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*Unité et diversité des
évangélismes actuels*

Éléments pour une typologie

Evangelicalism and milieu theory

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1. The Problem

Heinz von Foerster coined the famous phrase that we do not see that we do not see what we do not see. This may sound strange - but it's true. It all has to do with the sensory apparatus of an observer. If his senses haven't the faculty of observing an object, not only will he not be able to see the object, but also, he won't see that he doesn't see it.

Now in science our "sensory apparatus" lies partly in our concepts. We use theoretical concepts to observe and describe the world. And if we choose an inadequate concept, we will struggle with our findings, be puzzled or - worse - not even see that we don't see what we do not see. So one basic problem in science is: What concept should I choose and what will I be able to see with it? In this paper, I would like to propose the observational tool "milieu" in order to describe evangelicalism.

Before starting, I would like to put the term "milieu" into perspective by questioning what other concepts we have. What are the alternatives? We could describe evangelicalism as a *social movement*. Social movements can be defined as groups of people who try to change (or resist change in) certain important characteristics of society (cf. Esser, 2000, p. 46, Boudon/Bourricaud, 1992, p. 462 ff.). Examples would be, for instance, the women's liberation movement, the anti-nuclear-movement or the civil rights movement. Social movements always incorporate some sort of protest against the status quo; they always have a goal for society or parts of society. Now, from a certain perspective, fundamentalism and evangelicalism can very well be described as social movements and the term is indeed widely used (Jung, 1992; Strasser, 1995 ; Riesenbrodt, 1995). Fundamentalism and evangelicalism started out like this, challenging secularising changes in certain denominations and in society in general. Even today evangelicalism has a vision of trying to change society by "winning the whole nation to Christ". On the other hand, evangelicalism is at the moment firmly institutionalised. In a way, it has changed from a protest-movement to a form of Christian faith of its own, with its own structures, and its own world, in which it can live quite nicely. I would say, therefore, that if we want to describe evangelicalism *now*, the term social movement is perhaps not very adequate.

We could describe evangelicalism as a *group*. If we look at definitions of the term group, we find that these are mostly focused on small groups (cf. Neidhardt, 1979, Tyrell, 1983, Boudon/Bourricaud, 1992, p. 183 ff.). It is said that groups are social systems whereby: members have the possibility of face-to face contact; that members have diffuse (not

particular) relationships¹; and that members are important to each other as individuals; furthermore, groups are said to be relatively stable and to be characterised by boundaries, that is, some people belong to the group whereas others do not. Examples are families, football clubs, groups of friends, work teams, school classes etc. Obviously, evangelicalism is not a "small group" of this kind.

There exist, however, theoretical terms for bigger groups too. Some authors speak of *nominal groups* and *latent groups* (Boudon/Bourricaud, 1992, p. 256 ff.). Nominal groups are created by an observer, who notes a certain common characteristic. I could, for instance, create the group of all businessmen who roller-skate to work. *Latent groups* on the other hand are defined as groups that have a common interest, but aren't organised. Neither nominal nor latent groups are groups *for themselves*. They do not have a "group conscience", they're not organised, they can't "act". If we look at evangelicalism, we can see that it is certainly neither a nominal nor a latent group, for it does have a certain "consciousness", it exists not just as a construct of an observer.

Another concept of a "big group" is the term I want to advocate: *milieu*. Instead of a milieu, we could also speak of a life-style-group or a subculture. Although there are many similarities with Pierre Bourdieu's concept of "*champ*", there are also numerous differences². In contrast to smaller groups, milieus:

- do not have the possibility of face-to-face contact of every member with every other member

- are not necessarily characterised by diffuse relationships between members

- are not necessarily characterised by the importance of the individuals as individuals.

However, they do have - just like smaller groups :

- boundaries

- a high level of internal communication

- shared structural and cultural traits.

2. Theory of the milieu

Milieu theory emerged because of problems with earlier concepts such as class or strata. Researchers were increasingly aware that the differences and inequalities they found empirically did not fit the classical class model. Differentiation of social status, measured by education, job prestige and income, is not the only important mechanism that creates big social groups. Several researchers therefore thought that the concept of milieu might be a new descriptive tool to map social reality in a better way. But what is meant by the term milieu?

¹ This means that members are important to each other not just in one, but in different aspects.

² At the "colloque sur l'évangélisme" I was asked if the term "milieu" was something like the concept of "champ" which has been advanced by Pierre Bourdieu (f.e. 1984, 1987; see for a critique Lahire 2001). Obviously the concept "champ" by Bourdieu and "milieu" as advanced here have a lot in common. What I try to do, however, is to formulate a theory of the milieu based strictly on methodological individualism (which is rejected strongly by Bourdieu). Also I would not use the term "*habitus*" which does not seem to be very clear. Finally, I do not think that the evangelical milieu (or the milieus described by Schulze) are characterized as much by a "fight" (*lutte*) between the actors as Bourdieu would like to make us believe. To do justice to the work of Bourdieu, however, one would have to write a whole paper on this question.

Sometimes, milieu is defined as some kind of environment, e.g. the natural, geographical, or social environment (Hartfiel/Hillmann, 1982, 496). In the more recent literature, however, milieu is more often defined as a system itself (Hradil, 1987, 165 ; Schulze, 1990, 410). One thinks of a large group of people with certain similarities and shared differences to their social environment. Riesenbrodt (1995) and Stolz (1999, 2000) have suggested that we can use the term milieu for evangelicalism and fundamentalism. In my paper I will draw extensively on the works of Gerhard Schulze (1990 ; 1995, 169 ff.), who has written a fascinating book on milieus in Germany. My presentation will differ from Schulze's though on one important aspect. I am convinced that milieu theory can be grounded in methodological individualism. Thus, we can use milieu not only as a descriptive category, but we can also enumerate the mechanism by which milieus are created and put explanatory concepts to use. This micro-foundation is, in my view, compatible with Schulze, but it's certainly not his main concern.

Defining Characteristics

According to Schulze, a milieu has the following characteristics:

°*shared structural and cultural traits* (gemeinsame Existenzformen). Individuals in the same milieu will have similarities, for example, in their age-range, their income, their level of education; similarly there will be similarities in their values, their view of the world and their way of expressing feelings and their everyday aesthetics (likes and dislikes) (Schulze, 1990, 410) (Schulze, 1990, 410 ; 1995, 171 ff.)

°*an elevated level of internal communication*. Individuals will have a higher probability of communicating and looking for partners for communication in their own milieu. (erhöhte Binnenkommunikation). (Schulze, 1990, 410; 1995, 174).

clearly visible boundaries. Milieus have boundaries. These boundaries are drawn with the help of easily visible milieu signs. Individuals inside and outside can use certain milieu signs to judge whether a certain person is a member of the milieu or not. Individuals can and do judge themselves in order to find out if they can pass as a member (Schulze, 1995, 108 ff., 364 ff. ; Müller ,1989, 55). Boundary signs have to meet two requirements. They have to be evident (easily visible) and they have to be significant (they have to have a high probability of being correct signs of the designated object).

What examples do we have of milieu-signs ? According to Schulze, a milieu can use language codes, behavioural conduct, dress codes, consumer goods and the like to show milieu membership.

Level of abstraction

Schulze tells us that milieus can be formed at very different levels of abstraction. On a very abstract level we will make out only the most salient differences. On this level, therefore, one will see only very few, big milieus. Schulze, for instance, constructs only five milieus for German society. However, if we decrease the level of abstraction, if we *focus in* on our phenomena, it is clear that new differences will appear and that we have to take into account a whole lot of new sub-milieus.

System and action

In my view, and here I differ from Schulze, milieu theory should be clearly linked to an actor-based systems theory (like Boudon 1983, 1992, Esser 2000a, 2000b, Coleman 1990). This means, very briefly, the following.

First, we assume a certain type of actor with certain properties, interests, resources and faculties. Milieu theory especially stresses the fact that actors have to create an identity both for themselves and for others, by using milieu cognition and milieu structures. Milieu theory is, in my view, compatible with the assumption of actors using bounded rationality to pursue their self-interest.

Second, we assume that, through the action of the actors, the system (in this case : the milieu) emerges as a social structure. This structure in turn influences the cognition and the actions of the individuals. The milieu system has certain emergent properties, for example, - as claimed above - boundaries, a high level of internal communication and shared structural and cultural traits.

Milieu theory, therefore, is one solution to the so-called "micro-macro problem".

Emergence of the system

How do milieu systems emerge from individual actions ? I will not go into the question of how a milieu comes into being, but will instead mention a few mechanisms by which a milieu is maintained by the actions of individuals:

Milieu-focused cognition. Individuals in modern societies have to construct their social identity partly by themselves. Social identity is that part of the identity which stems from membership of certain social groups. Therefore, it becomes extremely important to be able to distinguish different groups and to be able to see which individuals belong to which groups and to what extent. The argument here is : Given a milieu society, rational individuals will focus their cognition on milieu differences and will act accordingly. This, in turn makes the milieus become real.

Milieu-focused action. Individuals not only focus their cognition on milieus; they also actively try to construct their identities in terms of milieu membership. They try to behave, feel and look like real milieu members. They try to acquire the necessary signs and knowledge, to exhibit the clothes, consumer goods and trophies the milieu requires. If membership in a milieu seems something desirable, a rational individual will try to become a member by doing all these things.

Social control. Inside the milieu we will find certain norms of consistency. Members of the milieu will observe each other in order to find out whether their interaction partner really belongs to the milieu or whether he's "just pretending". They will sanction behaviour, attitudes and looks that are too far away from internal milieu standards. For the individual this means that milieu membership is only to be gained by observing certain rules. If the individual wants to stay inside the milieu, he or she can thus either conform to milieu standards or try to hide his or her rule-breaking practices. Since pretending and covering up is itself often very difficult and thus costly, often conformism is the most rational alternative.

Incentive for internal communication. The individual member of a certain milieu, will find that he or she has similar knowledge, moral standards and standards of conduct to other members of his milieu. Outsiders though often have very diverse standards and different knowledge. The individual finds, therefore, that it is much easier and - ceteris paribus - more rational to establish contact with members of his own milieu than with outsiders.

Milieu as structural constraint. Being a member of a certain milieu, the individual will have much more contact with other members of the milieu than with outsiders. This leads to a fortification of already existing beliefs and practices, while different beliefs and practices are rarely encountered and therefore often either not known or thought to be absurd. This means that the individual - whether he wants to or not - will be led into a certain way of thinking, feeling, seeing which to him seems just plain "normal" but which might not seem normal to outsiders at all (Schulze's term is "internal homogenisation").

Internal differentiation

Milieus, like many other social systems, can be internally differentiated. For one thing there is a *segmential differentiation*. Think of the environmentalist milieu where, at least in Germany, you have clearly a "realo" and a "fundamentalist" sub-group. Think of the theatre milieu where you have the milieu of established actors, off-actors, lay actors. Think of youth culture where you have ravers, punks, hip-hoppers, grungers and so on.

Milieus are apparently not only differentiated into sub-milieus, but they very often also have a *centre-periphery differentiation*. This means that we often find one or more centres of the milieu. Here we find the stars of the milieu; those people who say what's new, what's going on. This is where the action is. Most members of the milieu will observe closely what's happening in the centre, for by doing so they can inform themselves about the newest trends as quickly as possible. There are milieus in which the centre changes from one place to another at an extremely quick pace. It is a difficult thing to know where the centre is, and often already the knowledge of where the centre is can be taken as a sign that the individual himself belongs to the centre. People on the periphery of the milieu, on the other hand, often do not embrace milieu membership fully. They have some reservations, they only dress a bit like members, they might think of themselves as part-time members, they might be afraid of not fitting in very well or might try to define themselves with the help of other milieus and groups.

Nevertheless, one should not forget that milieus also have external *boundaries*. This means that milieus are not only differentiated internally, but also externally. There are certain things that cannot be done by members. There are certain people who could not become members. There are certain values that are completely at odds with the milieu ideology.

Organisations and entrepreneurs who compete for influence in the milieu

Given a milieu, entrepreneurs will appear who will try to gain some profit by centring their products on the milieu. In a techno-culture, we expect to find music labels, party organisers, DJ's, clothes manufacturers all competing on the market this milieu stands for. They will fight each other for milieu customers and by trying to find out exactly what happens in the milieu and by advertising just this, they are an important factor of change in the milieu itself.

Milieus as an explanatory concept : milieus as resources and constraints of cognition and action

I would like to argue that milieu is not just a descriptive concept but also an explanatory one. Given his/her knowledge of the milieu and the fact that a certain individual is a member of the milieu, the sociologist can explain

why the individual sees things in a certain way rather than in another way

why the individual evaluates a new stimulus in a certain way rather than in another way

why the individual chooses A rather than B.

3. Evangelicalism

Before I try to apply the milieu concept, let's take a quick look at my assumptions about evangelicalism. I would like to say something about theological characteristics, main branches and important lines of conflict.

3.1 Theological characteristics

Although there are great differences on other points, evangelical groups seem to have a common denominator in that they subscribe to the following (cf. Jung, 1992 ; Hunter, 1981, 1983, 1987 ; Stolz, 1999, 2000) :

An orthodox view of the biblical scriptures. A view that does certainly not incorporate "demythologizing" (Bultmann) and that readily accepts, for example, stories of miracles as true fact. It is also a view in which the sinfulness of man and the possibility to be saved is very important. Inside this orthodox view, there are still a wide range of different theological possibilities. Some do, for example, take historical research into account, others do not.

The importance of a singular *conversion* (to be born again) in which one gives ones life to Jesus Christ thereby gaining a personal relationship with him. Both conversion and the relationship with Jesus are conceived as something not just intellectual but rather emotional. It is something one feels in one's daily life, it is something one knows out of experience.

The importance of *evangelising*, of trying to win other people to Christ.

3.2 Main currents

There are perhaps three main branches in evangelicalism (Jung, 1992, p. 88) :

Classical evangelicals have their roots in pietism and the great awakenings. Examples are Chrischona, Freie evangelische Gemeinden or Vereinigung freier Missionsgemeinden. These evangelicals emphasise the emotional relationship with Jesus and one experience of being born again.

Fundamentalist evangelicals. One root of this current goes back to the Baptists of the 16th century, for instance, in Zurich. For these evangelicals, the inerrancy of the bible, a very clearly regulated life in the faith of God and baptism of adults (baptism of faith) are very important. Examples are the Mennonites, the Baptists and the Darbysts. Emotionality is less important in these groups.

Pentecostal evangelicals. The pentecostal movement started out at the beginning of the last century. It emphasises the experience of the Holy Ghost. Examples are the "Gemeinde für Urchristentum" or the "Bund Freikirchlicher Pfingstgemeinden". Pentecostals think that after conversion there is a second experience called the "baptism of the holy spirit", which sometimes can be directly observed, for example, when a person is "speaking in tongues". Often pentecostals are convinced that to be a fully qualified Christian one has to have had not only the born-again experience, but also that of the baptism of the holy spirit. Emotionality is a very important aspect of pentecostal faith.

A possible fourth branch are the *adventist groups* (such as seventh day adventist or Jehovas Witnesses). Traditionally they emphasise the near imminence of the coming of Jesus Christ and the end of the world. However, many important adventist groups cannot be included in evangelicalism (e.g. Jehovas Witnesses or the Churches of God) since they have special theological views that are incompatible with the fundamentals of evangelical faith (Eggenberger, 1994).

Furthermore, it is important to note that there has also been a *charismatic movement* inside the state churches and evangelical groups (see f.e. Föllner, 1994). This movement, close to pentecostalism, emphasises emotionality and the experience of the Holy Ghost. In most instances, this movement has grown up inside the structures of already existing churches and has not led to the foundation of new religious groups.

The most important *point of conflict* on religious matters among evangelicals might well be the difference between pentecostalists/charismatics and other evangelicals on the question of the "baptism of the spirit" and other charismata. Another important point is the question of interpretation of the scriptures where strong biblicists fight moderate biblicists.

We find evangelicals mainly among the protestants and in the free churches; but we should not forget that there are important numbers of evangelicals in the reformed church too, which is in most parts of Switzerland still a state-church.

4. Evangelicalism as a milieu

Is it possible to describe evangelicalism as a milieu? Let's just take a quick look at the theoretical points that I have mentioned and see if they fit the "evangelical case".

Shared structural and cultural traits. I would argue that we do indeed find shared structural and cultural traits. For example, we can observe high religiosity, high religious experience, certain values, and shared morality.

High level of internal communication. We will see shortly that evangelicalism is characterised by a high level of internal communication. Evangelicals have evangelical parents, spouses, friends and children. When they share their experiences, it is very likely that they share them with another evangelical. When they talk about and judge homosexuality, it is very likely that they do so with another evangelical who most likely will have a similar opinion.

Boundaries. In my view the evangelical milieu has several boundaries. The most important boundary is to be seen in the difference between born again/not born again (bekehrt/nicht bekehrt). This difference can have varying names and formulations; the basic meaning, however, is always the same. With this difference it is possible to establish who belongs to the milieu and who does not. An individual who is born again in Christ is a "real Christian" or simply "a Christian". With conversion one can therefore draw boundaries, showing one's difference in comparison to other religions and other forms of Christianity. Conversion, seen as a boundary of the milieu, is compatible with a great variety of different individual experiences (e.g. long process, one dramatic moment, reconversion after a time of absence from the milieu, etc.) and implies a lot for the individual who claims to be born again and wants to sustain this role both for himself and for his community. This, of course is a strictly

sociological view. The born-again Christian will say that it's *not* about a role and *not* about himself or the community, but *about his relationship to Jesus Christ*. Whatever terminology you use, however, the fact remains that to be born again implies a lot. It implies a rich religious practice, a personal belief, the willingness to evangelise, a willingness to give away 10% of one's income, the willingness to be part of a group of Christians and to share one's faith with them. Besides, and in conjunction with this fundamental boundary, there exist a lot of *boundary signs*: born-again Christians have a special way of talking and of handling life ; some have a special way of being joyful. I have often heard that born-again Christians recognised each other without having been told that they belonged to the same milieu. Nancy Amerman coined the phrase : "Insiders sound like insiders". Think too of the fish which evangelicals used to put on their cars to show that they are a Christian. But there are also *negative signs*. You hear somebody swear, you see somebody smoke, you see somebody listening to non-Christian heavy metal music, you see somebody take drugs - it is likely he is *not* a born-again Christian.

Level of abstraction. When we say that evangelicalism is a milieu we assume a certain level of abstraction. On this level, only certain differences become visible and all the other differences, which, to the insider, are considerable, are for the moment neglected. Considering the evangelical milieu in Switzerland, this refers to 3-4% of the Swiss population at the most, which is rather small, and similar in size perhaps to milieus like the students or the techno-ravers.

Emergence of the milieu from individual action. The mechanisms that link individual action to the milieu, that I described above, can be found with no great difficulty. We see that evangelicals have a certain milieu cognition, that they view the world with the difference between born again/not born again. We notice milieu-focused actions, that is, actions by which individuals try to make their Christian identity more real for themselves and for others (there is, for example, the milieu goal of "growing in your faith"). We observe social control with very clear cut norms and expectations as to how a Christian should preferably behave. Evangelicals tell us that it is easier to relate to other evangelicals than to outsiders; so very often they do have most of their contacts inside their milieu. Finally, we observe that their milieu as their environment makes them believe with virtually no effort in things which outsiders would find quite hard to believe.

Internal Differentiation. Evangelicalism is internally differentiated. At various levels of abstraction we find different sub- and sub-sub-milieus. I have already spoken of the distinction between classical, fundamentalist and pentecostal evangelicals. But, of course, much finer distinctions would be possible. There also seems to be some centre-periphery differentiation. For example, in a lot of groups one can clearly see individuals who are at the periphery, who are not yet born-again or who have difficulty with their faith - and others who have the highest status in the group, who are very convinced of their faith.

Organisations which compete for influence in the milieu. There are a lot of organisations and producers competing for influence and for market segments in the evangelical milieu. We find the churches who compete for members, organisations like campus crusade, Christian writers, a Christian music industry, Christian hotels, Christian television. Since the milieu is not that big, there do not seem to be a great deal of providers, so the question is, for instance, not so much one of inter-Christian competition, but rather of either choosing the Christian channel - or another, worldly one.

5. Data and method

I will use survey data from two sources. Both surveys have serious limitations in respect to our questions - but together they draw a pretty convincing picture.

Survey 1999

The first data set stems from a study conducted in 1999. The principal leader of that study was Roland Campiche and the project was entitled "Religion et lien social : construction et régulation des mobilisations religieuses"³. I am grateful to Roland Campiche and his team for letting me work on some aspects of their study. This survey is representative of the population in Switzerland, both Swiss and foreign, in the age range from 16 to 75 years. The survey was conducted by CATI, that is, computer-aided telephone-interviews. Response-rate was at 54%. The N is 1636. Twenty-eight of these 1636 respondents (or 1.7%) are in free churches. There are methodists, baptists, crischona and so on. I will show that even though this number is very small, we can find very interesting differences between people in the big mainstream churches and those in the free churches. I will argue that the attitudes and the behaviour of respondents in the free churches give us a good idea of what the "evangelical milieu" is like⁴.

Survey 1991

The second survey stems from 1991 and was planned and organised by me (Stolz, 1993, 1999). The population were the readers of an evangelical magazine called "Christliches Zeugnis". This magazine which was produced by Campus Crusade Switzerland had at the time some 20,000 readers. The study used a random sample and was conducted by mail. Response rate was 64%. The N was 594. Among the respondents we have members of all the bigger evangelical denominations in the German-speaking part of Switzerland. Twenty-three per cent belonged only to the state-church, 42% belonged both to the state-church and a free church and 35% belonged only to a free church. Ten per cent of the respondents said they were not born-again. If, as I did above, one argues that conversion is the boundary of evangelicalism, this data set can be used to compare born-again and not born-again Christians. The results that can be drawn from this data set are representative only for the readers of the chosen magazine. However, taken together with the results of the first survey, they give us a very convincing picture of an "evangelical milieu".

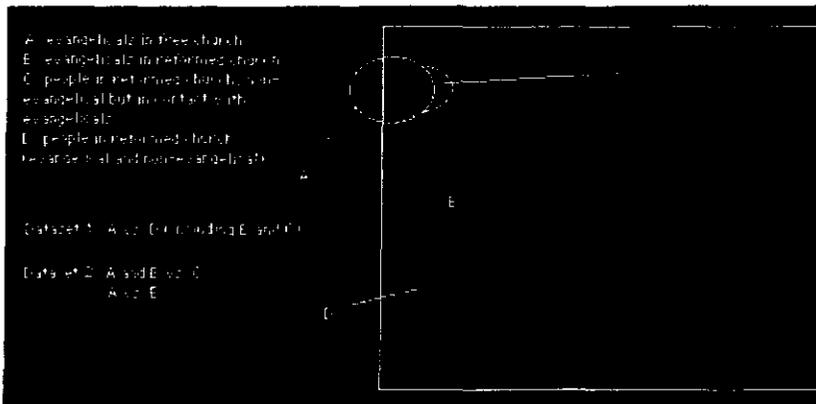
A comparison of the 1999 and 1991 surveys

In order to understand the results, we have to be clear about the different groups that are being compared in the two data sets. Graph 1 will help to clarify this.

³ This study is a follow-up of a study conducted in 1989 by Roland Campiche and Alfred Dubach. See Campiche/Dubach, 1992, Campiche, 1993.

⁴ Of course, as noted above, there are also evangelicals in the state church, but with these data we cannot differentiate evangelicals and non-evangelicals in the state-church. Nevertheless evangelicals in the free-churches give us a good idea also of what evangelicals in the state church are like. We can look at the similarities and differences between evangelicals in the state church and the free churches with our second data-set.

Graph 1 Description of the comparisons made in Dataset 1 and Dataset 2



Hypothetically, we have an evangelical milieu consisting of A and B (evangelicals who are either in the free churches (A) or in the reformed state-church (B)). Ideally we would be in possession of a data set in which we could compare the three groups A, B and "D without B". However, in the two data sets we have we can compare :

- Dataset 1 (1999) : A vs. D. and
- Dataset 2 : (1991) (A and B) vs. C // A vs. B

So, in Dataset 1 we compare a small number of respondents in the free churches (A) to a larger number of respondents in the reformed state church (D). The latter group (D) includes also some evangelicals, but this number can be assumed to be very small, so that it would not change the averages of the variables in group (D) in a significant way.

In Dataset 2 we can make two types of comparison. First, we can compare born-again Christians (= whom we define as evangelicals) (A and B) with not born-again Christians (= whom we define as non-evangelicals) (C). The latter group (C) consists of people in the reformed church, who receive the evangelical magazine but who are not born-again. Second, we can compare born-again Christians in the free churches (A) with born- again Christians in the reformed church (B).⁵

6. Empirical Evidence

Let's take a look at the data to see how clear the evidence is. I will discuss four of the main issues mentioned previously, namely, shared structural and cultural traits, boundaries, level of internal communication and internal differentiation. Under each of these headings I will present some tables from the two surveys.

⁵ We will see that, empirically, many respondents are both in a free church and members of the reformed state church. This is not a problem though, since we can compare the three groups: a. only in free church, b. in free and state church, c. only in state church.

6.1 Shared cultural traits

Survey 1999

The following tables are from the 1999 survey. Here we can compare people in the free churches with people in the reformed church and those who have no religious affiliation. Religiosity and the feeling that religion is important can certainly be interpreted as a "cultural trait" in Schulze's sense, so let's have a look at *Table 1*. We see that while 83.3% of the members of the free churches consider religion to be very important, only 13.1% of reformed church members seem to think so. People with no religious affiliation think in this way in 6.6% of the cases.

When interpreting these data, we have to bear in mind that there are only 24 individuals in our category "free churches". Nevertheless, I think this group is representative of what a bigger group of evangelicals would statistically look like. Although the number (24) is small, the differences between this group and the other groups are so big that they're always highly significant.⁶

Table 1 Importance of religion

	free churches	reformed	none
1 very important	83.3%	13.1%	6.6%
2	12.5%	10.1%	4.6%
3	4.2%	14.9%	6.0%
4	0.0%	22.6%	11.9%
5	0.0%	14.7%	16.6%
6	0.0%	13.7%	18.5%
7 unimportant	0.0%	10.8%	35.8%

N 24 611 151

So people in free churches on average think that religion is very important. But what exactly do they believe in? *Table 2* shows that an orthodox statement such as "God exists, he has shown himself in Jesus Christ" gets an astonishing approval rate of 100% in this group, something we rarely see in sociology. In comparison, in the reformed group we only find 32.1% who agree strongly with this statement and in the "no-affiliation" group only 17.2%.

⁶ The reported differences are significant with p < .05 where not otherwise noted.

Table 2 "God exists, he has shown himself in Jesus Christ"

	free churches	reformed	none
agree strongly	100.0%	32.1%	17.2%
agree moderately	0.0%	30.4%	11.3%
so-so	0.0%	24.8%	24.5%
disagree moderately	0.0%	8.2%	22.5%
disagree strongly	0.0%	4.4%	24.5%
	24	608	151

Since we are interested not only in religiosity but generally in *shared values*, we shall have a look at differences concerning attitudes to gender roles.

Do individuals in the free churches have other values concerning gender roles than individuals in the state church? *Table 3* gives us some hints. Take the item "For everybody concerned, it is much better if the husband works full time while the wife stays at home to do the housework and to look after the children." Here 20.8% of members of the free churches agree, while only 16.7% of reformed church members agree. This would mean that free church members are a little more conservative concerning gender-role values. If we look at the item "Recognition at work is at least as important for a woman as having children", however, differences are not significant.

Table 3 Values and beliefs of respondents (% agreeing totally)

	free churches	reformed
It is best for everybody concerned if the man works full time while the woman does the housework and looks for the children	20.8%	16.7% ⁷
Recognition at work is at least as important for a woman as having children	25.0%	29.8% ⁸
N	23	592

Survey 1991

Let's change to the data set from 1991 where we can compare people who claim to be born again (= evangelicals) and others who don't (= non evangelicals). Here again we find substantial differences between the two groups in regard to religiosity and values (*Table 4*). More than 90% of born-again respondents agree with the first four items. Practically all born-again respondents (98.7%) agree totally with the view that Jesus Christ suffered for their sins, that they have a personal relationship with Jesus (94.7%), that his resurrection is an objective fact (93.2%) and that prayers can lead to miracles even today (94.5%). In comparison,

⁷ Significant with p 74..

⁸ This difference n.s.

individuals who are not born again believe these statements only to a significantly lower degree (33.9% - 57.9%). Big differences are also to be found in regard to sexual morality and gender roles. While 79.4% of born-again agree totally with the view that "sexual relationships are allowed only in a marriage", only 15.5% of not born-again subscribe to this view. Furthermore, while 31.6% of born-again agree totally with the idea that men should basically work outside the house while women should do the housework, only 18.6% of not born-again think in this way.⁹ Apparently, evangelicals differ from general society more on sexual morality than on standard emancipatory values.

Table 4 Values and beliefs of respondents (% agreeing totally)

	born again	not born again
Jesus Christ suffered for my sins	98.7%	57.9%
I have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. I can speak to him like speaking to a fellow man.	94.7%	33.9%
The resurrection of Jesus Christ is an objective fact.	93.2%	55.8%
The grave was empty.		
Prayers can help with very practical problems, e.g. when looking for an apartment	94.5%	39.0
Sexual relationships are allowed only in a marriage.	79.4%	15.5%
It is best for everybody concerned if the man works full time while the woman does the housework and looks for the children.	31.6%	18.6%
N	516	59

In summary, both surveys give us very strong evidence that there are shared cultural traits (religious attitudes and moral values) in the evangelical milieu which differ sharply from standards outside the milieu.

6.2 Shared structural traits

Survey 1999

Gerhard Schulze shows that milieus not only show specific *cultural values*, but that they are built on certain *structural foundations*. He says that milieus interpret culturally the structure that they are built on. His five milieus are built essentially on such structural characteristics as age and education. The social space that is formed by age and education is thus "reinterpreted" by a vast array of cultural ideas, values, aesthetics and so on.

When we look for such structural foundations in the evangelical milieu, at first glance, we do not find anything. Evangelicals do not seem to have a different age, income, sex or education structure than mainline protestants. Is this, then, a *solely cultural milieu*?

It is not. But the sociodemographic or structural foundations, lie not in the dimensions of age, education, or income, but in the *membership of strongly integrated groups*. It is these groups

⁹ The wording of this last question is the same as in dataset 1999.

that the incredibly different beliefs, values and attitudes are rooted in. This can readily be seen by looking at the respondents' subjective feeling of being a member of their group. *Table 5* shows that, although *all* respondents are *officially* members of their denomination, 91.7% of free church members *subjectively* feel themselves to be members, while only 43.1% of reformed members do so. While 8.7% of free church members have thought about leaving their church, 33.8% of reformed church members have done so. Furthermore, 78.3% of free church-members think that their group takes a stance for values that are important for them personally, which means they feel that their church stands up for what they think is right. Among the reformed church members, only 21.2% think this.

So almost all free church members subjectively feel themselves to be members of a group that they would rather not leave and which fights for their values; the majority of state church members on the other hand does not feel subjectively that they are a member of their group. Why? How do we account for these differences? One very simple - though certainly not the whole - answer is: because free church members are *continuously in contact* with their group while state church members aren't. Look at service attendance (*Table 5*). While 82.2% of free church members go to church at least once a week, only 5.4% of reformed church members do so.

Table 5 Values and beliefs of respondents (% agreeing totally)

	free churches	reformed
Feeling as a member		
Do you feel you are a member of a religious group or denomination ?	91.7%	43.1%
Leaving the church		
Have you thought about leaving your religious community or church ?	8.7%	33.8%
Value commitment		
My church or denomination takes a stance for values that are important to me personally.	78.3%	21.2%
Service attendance		
once a week	82.2%	5.4%
at least once a month	14.3%	12.4%
seldom or never	3.6%	82.2%
N	24	603

Survey 1991

The same differences concerning social structure emerge in the 1991 survey. Here, too, we find that the ordinary structural variables like age, education, income etc. cannot account for any differences. And again, we see that the big value differences between born-again and not born-again Christians is essentially rooted in the structure of firmly established groups. I present just service attendance (*Table 6*) to back this claim.

Table 6 Service attendance

	born again	not born again
once a week	76.9%	23.0%
at least once a month	18.2%	31.1%
seldom or never	4.9%	45.9%
N	528	61

6.3 Boundaries

Gerhard Schulze tells us that milieus have boundaries. Do we find boundaries empirically in the evangelical milieu?

Survey 1999

In Table 7 we see that free church members express a clear preference for their faith: 95.4% either prefer their faith to others or think that only their faith is the true one. Compare this to reformed church members where only 35% of respondents either prefer their faith or think it is the only true faith.

Table 7 "Evaluation of one's own group and other groups"

	free churches	reformed
all faiths are equally valuable	4.5%	34.6%
all faiths are equally valuable, but I'm used to mine	0.0%	30.4%
all faiths should be respected, but I prefer mine	54.5%	31.8%
all faiths should be respected, but only mine is true	40.9%	3.2%
N	22	601

The same phenomenon can be studied in Table 8. Here respondents were asked if they felt close to different non-Christian religions. Not surprisingly, in the group of free church members there are several respondents who feel close to Judaism (45.8%)¹⁰, while only one person close to Buddhism and no-one who feels close to Hinduism, Islam and New Age. In the reformed church group, however, we find much higher percentages of respondents who feel close to other religions, e.g.: Buddhism (26.2%), Hinduism (12.3%), Judaism (15.5%), Islam (4.3%) and New Age (4.1%). By the way, one should not think that small percentages can be neglected. Gerhard Schulze makes a very important point by saying that sometimes a milieu is also characterised by things that only a few people do, but that are known to be *possible actions*. I will give you an example: We all know that playing the alphorn is a very Swiss thing to do and not an English thing. We all agree on that. But if you look at the numbers, you will find that most people, perhaps 99% of the population of both Switzerland and England, do not play the alphorn. What's important is that in one country 1% play, while in the other country there is *no alphorn playing at all*. So I would suggest that the fact that we find *nobody* who feels close to Hinduism, Islam or New Age in the free churches is very

¹⁰ This of course is to be explained by the close historical connection between Christianity and Judaism

important. What we have seen so far is the pertinence of evangelical boundaries in respect to other religious groups.

Table 8 Do you feel close to the following religions ?

	free churches	reformed	none
Buddhism	4.2%	26.2%	39.1%
Hinduism	0.0%	12.3%	13.2%
Judaism	45.8%	15.5%	7.9%
Islam	0.0%	4.3%	4.6%
New Age	0.0%	4.1%	5.3%
N	24	600	150

Now we take a look at the evangelical boundaries with respect to *content* of beliefs. In *Table 9* we see that while reformed church members are open to many beliefs or are not so sure what to think, free church members are very sure that most beliefs different from theirs are not true. For example 87.5% of free church members disagree (strongly or moderately) with the belief that there is reincarnation of the soul in another life, while only 42.7% of reformed disagree strongly or moderately.

Likewise, more than 50% of reformed church members think that possibly what we call "God" might just be another word for "everything valuable in a human being". This is a very secularised version of Christianity indeed. In the free church group, however, only 8.4% agree with this statement strongly or moderately.

Table 9

		free churches	reformed
There is such a thing as reincarnation of the soul in another life	agree strongly	12.5%	12.5%
	agree moderately	0.0%	19.8%
	so-so	0.0%	25.0%
	disagree moderately	12.5%	21.1%
What people call "God" is just another word for everything valuable in a human being	disagree strongly	75.0%	21.6%
	agree strongly	4.2%	19.1%
	agree moderately	4.2%	31.6%
	so-so	4.2%	18.3%
	disagree moderately	8.3%	18.1%
	disagree strongly	79.2%	12.9%
	N	24	607

Survey 1991

Roughly the same very strong boundaries are to be found in the 1991 data (*Table 10*). Here 94.9% of born-again Christians believe that "the way to God is through Jesus Christ" and that "there is no other way", while only 31.0% of not born-again Christians believe this to be true. Similarly, 52.2% of born-again Christians disagree totally with the statement that one can be a real Christian without being born again, while 5.6% of not born-again Christians think in this way. It is clear that that born-again Christians see conversion and a personal relationship with Jesus Christ as a vitally important condition for being a "real Christian". This is how conversion can function as a "boundary", signifying both a "rite de passage" from a temporal viewpoint and a "state of the individual" from a social viewpoint that makes comparisons between different persons.

The third item in *Table 10* shows the strong boundary between evangelical Christians and people with non-Christian beliefs. We see that born-again Christians have much stronger boundaries than not born-again Christians. While 73.9% of born-again Christians disagree strongly with the idea that apart from Jesus there might be others who brought important religious truths to humanity, e.g. Buddha, only 8.2% of not born-again Christians disagree totally with this view.

Table 10 Boundaries

	born again	not born again
The way to God is through Jesus Christ. There is no other way (agreeing totally)	94.9%	31.0%
There are people who are not born again but who nevertheless are real Christians. (disagreeing totally)	52.2%	5.6%
Apart from Jesus there are others who brought important religious truths to humanity, e.g. Buddha. (disagreeing totally)	73.9%	8.2%
N	516	59

Summarising we can say that evangelicals have built strong ideological boundaries around themselves. While we have to recognise that most of them also feel humble in a very Christian way, nevertheless, there is a strong feeling of being an elite. Many think that Christians who are not born again are lacking something very important; they believe that other religions are to be respected, but are not the true religion; and they are convinced that a lot of the new age ideas are just plainly sent by the devil.

6.4 The high level of internal communication

Survey 1999

According to Schulze, milieus are characterised by a high level of internal communication. Do we find this in the data? The 1999 data do give us some very suggestive hints. Look at *Table 11*. Here we see that respondents in free churches talk about religious matters a lot more often than reformed Christians: Some 75.0% talk about religious matters with their parents (reformed: 36.7%); 72.2% with their children (reformed: 59.9%); 83.3% with their friends (reformed: 43.7%); 52.4% with their colleagues at work (reformed: 20.4%). One

might think that these differences stem from the fact that members of free churches try to evangelise. This might be true. But another hypothesis is that part of these impressive differences is due to the fact that people in free churches just *live in a very strong milieu, their parents, children, friends and partly colleagues at work are other free church members, and so they naturally talk more often about religious matters with all these people.*

Table 11 Conversations about religious matters (sometimes or often)

	free churches	reformed	none
with :			
parents	75.0%	36.7%	23.4%
children	72.2%	59.9%	35.2%
friends	83.3%	43.7%	43.2%
colleagues at work	52.4%	20.4%	25.0%

This view is corroborated if we look at service attendance of respondents and their spouses or partners (*Table 12*). Almost all free church members go to church at least once a week. If they have a partner, do they go on their own? No, their spouse or partner goes with them. On the other hand, most reformed Christians seldom or never go to church - and their partners evidently don't either. So we see from these data that free church members have partners who show a religious practice just as strong as their own. Meaning, of course, that the partners belong to the same evangelical milieu.

Table 12 Service attendance

	free churches	free churches	reformed church	reformed church
	respondents	partners	respondents	partners
Service attendance				
once a week	93.7%	93.7%	6.3%	6.9%
at least once a month	6.3%	6.3%	13.2%	15.5%
seldom or never	0.0%	0.0%	80.5%	77.6%
N	16	16	362	362

Survey 1991

If we turn to the data from 1991, we see again that born-again Christians live surrounded by close relatives and friends who are also born again (*Table 13*). Thus 87% of the spouses of born-again Christians are also born again; 89.9% of born-again Christians say that at least two of their three best friends are born-again Christians themselves. And 47.2% of born-again Christians say that at least one of their parents is also born again.

Table 13 Percentage of born-again spouses, best friends and parents of born-again respondents

Is your spouse born again ?		yes	no	don't know	N
		87.0%	8.2%	4.8%	292
How many of your three best friends are born again?	three	two	one	none	N
	61.4%	28.5%	7.9%	2.1%	516
Are your parents born again?		both	one	none	N
		32.3%	14.9%	52.7%	529

In the 1991 survey we can also see that born-again respondents have partners who, on average, go to church almost as often as themselves (*Table 14*), corroborating the assumption that both respondents and their partners find themselves in the same religious "milieu".

Table 14 Service attendance

	born-again respondents	partners of born again	not born-again respondents	partners of not born again
Service attendance				
once a week	76.2%	67.1%	26.3%	23.7%
at least once a month	17.3%	21.1%	28.9%	26.4%
seldom or never	6.5%	11.8%	44.7%	31.6%
N	307	307	38	38

With this evidence we can clearly make a case for the very strong internal communication in the evangelical milieu.

6.5 Internal differentiation within the milieu

Let's have a very quick look at some internal differentiation within the evangelical milieu. Here we have to turn to our 1991 data set. In *Table 15* we can see two things. For one, some born-again Christians are to be found only in the state church (22.8%), others in free churches (35.2%) and many belong both to the state church and to a free church (42.0%). This is interesting in so far as one often tends to forget evangelicals in the state church. State-church membership varies with the kind of free church respondents are in, e.g. members of the "Evangelische Gesellschaft" are very often also members of the state church (86.4%), while members of the "Evangelische Täufergemeinde" are also members of the state church only in 33.3% of the cases.

Table 15 Evangelicals in the free and the state churches

		only state church	state church and free church	only free church	N
reformed	100.0%				101
roman-catholic	100.0%				17
classical					
	Chrischona		56.2%	43.8%	73
	FEG		52.1%	47.9%	71
	methodist		30.4%	69.6%	34
	Evang. Gesellsch.		86.4%	13.6%	22
	VfM		80.0%	20.0%	15
pentecostalist					
	pentecostalist		30.4%	69.6%	69
	GfU		83.3%	16.7%	18
fundamentalist					
	Ev. Täufergemeinde		33.3%	66.7%	18
other			67.1%	32.9%	79
Total %		22.8%	42.0%	35.2%	517
N		118	217	182	517

Do we find differences between state church and free church evangelicals? Yes, free church evangelicals seem to be, on average, a bit stronger on religious beliefs, attitudes and practice than state church evangelicals (Stolz, 1999).

In *Table 16* we can see one of the important divisions in the evangelical milieu: the "baptism of the holy spirit", meaning basically a "second experience" after conversion. This "baptism of the holy spirit" is part of the teaching in the Heiligungsbewegung, the charismatics and the pentecostalists, although some of the members of classical evangelicalism and fundamentalists have had this experience. However - and not surprisingly - we find it mainly in the pentecostalist free churches.

Table 16 Baptism of the holy spirit in different confessions/denominations

	no	yes	N	
reformed	89.7%	10.3%	107	
Roman-Catholic	94.4%	5.6%	18	
classical				
		no	yes	N
	Chrischona	95.9%	4.1%	73
	FEG	88.7%	11.3%	71
	methodist	88.2%	11.8%	34
	Evang. Gesellsch.	86.4%	13.6%	22
	VfM	94.4%	5.6%	15
pentecostalist				
	pentecostalist	23.2%	76.8%	69
	GfU	38.9%	61.1%	18
fundamentalist				
	ev. Täufergemeinde	94.4%	5.6%	18
other		84.5%	15.5%	84
N		420	109	539

7. Conclusion

I would like to summarise what we have seen so far and make a few concluding remarks. I have made the case for using the concept of milieu to describe evangelicalism. Milieus are characterised by shared structural and cultural traits, by boundaries and a high level of internal communication. With milieu theory it is possible explain how such a milieu can come into existence and how it sustains itself. The explanation uses mechanisms which link the milieu system to the intentional actions of individuals. With two data –sets, I have shown that there is considerable evidence of such an evangelical milieu, for we find the three defining traits. I have not, however, shown that the propositions of milieu theory actually apply.¹¹ Now, what have we gained by describing evangelicalism as a milieu? I would like to make three points

First, I think that we have a fairly good *description* of the phenomena that interest us. At least in a short-term analysis, the concept is better than other concepts, such as group, latent group or movement.

Second, the milieu concept and milieu theory are general concepts. They not only apply to evangelicalism, in fact, they stem from other areas of sociology. This means that the description of evangelicalism as one of many milieus opens up the possibility of *comparison*. We can compare the evangelical milieu with the harmony milieu described by Schulze, with the milieu of the ravers or the milieu of new age adepts. This could lead to fruitful insights

¹¹ I hope to be able to show this in future publications.

and new questions. We might, for example, ask: Is there an analogue to the ethnocentric self-descriptions in the Schulze's milieus in the evangelical milieu? We would surely find one. Or what are the everyday aesthetics of the evangelical milieu? We could compare internal differentiation in the evangelical milieu with differentiation in other milieus.

Third, I think the underlying milieu theory lends itself not just to description, but also to *explanations* of different kinds. Since the milieu theory advocated here assumes rational actors, we can construct milieu explanations in rational action fashion. This means we can use the milieu as an explanatory concept, if we can specify just how the milieu membership is able to:

- give the actor certain resources or prevent him from having them
- give the actor certain knowledge or prevent him from having it
- set certain opportunity structures.

Thus, given that an individual is a milieu member and given the understanding of the way the milieu influences the resources, the knowledge and the values of the individual, we can make predictions about the way such an individual will act.

Not all of these claims have been seriously addressed in this paper. But perhaps I have been able to show that milieu theory is a promising direction for future research.

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