inside. An explorative qualitative study of the understanding of the wedding among selected pastors investigates their understanding of the wedding service in three different dimensions and shows that both groups primarily understand the wedding as a traditional ritual, but younger pastors appear to enact this understanding in a relational approach in which the meaning of the wedding emerges in the encounter between pastor and wedding couple. The older pastors appear to link the meaning of the wedding closely to the ritual procedures themselves. At the end of the article, the ecclesiological implications of these different understandings of the wedding service are elaborated.

**Keywords:** The Evangelical-Lutheran Church in Denmark, Wedding, Generation, Ecclesiology in the 21st Century

**Zusammenfassung:** Der Beitrag untersucht, welche unterschiedlichen Auffassungen von Traugottesdiensten bei jüngeren und älteren Pastorinnen und Pastoren der evangelisch-lutherischen Kirche Dänemarks bestehen. Unter Bezug auf die Generationstheorie Karl Mannheims arbeitet diese explorative qualitative Studie Ähnlichkeiten und Differenzen zwischen den Altersgruppen heraus. Es zeigt sich, dass die rituelle Dimension beiden Generationen stark präsent ist, die jüngeren Pastorinnen und Pastoren jedoch eine stärker relationale Herangehensweise an Traugottesdienste und ihre Deutung verfolgen. Dies hat Implikationen für das Amtsverständnis und die Außenwahrnehmung der Kirche. Der Aufsatz schließt

---

\*Corresponding author: Professor Kirstine Helboe Johansen, Aarhus University, Theology, Jens Chr. Skous vej 3, 8000 Aarhus C, E-Mail: [kp@cas.au.dk](mailto:kp@cas.au.dk)

mit Überlegungen zur ekklesiologischen Dimension der Generationenunterschiede bei der Gestaltung von Traugottesdiensten.

**Stichwörter:** Evangelisch-lutherische Kirche Dänemarks, Traugottesdienst, Generation, Ekklesiologie

## 1 Introduction

Religion's transformation in the north-western hemisphere as a result of secularization, individualization and holistic spirituality is most often described as something happening to the established churches from external cultural pressure;<sup>1</sup> but how might these societal dynamics be changing the church from the inside as the core church representatives – the pastors – are also themselves part of their time and its trends?

Pastors are the public representation of the church, as they are the official faces of the church in worship, life cycle rituals and teaching. They are expected to preach the gospel devotionally and with theological adequacy, and, therefore, they may be deemed the authoritative representatives of an ancient tradition. My hypothesis is that churches change not only because times and people change, but also because pastors are influenced by the same events and trends as the society they are part of and, therefore, they also change. I examine this hypothesis through an analysis of the findings of an explorative qualitative study of the understanding of the wedding ceremony among pastors in the Evangelical-Lutheran Church in Denmark (ELCD) to determine to what extent the generational divide found among the wider population and church members is represented among the Danish clergy. The basic question is: Does generation matter when it comes to the authoritative representation of religious ideas and practices?

Due to their employment as pastors, making them representatives of a religious institution, pastors are responsible for handling the traditional rituals of the ELCD, and as they are theologically educated, they know by heart both the ritual order and the theological meaning ascribed to it. Therefore, the expectation is that all pastors treasure a traditional wedding service more than the population

---

**1** Almost iconic references to this development are for instance: Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, and London: The Belknap Press, 2007); Paul Heelas and Linda Woodhead, *The Spiritual Revolution. Why Religion is giving way to Spirituality* (Malden and Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2005); Hugh McLeod, *The Religious Crisis of the 1960s*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

in general<sup>2</sup> but that there will be generational differences in the way they interpret and manage the established ritual order.

## 2 The Danish Case

The Evangelical-Lutheran Church in Denmark is a majority church with close connections to the state of Denmark. The Danish Constitution paragraph 4 states that: “The Evangelical Lutheran Church shall be the Established Church of Denmark (Folkekirken), and as such shall be supported by the State.” The church has no national synod and the highest level of governance is the Ministry of Ecclesiastical Affairs with the Queen of Denmark as the official Head of the church, but the local parishes have a high degree of autonomy. The congregational councils largely manage the everyday life of the local church; they select their own pastor and participate in the election of bishops.<sup>3</sup> At the same time, the local pastor is independent from the congregational council in his or her conduct of pastoral tasks, including preaching.<sup>4</sup> As of January 1 2017, 75.9 % of the population are members of the ELCD. Membership is established by baptism (predominantly infant baptism) and is ended only by written resignation.<sup>5</sup> The traditional lifecycle rituals are popular: in 2016 82.9 % of the deceased were given a church funeral, 67.8 % of the young people were confirmed, about 33 % of the weddings were church weddings, and 61.5 % of new-borns in 2015 were baptised.<sup>6</sup> Yet only an estimated 2-4 % of members attend church services once a month or more. Due to

---

2 So the ministers are expected to show an altered pattern of the differences between churching and unchurching people that were found by Jackson W. Carroll and Wade C. Roof, *Bridging Divided Worlds: Generational Cultures in Congregations* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2002), 81ff. The possible discrepancy between pastors and the general population is not of interest in the present study.

3 Marie V. Nielsen and Lene Kühle, “Religion and State in Denmark: Exception among Exceptions?” *Nordic Journal of Religion and Society* 24 (2011): 173–188; Marie V. Nielsen, “The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Denmark,” in *Exploring a Heritage: Evangelical Lutheran Churches in the North*, Eds. Anne-Louise Eriksson et al. (Eugene: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2012), 8–15; Lisbeth Christoffersen, “Folkekirke mellem statskirke, embedskirke og frikirke: Om det uopgivelige i folkekirken, om den igangværende folkekirkelige ‘kommunalreform’ og om folkekirkelige styringsparadigmer for fremtiden,” in *KIRKEFORFATNING: Kirkeretsantologi 2012*, Eds. Svend Andersen et al. (Frederiksberg: Forlaget Anis, 2012), 79–100.

4 Lov om menighedsråd (Law on Congregational Councils) chapter 6 § 37.

5 Lov om medlemskab af folkekirken, kirkelig betjening og sognebåndsløsning (Law on Membership of The Evangelical-Lutheran Church in Denmark, ecclesial service and change of parish belonging) chapter 3 § 6.

6 <http://www.km.dk/kirke/kirkestatistik>.

this behavioural pattern, the church members are often characterised as cultural Christians.<sup>7</sup> The term also refers to the close bonds between the ELCD and traditional Danish culture.

According to Danish anthropologist Cecilie Rubow, pastors are perceived as representatives of the church's authorised teachings and established rituals (categorized as shaman or expert in the former, presider or performer in the latter case). At the same time they mediate between church practices and the everyday culture of the members (as polemicist or mediator)<sup>8</sup>, especially when they preside at life cycle rituals and at significant societal moments such as Christmas. As above cited data demonstrates, ecclesial lifecycle rituals constitute the most typical meeting point between established church rituals and church members who never or rarely engage in Sunday services.

The church wedding is a particularly revealing example of this. The wedding is legally binding according to civil law and also a church blessing.<sup>9</sup> The wedding liturgy is authorised by the Queen of Denmark and must be followed with limited room for personal adjustments, for instance, with respect to choice of hymns and music pieces.<sup>10</sup> Furthermore, the wedding service is connected to new and old folk traditions and is interwoven into the personal life story of the wedding couple, their families and friends. Therefore, the preparation of wedding services has been selected as a potential fertile case for examining the way pastors of different generations practice their role as church representatives in rituals.

### 3 Religion and Generation

The distinctive importance of generational differences was first framed by Hungarian sociologist Karl Mannheim, who compares generations with social classes.

**7** Nielsen, "Evangelical Lutheran"; Phil Zuckerman, *Society without God?* (New York: New York University Press, 2008).

**8** Cecilie Rubow, *Fem præster og antropologiske perspektiver på identitet og autoritet* (Five pastors and anthropological perspectives on identity and authority) (Copenhagen: Forlaget Anis, 2006).

**9** Lov om ægteskabs indgåelse og opløsning (Law on the Entering and Break-up of Marriage) chapter 2§ 15–17.

**10** Also the liturgy of the Sunday Service is authorized by the Queen of Denmark and must be followed although with a number of choices offered in the authorized liturgy, whereas in the liturgy for church burial only the liturgy of the committal is authorized. The liturgy of the wedding and the liturgies of ELCD in English can be found with the following links: [http://www.folkekirken.dk/\\_Resources/Persistent/6/4/4/f/644f94c8205ea8c0850a902a723241c0afce1b93/Vielse%20liturgi.pdf](http://www.folkekirken.dk/_Resources/Persistent/6/4/4/f/644f94c8205ea8c0850a902a723241c0afce1b93/Vielse%20liturgi.pdf); accessed 06.06.2017; <http://www.interchurch.dk/materialer/salmer-og-liturgier-paa-andre-sprog/engelske-liturgier>; accessed 06.06.2017.

A generation is not a distinct group, “the unity of generations is constituted essentially by a similarity of location of a number of individuals within a social whole”;<sup>11</sup> but a given generation is determined not only by their similar location but also by their experience of the same events.<sup>12</sup> These events may be cross-regional, such as the 1960s, which left immense impressions all over the western world, and thereby created cross-regional generational similarities<sup>13</sup>; but they may also be local, such as the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, which was a historical event all over the western world but directly changed the world of coming generations in Germany.

Mannheim’s theory is still applied as baseline in the description of new generations<sup>14</sup> but during the years it has also been adjusted and revisited. Irish-based sociologists Virpi Timonen and Cathrine Conlon emphasise that Mannheim’s concept of generation is not to be understood as a homogeneous unit as members of a generation participate differently in the social and intellectual currents of their time.<sup>15</sup> Similarly, British sociologist Jane Pilcher argues that societal generations must be understood as social generations being born within same historical and cultural context. Thus, generations within the same timespan but in different locations or within different cultural contexts may share some common characteristics – especially younger generations in the wave of globalisation – but they diverge in other aspects. Even within the same cultural context there will be differing ways of responding to a situation. A generation “is likely to be stratified by a number of ‘generation units’”.<sup>16</sup> Inspired by Niklas Luhmann, German sociologist Michael Corsten argues for understanding a generation as contracted by a cultural circle defined as “certain criteria for interpreting and articulating topics in a similar manner,” which means that people within the same age-group are more likely to share “comparable standpoints and perspectives in the discursive practices.”<sup>17</sup> These perspectives support an approach to generations that focuses on specific generational units that might be expected to express and participate in the cultural circle of their time in particular ways, such

---

11 Karl Mannheim, *Essays on the Sociology of Knowledge* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd, 1952), 290.

12 Mannheim, *Essays*, 297.

13 McLeod, *Crisis*.

14 Such as Ruth Milkman, “A New Political Generation: Millennials and the Post-2008 Wave of Protest. 2016 Presidential Address,” *American Sociological Review* 82 no. 1 (2017): 1–31.

15 Virpi Timonen and Catherine Conlon, “Beyond Mannheim: Conceptualizing how people ‘talk’ and ‘do’ generations in contemporary society,” *Advances in Life Course Research* 24 (2015): 1–9 (2).

16 Jane Pilcher, “Mannheim’s Sociology of Generations: An Undervalued Legacy,” *The British Journal of Sociology* 45, no. 3 (1994): 481–495 (490).

17 Michael Corsten, “The Time of Generations,” *Time and Society* 8 no. 2 (1999): 249–272 (262).

as in this case pastors or more broadly highly engaged members of a Nordic majority church.

Revisiting Mannheim through the incorporation of Pierre Bourdieu's concepts of habitus and hexis, American sociologist Ron Eyerman and British-Australian sociologist Bryan Turner understand a generation as sharing a common habitus, hexis and culture. Therefore, their interest is "the modes through which a generation embodies its collective identity in response to traumatic or formative events".<sup>18</sup> Generational characteristics are to be found in the ways and norms of practices within a generation. Recently, Portuguese sociologists Sofia Aboim and Pedro Vasconcelos have continued this turn to generational practices with the help of Michel Foucault. Thus, they seek to replace Mannheim's concept of generational units with generations as discursive formations. Building upon the insights of both Eyerman and Turner and Corsten, Aboim and Vasconcelos insist that generations must be envisaged "not only as defined by an often vague and structurally-determined cultural content but, rather, forged by and upon the dominant cultural narratives produced in a given time-space location."<sup>19</sup> In other words, generations consist of people born within specific time and location but within these generations there are discursive formations that relate differently to the dominant narratives and norms of practices characterising their time and times before them. This study of ELCD pastors does not examine different discursive formations within a generation but across generations in similar subgroups by scrutinising their discursive practices in preparatory conversations as a way of identifying possible generational characteristics.

Despite these refinements of Mannheim's theory of generations, a more simple separation of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in three adult generations has been fruitful in determining longitudinal changes within religion.<sup>20</sup> The pre-boomers were born prior to 1946 with the experience of the great depression and the Second World War deeply embedded in their memory.<sup>21</sup> The generation after the Second World War born in the years 1946–1964 is usually referred to as the baby-boomers due to the high birth rates. They are characterised by the development of a

---

**18** Ron Eyerman and Bryan S. Turner, "Outline of a Theory of Generations," *European Journal of Social Theory* 1 (1998): 91–106 (93; 96).

**19** Sofia Aboim and Pedro Vasconcelos, "From political to social generations: A critical reappraisal of Mannheim's classical approach," *European Journal of Social Theory* 17 (2014): 165–183 (175).

**20** Pål K. Botvar, "The Moral Thinking of Three Generations in Scandinavia: What Role Does Religion Play?" *Social Compass* 52 (2005): 185–195; Carroll and Roof, *Bridging*; Crocket and Voas, *Generations*; Halman and Pettersson, *Decline*; Inger Furseth, *From Quest for Truth to Being Oneself. Religious Change in Life Stories* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2006).

**21** Carroll and Roof, *Bridging*, 5; 62.

growing middleclass and a period in which traditional norms and values were destabilised with respect to gender, social class and age – also including a fierce critique of the old, established authorities.<sup>22</sup> The succeeding generation born 1964–1980 are called Generation X because this period of time lacks all-encompassing events.<sup>23</sup> Generation X follows the trends laid out by the boomers, with an increased focus on individuality, personal choice, religious pluralism and differing family types;<sup>24</sup> and therefore, in many ways the baby-boomers and Generation X are easier to separate from the pre-boomers than from each other.<sup>25</sup>

British sociologists Alasdair Crocket and David Voas strongly argue for the importance of generations. Religion in Britain is in decline: each generation is less religious than the previous one; but generation is not only explanatory when it comes to religious decline but also with respect to changes within religion. Norwegian political scientist Pål K. Botvar points to changes in the understanding of religion between generations in Scandinavia; Norwegian sociologist Inger Furseth makes a similar point in her study of life stories;<sup>26</sup> Swedish sociologist Lars Ahlin examines the importance of religious socialisation and generation;<sup>27</sup> and even though Danish sociologist Peter Gundelach finds that generational differences decrease, his study of understandings of religion show clear generational differences.<sup>28</sup> All point to higher degrees of individualisation and de-traditionalisation with respect to established religious authorities and dogmas. Thus, the influence of generational differences on religion pertains not only to secularisation but also to changes within the group of people that still describe themselves as religious or spiritual.<sup>29</sup>

---

**22** Wade C. Roof, “Generations and Religion,” in *The Oxford Handbook of The Sociology of Religion*, ed. P.B. Clarke (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 623ff.

**23** Generation X is also referred to as the Bust generation. See Loek Halman and Thorleif Pettersson, “A Decline of Religious Values?” in *Globalization, Value Change, and Generations: a Cross-National and Intergenerational Perspective*, eds. Ester et al. (E-book: Brill Academic Publishers, 2006), 43.

**24** Roof, *Generations*, 627; Carroll and Roof, *Bridging*, 19–22.

**25** Carroll and Roof, *Bridging*.

**26** Furseth, *Quest*, 295–311.

**27** Lars Ahlin, *Pilgrim, turist eller flyktning? En studie av individuell religiös rörlighet i senmoderniteten* (Stockholm: Brutus Östlings Bokförlag Symposion, 2005).

**28** Peter Gundelach, “Denmark – Solid or Fluid?” in *European Values Studies 12* (E-book: Brill Academic Publishers, 2008), 149–173 (154; 169).

**29** The individualisation thesis or the ‘believing without belonging’ thesis is often perceived (in Crocket and Voas, for instance) as challenging or opposing the secularisation thesis. In this case, I point to the two theses as two levels of investigation: secularisation as the relation between the population and religion in general; and individualisation as changes within religion. Thus, I do

The changes within religion influence not only beliefs, but also the understanding of ritual actions, including those constructed for a specific occasion. French-Canadian anthropologist Michael Houseman shows how rituals within new forms of religion are individually designed, may be inspired by scripts on the internet, and draw on a multitude of religious and cultural traditions,<sup>30</sup> whereas American ritual theorist Ronald Grimes and in a Nordic context, Norwegian sociologist of religion Ida Maria Høeg point to the importance of the individual story in the re-invention of rituals.<sup>31</sup> Thus, within new forms of religion, traditions are increasingly combined and adapted to specific occasions but these tendencies also influence the ritual actions within or relating to established religions which are increasingly adjusted to the specific occasion.<sup>32</sup> Such rituals differ from the more well-established rituals which, according to American anthropologist Roy A. Rappaport, are characterised by a pre-existing order of performance and close connection to a specific religious universe and community, making them appear almost invariable.<sup>33</sup> In the terms of British sociologists Paul Heelas and Linda Woodhead, changes in the understanding of rituals assimilate the overall change in dominant but not all-encompassing values from *life-as*, in which norms are ascribed external authority, to *subjective-life* in which norms are expected to be authentic in the individual lives.<sup>34</sup>

---

not enter into the discussion as to whether and to which degree the individualisation thesis challenges the secularisation thesis.

**30** Michael Houseman, “Menstrual Slaps and First Blood Celebrations: Inference, Simulation and the Learning of Ritual,” in *Learning Religion: Anthropological Approaches*, eds. Berliner, David, and Ramon Sarró (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2007).

**31** Ronald Grimes, *Deeply into the Bone: Re-inventing Rites of Passage* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 2000). Ida M. Høeg, “Velkommen til oss” *Ritualisering av livets begynnelse* (PhD diss., Universitetet i Bergen, 2008).

**32** William R. Arfman, “Liquid Ritualizing: Facing the Challenges of late Modernity in an Emerging Ritual Field,” *Journal of Religion in Europe* 7 (2014): 1–25; Oluf Aagedal, Pål K. Botvar, and Ida M. Høeg eds, *Den offentlige sorgen. Markeringer, ritualer og religion etter 22. Juli* (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 2013); Kirstine Helboe Johansen, “Weddings in the Church of Denmark – Traditional and Modern Expectations of an Efficacious Ritual,” in *Christliche Rituale im Wandel. Schlaglichter aus theologischer und religionswissenschaftlicher Sicht*, eds. Hans Gerald Hödl, Johann Pock and Teresa Schweighofer (Vienna: Vienna University Press, 2017), 65–85.

**33** Roy A. Rappaport, *Ritual and Religion in the Making of Humanity*, Cambridge Studies in Social and Cultural Anthropology 110 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

**34** Heelas and Woodhead, *Revolution*, 4.

## 4 Research Design: Do Understandings of the Wedding Service Point to Generational Differences among Pastors in the Evangelical-Lutheran Church in Denmark?

The study focuses specifically on what kinds of understandings of the wedding ceremony the pastors express when preparing the wedding ceremony with couples and when afterwards asked to elaborate on their own practice. Thus, the study does not regard the pastors' marriage theology as such but their understanding of the wedding ceremony as a case for how they understand themselves and the church in relation to church members. Therefore, I focused the study on preparatory conversations before the wedding ceremony followed by interviews with couples and pastors, respectively. In the preparatory conversations, pastors often meet with couples with whom they have passing acquaintance or, more often, have no acquaintance at all. The conversation is often scheduled in the week before the ceremony but sometimes e-mail correspondence, often with respect to practical matters or special wishes such as choice of music and equipment for invited musicians, supplements the conversation. During the conversation, pastors need to both introduce the ritual order and the meaning of it and get acquainted with the wedding couple to be able to write the wedding speech which is expected both to be a sermon and to be written with the specific couple in mind.

The examination was conducted as a qualitative study in selected churches in the diocese of Aarhus, the second-largest city in Denmark, from the spring to the autumn of 2012. The study included monitoring and audio recording of thirteen conversations between pastors and couples preparing the wedding ceremony, thirteen semi-structured interviews with couples and eight semi-structured interviews with the pastors.<sup>35</sup> All pastors and couples had agreed to allow me to observe the conversation and all interviews with both pastors and couples were initiated by introducing a written form of consent relating to both observations and interviews explaining the research purpose and procedures, as well as identity protection in publications. The interviews were conducted after the pastoral conversations, enabling me to invite the couples and pastors to elaborate on their expressions during the conversation and to explain their own under-

---

<sup>35</sup> For this analysis only the perspectives of the pastors are included so the following description of selection focuses on them.

standings of elements and dialogues in the conversation. The interviews followed a semi-structured interview guide and lasted 30–45 minutes. Ten conversations lasted about an hour, while three conversations lasted about an hour and a half.

The sample consisted of eight pastors, who were selected to represent different generations. Within each generation, they were also selected to represent male and female pastors, urban and rural parishes equally.

Four pastors were selected to represent a generation born and to some extent raised before the 1960s (birth-years: 1945 (M2), 1947 (M8), 1948 (M3), and 1953 (M1)). Within the baby-boom generation, they could be characterised as the early boomers or, in a Danish context, as the early post-war generation. They grew up in an almost unquestioned Evangelical-Lutheran hegemony that in the U.S. context is taken to be characteristic of the pre-boomers.<sup>36</sup> Another four pastors were selected to represent a generation born and raised after the 1960s (birth-years: 1972 (M7), 1977 (M4), 1979 (M6), and 1981 (M5)). They all belong to the younger part of Generation X. They were raised in a much more pluralistic and individualistic society as the trends from the 1960s gradually spread in the general population. Furthermore, they grew up in a period when religious and spiritual seeking was prominent. In their time, religion is increasingly seen as a choice: a choice of religion or no religion, a choice of which religion, and a choice of whether or not an established religious institution is necessary to practise religion.

By placing the pastors early and late in their generation respectively, I expected to find stronger differences between them. Since the study focuses on generational differences rather than theological differences, I sought to diminish the influence of theology by selecting pastors that did not belong to any distinct theological subgroups within the ELCD. The pastors were asked to invite couples who were younger (born after 1970), who were marrying for the first time, who lived in or came from the given parish, and who were not associated with specific theological subgroups. Most of the wedding couples met all of these criteria; the remaining few met all but one of them.

The study was guided by the following research questions:

- How do pastors understand and describe the determining elements of a wedding service?
- To what degree is generation a contributing factor for possible differences in their understandings?
- How are the understandings of the different generations to be characterised?

---

**36** Carroll and Roof, *Bridging*, 39. For a brief description of a similar pattern in Norway, see Furseth, *Quest*, 54–59.

- What kind of ecclesiological perspectives do possible generational differences or similarities imply?

After a full transcription of the interviews, the transcriptions were coded by two independent coders. Two main codes coined traditional and more adaptive understandings of ritual respectively. Traditional understandings of ritual were described by terms from ritual theories of established rituals: ritual order, established meaning, tradition, relation to other rituals and community. Adaptive understandings of ritual were described by terms from ritual theories of new and holistic rituals: personal meaning, action adjustments, emphasis on personal decision and inspiration from other traditions. The main coding aimed at detecting traditional and adaptive understandings of ritual, but in the coding process it became evident that expressions which referred to “change” as the basic characteristic of ritual were prevalent. Therefore, the initial coding was supplemented by the code: *Change*, capturing a strong expression of the church wedding as a real change that makes it more serious than other types of weddings. Change is characterised by terms from an open coding that showed references to *højtidelighed*,<sup>37</sup> seriousness and something special to be prevalent. The understanding of ritual as change refers to a fundamental characteristic within both newer and traditional rituals and has a specific theoretical foundation in ritual theories and studies that emphasise the efficacy of ritual actions,<sup>38</sup> thereby enabling ritual actions to express change.<sup>39</sup> The final coding was done according to the coding scheme displayed in Table 1.

---

**37** The Danish words *højtidelig* (adj.) and *højtidelighed* (subj.) are difficult, if not impossible to translate into English. The meaning of the words falls in between solemn and dignified, something that should be approached with reverence; and they are often used to refer to the special sense of dignified seriousness at ritualised actions. The terms can be used equally well for a dignified setting for sorrow and loss (funerals, All Saints’ Day) and for joy and happiness (Wedding, baptism, Christmas Eve). Due to the difficulties in translation, the Danish terms are used in the text.

**38** Jesper Sørensen, “The Problem of Magic: Or how Gibberish Becomes Efficacious Action,” *Recherches sémiotiques/Semiotic Inquiry* 25 (2005): 93–117; Rappaport, *Ritual and Religion*, 86–97.

**39** Ulrike Wagner-Rau, „Segen und Magie in der Trauung,“ in *Zwischen Schwellenangst und Schwellenzauber. Kasualpredigt als Schwellenkunde*, eds. Garhammer et al. (München: Don Bosco Verlag, 2002), 155–159; Kirstine H. Johansen, ”Højmesse – mellem stadfæstelse og virkningsfuldhed,“ in *En gudstjeneste – mange perspektiver*, eds. Kirstine H. Johansen and J.B. Rønkilde (København: Forlaget Anis, 2013), 63–89.

**Table 1:** Coding scheme for analyses of interviews

Code	Subcode	Definition
Change		A church wedding sets a difference between before and after. Typically described as a solemn occasion, as something to be taken seriously or as an undefined experience of something special.
	Solemn	A church wedding is a feast and thereby a time set apart from ordinary times
	Serious	A church wedding is not a game but is to be conducted in earnest
	Special	A church wedding has a undefined but unique feeling to it
Traditional		A church wedding is part of a culturally well-established religious institution and is recognised by a stable ritual order and an established meaning. It is connected to other rituals in the church room and is conducted by a group of people in communion
	Ritual order	A church wedding includes a specific sequence of performances
	Established meaning	A church wedding is ascribed a specific content
	Tradition	A church wedding is a culturally well-established practice for entering into marriage
	Other rituals	A church wedding is connected to other ritual activities that takes place in the church room
	Community	A church wedding is conducted by a group of people gathered for the occasion
Adaptive		A church wedding is a personal ritual occasion that is chosen by the individual couple and should be adjusted according to their preferences. This may include inspiration from other religious and cultural traditions
	Personal meaning	A church wedding is ascribed a content in the individually specific occasion
	Action adjustment	The action sequence of a church wedding is adjusted according to personal preferences
	Personal decision	A church wedding is an individual choice that can be argued for
	Other traditions	A church wedding include inspirations from other religions and cultures

The final coding revealed that the impact of the subcodes *Tradition*, *Special*, *Personal decision* and *Other traditions* was minimal in terms of both representa-

tion and meaning ascription, and therefore these codes are not included in the analysis.<sup>40</sup>

The analysis of the interviews is supplemented by observations from the conversations between pastors and couples. These conversations have been analysed with respect to dominant themes which surfaced in an inductive inquiry and consist of three main topics: *Ritual* – conversation about and introduction to the wedding liturgy; *Life story* – conversation about the life or opinions of the wedding couple; and *Wedding/Church* – conversation about the choice of church wedding and the specific church. The main topics are supplemented by two minor topics: *Hymns* – conversation about and choice of hymns for the wedding; and *Readings* – conversation about and introduction to the biblical readings in the wedding. Based on the sound file, the duration of the different topics has been measured.

## 4 Analysis: A “Good” Wedding

The analysis is structured according to the three main codes: *Change*, *Traditional* and *Adaptive*, and investigates the degree to which these codes are represented among older and younger pastors respectively. But the purpose is not only to describe the distribution of the different codes. Instead, what is involved is an in-depth analysis that points to deeper similarities or differences in the understandings of the wedding.

### 4.1 A Wedding Must be Taken Seriously

Both older and younger pastors emphasise that a wedding should not be taken lightly but is to be approached in earnest. An older, female pastor says that a wedding “demands the concentration to say now or never” (M1); and a younger, female pastor makes a similar point as she wishes “... to give them [the wedding couple] the feeling that this is not a trivial occasion” (M7). To the pastors a wedding is not just a beautiful ceremony. Both concentration and a reverent approach are required if the wedding is to effect a change. An older, male pastor

---

**40** This finding is surprising, especially with respect to *tradition* and *personal decision*, since one might expect the couple’s personal decision to choose a traditional church wedding to be a central component in the conversation. One explanation might be that for the pastors, the tradition they represent and the personal decision of the wedding couples are the baseline of the conversation rather than a topic to engage in.

states that “there is a difference between before and now” (M8), and a younger, male pastor sees the attitude of the wedding couple as the necessary condition for flexibility on his side: “If I sense that they take the ritual seriously, if they have something at stake, then we can solve most things” (M5).

With the strong representation of the code “seriousness,” the pastors touch upon the fragility of rituals. Rituals have similarities with game and play, the difference being that they are performative actions that bring social changes into being whereby the ascribed meaning transcends the ritual moment.<sup>41</sup> To the pastors it is important that a wedding ceremony *is* a wedding and that the couple experience themselves as married—it is not something they pretend. Therefore, it is not surprising that a younger, female pastor (M4) expresses a feeling of ridicule if she senses that the wedding is nothing but a well-orchestrated event to the wedding couple.

Despite this common agreement, the generations divide over the representation of the wedding as something *højtidelig*. Whereas none of the older pastors emphasise the wedding as *højtidelig*, it is very evident among the younger pastors. A wedding is a feast and therefore a time set apart from the ordinary time, a time where you dress differently (M7); and the pastor is also responsible for creating this feeling of *højtidelighed* (M4). Unlike the understanding of the wedding as a serious occasion, which is closely connected to the pastors as representatives of a religious institution that must be taken seriously as a living and normative religion, the understanding of the wedding as a *højtidelig* occasion expresses a willingness to adopt the perspective of the other participants in the ritual. The wedding may not be a unique event for the pastor, who may have several weddings on the day in question and may not know the wedding couple very well; but for the wedding couple and their friends and family the wedding is (ideally) a unique event. When the younger pastors describe the wedding as *højtidelig*, they take the perspective of the ritual participants and include it in their responsibilities as ritual leaders to a higher degree than their older colleagues. The same type of perspective taking is found in references to other life-cycle rituals which are also only found among younger pastors. They emphasise that the wedding is connected to former family rituals either through the church space (M6) or through hymns that connect different ritual experiences (M4).

Of course, the fact that the older pastors do not explicitly state that they think of the wedding as *højtidelig* does not imply that they do not want the wedding to be *højtidelig*; but it does indicate that the older pastors have a tendency to remain within their own institutional perspective, whereas the younger pastors incorpo-

---

41 Rappaport, *Ritual and Religion*, 107–117.

rate a participant perspective into the understanding of the wedding and of their own task as ritual leaders.

## 4.2 Representing the institution

Both older and younger pastors also strongly report traditional understandings of ritual: a good wedding is a ritual order with an established meaning that necessitates a shared experience among the participants.

All pastors express their trust in the ritual as something to be guided by. To an older, female pastor the ritual order is like traffic rules: “well, it’s traffic rules in life ... when we are going through things like that it’s good to have rituals of how we do this” (M2). A younger, male pastor makes a similar point: “at the end of the day, the ritual structure is some sort of security mechanism because we can go through it when we have it and then nothing else matters” (M6). Other pastors say that the ritual order is “robust” or “well-structured”. To all of them the established ritual order is perceived as something solid that leads the ritual participant through important moments in life that would have been difficult to handle individually. Despite this common evaluation, the older pastors tend to introduce and explain the ritual procedures in greater depth than the younger pastors. The older pastors spend 28–75 per cent of the conversation on the ritual procedures and often draw a picture of the sanctuary showing all the stages of the wedding service for the couple to take home with them. The younger pastors often begin the conversation with a short visit to the sanctuary to show the wedding couple their seats and where to stand in front of the altar, and only spend 0–23 per cent of the conversation on explaining the ritual.

Both younger and older pastors refer to “the gospel” as a very broad term for the established meaning of the wedding. One older, male pastor says that the promise to love and respect each other “until death do you part” transcends the wedding couple’s human capacities:

“... they promise each other something and in reality they promise each other more than they can keep and that is to have faith. They have faith in it when they promise it” (M3).

A younger, female pastor makes a similar point: “the private covenant is made in the light and in the sound of something else, namely a thousand-year-long history of love” (M7).

To all pastors, the theological meaning of the wedding is present in the ritual and enhances the ritual meaning as well as the meaning of the wedding couple’s actions. The emphasis on theological meaning, however, is not reflected in the conversations through explanations of the obligatory liturgical biblical readings.

In seven conversations the readings are not explained at all. In the remaining six conversations the readings are a minor subject.

Despite this common pattern, the younger and the older pastors differ in the way in which they understand the relationship between the unique wedding and their common use of the broad term “the gospel”. The older pastors tend to refer to the gospel as connected to the wedding ceremony in itself. This is most forcefully stated by an older, male pastor who says that “[the experience of a wedding] they should have on the terms of the gospel” (M8); but is also represented as an insistence that “the biblical readings should be allowed to be heard” (M1), and in the above-mentioned statement that the wedding couple promise more than humans can fulfil (M3). When the younger pastors use the term “the gospel”, they tend to emphasise the relation between the gospel and the wedding couple. A younger, female pastor expresses this understanding as follows:

“If you are to get some theology into the picture, to me, then I have to find out who these people are, where I can say something – say something evangelical [evangelisk] in their lives” (M4).

Though some younger pastors also point to the biblical readings and a marriage theology, there seems to be a tendency that the established meaning of the wedding is not a marriage theology as such, but the gospel in relation to the specific story of the wedding couple standing in front of the pastor. Even though all pastors emphasise the theological meaning of the wedding, it is evident that younger and older pastors understand this differently. To the older pastors, a marriage theology is something that they have developed over the years as their theological interpretation of the wedding and they wish to share this with the wedding couple. To the younger pastors, marriage theology is understood relationally and emerges in the meeting between wedding couple, wedding ceremony and pastor. They wish to find out how the gospel may be preached to this specific couple at this specific occasion.

Finally, all pastors ascribe immense importance to the fact that the wedding service should be a communal experience involving both the wedding couple and their guests. An older male pastor says:

“A shared awareness and not just whether the wedding couple listens and is present in the situation, but also that the guests . . . are partners in the wedding couple’s joy, that they participate” (M8).

The shared experience is something that influences the pastor’s own performance, as expressed by a younger, male pastor: “if everybody sings and really joins in, then I am also lifted another 10 per cent” (M6), and the pastors also seek to integrate the whole congregation in their own preparations as expressed by a younger, female pastor: “[I] try to write my speech not just for the wedding couple

but also for their family and friends” (M4). The importance ascribed to sharing the experience of the wedding is closely connected to the joint agreement that the wedding has to be approached with reverence. To prevent the wedding from becoming a show performed by the pastor, the wedding couple must take the ritual and their own participation seriously; and so must the invited ritual participants (family and friends). Only when they actively participate in the ritual do they constitute a congregation.<sup>42</sup>

### 4.3 A Personal Wedding Or: Representing the wedding couple

Two of the four subcodes describing adaptive understandings of ritual are represented among the pastors: *Personal meaning* and *Adjustments*. In itself, this result supports the expectation that adaptive understandings of ritual would be less represented among the clergy than traditional understandings of ritual; but surprisingly both of these subcodes are almost equally represented among older and younger pastors.

Both groups agree to minor adjustments to the ritual order<sup>43</sup> if the wedding couples accept the place assigned to musical pieces within the ritual. An older, male pastor says: “at the place of the motet [just after the sermon] they can have almost anything” (M3). Apart from the assigned liturgical room for musical pieces, another limitation is the gospel as expressed by a younger, female pastor: “I am very open about these [personal adjustments], as long as they do not pull in a totally different direction” (M4).

The adjustments in question typically involve pieces of live or digitally recorded music, whereas wishes for songs that are not in the authorised hymnbook<sup>44</sup> are less accepted. The apparent openness towards personal adjustments to the ritual order is therefore *de facto* a very limited openness: the wedding couple is allowed to play a piece of music of their own choice during the wedding as long as the pastor regards their choice as suitable. An older pastor illustrates this when she describes her approach to requests for special music pieces or songs:

---

<sup>42</sup> Rappaport, *Ritual and Religion*, 23–58; 107–138; Johansen, *Højmesse*.

<sup>43</sup> Though the liturgical order is officially authorised and should be followed, the choice of songs and music is free to the pastor and liturgical elements may be added.

<sup>44</sup> The hymnbook is authorised by the Queen of Denmark and constitutes the officially sanctioned hymn repertoire.

“Well, as long as I do not think that it [music pieces] breaks the room<sup>45</sup> then I am willing to negotiate ... once I even dispensed with my rather firm: We sing from the authorised hymn-book” (M1).

Even though personal meaning is almost equally represented among both older and younger pastors, the apparent similarity seems to cover deeper differences. The older pastors primarily understand personal meaning in line with the wish to add minor personal elements to the wedding: “I will go a long way to help them have a nice wedding” (M2); “I am fine with their own small elements” (M1). According to the older generation, incorporating the personal meaning of the couple into the wedding ceremony means allowing them to have a special song or music piece integrated in the ritual order. The younger pastors understand it differently. To them personal meaning implies that they try to conduct the wedding and preach the gospel in a way that speaks specifically to the unique couple: “I am a co-reflector” (M5), “I wish to bind their words together” (M7), “the gospel must be told through their story” (M6). This finding accords with their understanding of the established meaning. The younger pastors tend to place the wedding couple in the centre of attention, and they wish to evolve the established ritual around them by merging the story of the couple and the Christian story into each other, thereby preaching the gospel in this particular context and setting, rather than preaching a marriage theology in itself.

Likewise, in the conversations, the younger pastors typically focus on the life story of the wedding couple (27–86 per cent of the conversation) and ask about the relationship between the couple’s life story and values and their choice of a church wedding. The older pastors only spend 0–25 per cent of the conversation on the couple’s life story. Typically, they ask for facts: How long have you known each other? Where did you meet? What do you like the most about your partner? Even though they ask the couple why they chose a church wedding, this topic is primarily used to introduce the pastor’s explanation of the ritual involved. Again the approach of the younger pastors can be characterised as relational. To them, integrating the personal meaning of the couple is not just to allow for a special song or music piece but to appreciate how the couple themselves understand the wedding, their values and life story and the younger pastors seek to preach the gospel specifically in relation to this.

---

<sup>45</sup> With the saying “breaks the room” the pastor refers to music pieces that might destroy the Christian story told in liturgy, hymns and sermon or the seriousness that she thinks belongs to the occasion.

## 5 A Generational Divide?

The two groups of pastors share cross-generational similarities determined especially by education, employment, conviction, and engagement and confidence in an established religious institution and its rituals. From this perspective the two groups of pastors may be said to constitute similar generational units that are minority groups in their respective generations, but as pointed out by Aboim and Vasconcelos, generations do not just consist of generational units but come to being as discursive formations in relation to the cultural narratives of a given time and space. Preparatory wedding conversations are one window to the discursive practices that express the ways different generations relate to current cultural trends.

Even though generation appears to be a convincing explanation of the differences between older and younger pastors, other possible explanations such as gender and age must also be taken into account. Within this qualitative study differences in gender and rural/urban setting do not seem to interfere with the generational divide but it may still be a supplementary explanation just like the difference in age. On the one hand, a pastor similar in age to the wedding couple may enhance the chance of building a relationship that enables the pastor to formulate the gospel to this specific couple. On the other hand, the authority ascribed to an older pastor may be stronger than that ascribed to a younger one. Similarity in age may enhance relationality, whereas difference in age may enhance an authoritative, institutional approach. In addition, theology and the educational curriculum have changed, making it likely that the two generations of pastors have received divergent theological training. Finally, the experience of many years as a pastor may lead to a certain reduction in the degree to which pastors truly engage with each individual couple, which may explain the wish to focus on a marriage theology itself.

The difference in theological training may be explained by generational trends incorporated into the educational system and might therefore be expected to be indirectly supporting value changes between generations. What should be taught and how one should be taught is also dependent on changing times and trends. Nevertheless, the difference in age must undoubtedly be regarded as important both because younger pastors are similar in age to the couples, and because the two groups of pastors differ in terms of their experience. The influence of age cannot be determined within this study but must await the aging and increased experience of the younger pastors and their relational approach. But even though their approach may evolve with age and experience, a generational approach will consider it unlikely that their basic convictions will ever correspond to the older pastors' understandings. The relational approach of the younger

pastors implies a distinct attention to the signals given by the wedding couples and an understanding that their task as pastors is to preach the gospel in relation to the specific couple and the specific occasion. Because they are focused on relationality and thereby on signals from outside themselves, their wedding practice may change as the exterior signals vary over time, but their relational approach is likely to remain characteristic for their generation.

Whereas the relational approach of the younger pastors points to a self-understanding as “facilitators” eager to show the relevance of the gospel in the life of the unique wedding couple, the older pastors tend to perceive themselves more in line with “gatekeepers.” When the wedding couples ask for a church wedding, older pastors expect them to ask for a Christian understanding of marriage. They are not untouched by the trends emerging in the 60s and, therefore, allow small personal elements, but they primarily see themselves as representatives of the established ritual procedures and a Christian understanding of marriage and they are eager to supply this to the particular wedding couple in the best possible way.

## 6 Ecclesiological Perspectives

The generational differences in the understanding of the wedding may be summed up as a matter of dominant stories. According to the older pastors, the wedding ritual has its own story, a marriage theology, referred to as the gospel which they wish to share with the wedding couple, their friends and family. In the words of an older, female pastor: to tell them “those words that say something about us as human beings and love” (M1). The younger pastors tend to emphasise how two stories – the story of the couple and the gospel – must fuse. A younger, male pastor says: “The gospel must be told through their [the wedding couple’s] story” (M6). But these understandings of stories in a wedding also indicate more general differences in the understanding and practice of the relationship between church and church members. In her influential work on practice theory, British theologian Elaine Graham points to church practices as “the creators and bearers of the fundamental truth-claims of the Christian community.”<sup>46</sup> The conversational and liturgical practice of the pastors when preparing and conducting a wedding illumines their understanding of the wedding and, thereby, of ritual procedures more generally, but their practice is also a window to their under-

---

<sup>46</sup> Elaine Graham, *Transforming Practice: Pastoral Theology in an Age of Uncertainty* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2002 [1996]), 111.

standing of the relationship between church, church members and society, to what they perceive a church to be. The practice of all pastors indicates a universalist view on the church that Swedish theologian Karin Oljelund, inspired by Avery Dulles, describes as typical of both the Roman-Catholic church and the national churches.<sup>47</sup> The pastors do not question the belief of the wedding couples or their wish to have a church wedding despite very irregular participation in other church activities. In their wedding conversations both groups practice the church as an inclusive community with a low threshold for membership. The wedding couples are church members and, therefore, they have the right – also legally<sup>48</sup> – to a wedding in their local church. But the role of the church in this inclusive relation to the wedding couples is pictured differently.

To the older pastors, the church is primarily a place for religious services and for preaching established theologies, and, thereby, it assimilates a temple or the common church described by Dutch theologian Henk de Roest. The temple does not form a tightly knit community but has its most solid expressions in the life cycle rituals.<sup>49</sup> As German theologian Wilhelm Gräb has pointed out, traditionally, life cycle rituals are theologically understood in dogmatic categories:<sup>50</sup> the wedding belongs within a Christian understanding of marriage, as the older pastors express. The wedding has an authorised ritual, the pastor has a marriage theology, the older pastors are open and willing to supply this to all kinds of church members, and their duty is primarily to assure that the ritual is practiced well and in accordance with their theological understanding of the wedding. In other words, they view the church from inside out: The church has certain services which belong within certain dogmatic categories and when people come to church and ask for a ritual, they expect them to ask for this standard repertoire.

---

47 A universalist view traditionally implies that the Christian Communion is primarily with God and secondarily with the particular Christian community, but in the context of national churches a universalist view may also be seen as emphasizing the mother church i.e. the ELCD rather than the particular congregation within the mother church (Karin Oljelund, “Method in Liturgical Ecclesiology: An Attempt to Understand the Formation of Primary Ecclesiology,” in *The Meaning of Christian Liturgy: Recent Developments in the Church of Sweden*, ed. Oloph Bexell (Grand Rapids and Cambridge: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2012), 91–113 (95f).

48 Lov om medlemskab af folkekirken, kirkelig betjening og sognebåndsløsning (Law on Membership of The Evangelical-Lutheran Church in Denmark, ecclesial service and change of parish belonging) chapter 3 § 6.

49 Henk De Roest, “The Precarious Church: Developing Congregations in an Individualized Society,” *Ecclesiology* 4, (2008): 204–221 (218).

50 Wilhelm Gräb, *Lebensgeschichte – Lebentwürfe – Sinndeutungen. Eine Praktische Theologie gelebter Religion* (Gütersloh: Chr.Kaiser/Gütersloh Verlagshaus, 2000), 192.

The younger pastors understand their competence and task differently. To them the church is also an open place with a low threshold. They do not move in the direction of a “semi-detached house” as proposed by de Roest and thereby neither in the direction of a more particularistic understanding of the church as a tightly knit community of the committed. Instead their practice assimilates the visions for an open church described by Gräß:

“To be an open people’s church, that means also the church not only allows for pluralism within itself, but also the church tries to promote it. Different groups should be granted the freedom to express different ethical-religious self-understandings in church space.”<sup>51</sup>

Instead of a specific marriage theology, the younger pastors wish to preach the gospel that the specific couple needs to hear. They understand their competence as “Lebenskundliche Deutungskompetenz” (life interpretation).<sup>52</sup> To them, theological meaning emerges as they meet the wedding couple. In other words, their understanding of the church is outside in: in which ways may the gospel be preached in this particular context? The tendency to individual adaptation of not only the ritual performance but even more so of the ritual meaning influences church practices both from church members and from the younger generation of church pastors. This adaptation does not necessarily entail that younger pastors just “go with the flow” without any theological reflections or viewpoints. Rather practicing theology as a relational enterprise may be regarded as the basic theological viewpoint from which their theological reflections spring. None of the pastors express a wish to preach the gospel the wedding couples wish to hear. Instead, they seek to preach the gospel the wedding couple needs to hear or that will say something important in relation to their life story. The younger pastors perceive of life-cycle rituals as an opportunity to initiate a closer relationship between church members and church; an opportunity that may be further supported by offering marriage counselling or sending special invitations for Valentine’s Day worship.<sup>53</sup> Thus, from this viewpoint a marriage theology, or a funeral theology, for that matter, is not something pastors have but something they develop in relation to the people they engage with and in the particular situation;

---

51 Gräß, *Lebensgeschichten*, 89. „Offene Volkskirche zu sein, d.h. dann aber auch, dass die Kirche den Pluralismus in sich selber nicht nur zuzulassen, sondern zu fördern versucht. Es muss also unterschiedlichen Gruppen auch die Freiheit zu unterschiedlichen Selbstfestlegungen in etisch-religiöser Hinsicht im Raum der Kirche eingeräumt werden.“

52 Gräß, *Lebensgeschichten*, 91.

53 Marie Vejrup Nielsen and Kirstine Helboe Johansen, “Transforming churches: the lived religion of religious organizations in a contemporary context,” *Journal of Contemporary Religion* (forthcoming).

and, thereby, the open church not only supplies different groups of participants with the freedom to express themselves differently within the church but also turns this plurality into a theological enterprise that is deeply relational.

## 7 Conclusions

Neither younger nor older pastors that were interviewed have incorporated new trends into the wedding for which they are responsible. The ritual leaves room for minor personal elements, and both older and younger pastors in general allow such elements. In this sense, the ritual order and its administration appear almost untouched by recent trends within holistic spirituality. Furthermore, to both groups church is an open place—a place to go if you want to be part of the relationship between the Christian God and human beings. But the relationship between church as place and wedding couple is radically different. According to the wedding practice of the older pastor, the church is a solid place with well-established rituals and pastors who are competent in preaching a theology inherent in these rituals. According to the wedding practice of the younger pastors, the church is still a solid place in the sense that people come to the church. The church is not liquid, floating to all the places where people convene as described by Pete Ward.<sup>54</sup> But the solid church is an adaptive place with well-established rituals and pastors who are competent in interpreting your life-story theologically and in relation to the specific ritual occasion. Thus, it appears that the understanding of the wedding reflects generational differences. Renewed understandings of the wedding are not only imposed on the ritual from trends outside the church but are inherent in the church as also the pastors are part of their generation.

---

54 Pete Ward, *Liquid Church* (Carlisle Cumbria: Paternoster Press, 2002)