



An analysis on the postmodern student world

Faithfulness and Creativity

In Deuteronomy, Moses stands before the people of Israel. Behind us is the Exodus from Egypt, the giving of the Torah, the failures of the people and 40 years in the desert. Before Moses, however, are not the people who have experienced these events, but a new generation that needs to creatively embody faithfulness to the Torah (the law or guidance) in a new age. Moses himself models guidelines for this time and the book's Greek name Deutronomium, the second law, tells us about this purpose. For in Deutronomium a multitude of the laws we have already encountered in Exodus, Leviticus and Numbers are repeated. However, there are small adaptations that are better suited for a settled community than the nomadic life that characterized the desert migration. In this way, a basic pattern is laid for how each generation of God's people needs a renewal of the Torah. Credo needs a creative imagination that, with sensitivity for today's society and a faithfulness to God's guidance through his Word, centered in the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ, that proclaims, shapes and is transformed by the gospel. The Good News in a new time.

In this analysis, an inductive approach will first form the basis for a sketch of the basic attitudes that non-Christian University students have towards the Christian faith. Then, through a deductive approach, based on the reports *Här för att stanna* (Here to stay) (2020 BibelIn idag), *Unga troende i samhället* (Young Believers in Society) (2020 SKR), and *Kristen tro på glid* (A gliding Christian faith) (2022 ALT) will highlight the needs of Christian students. Finally, there is a response to how Credo at this time can shape the gospel and fulfill his vision to make "**Jesus Christ known, believed, obeyed, and loved,**" as well as his purpose to "**through the gospel, proclaimed to revival, repentance, and deepen spiritual life among student youth, advance the kingdom of God both at home and in other lands.**" Focusing on the method:

- start, support and coordinate local **school and student groups**
- engage people in **school and student evangelism**
- organizing **meetings** for high- school and university students
- promote and develop contacts with the **worldwide evangelical student movement**

A) An inductive approach – a sketch of young non-Christians' attitudes towards the Christian faith

In recent years, a number of important reports have been published on young Christians' relationship to their faith. The reports are important, but one criticism that is raised against them is that they often fail to take into account the attitudes of those who have left the Christian faith or even more so those who do not have a Christian faith (*Kristen tro på glid* (A gliding Christian faith) however, makes an effort to understand those who have left the Christian faith). Therefore, there are plenty of reports from the Christian side that help us understand Christian youth and young adults' approaches to the Christian faith, but fewer that help us understand specifically non-Christian young people and young adults' approaches to the Christian faith. Credo therefore believes that it is valuable to take advantage of the meetings with non-Christians that the network has through its related organizations' activities. This will be done through interviews and surveys with the CREDO People in student and school, i.e. students, missionaries and school employees who are connected to Credo and passionate about the vision of making Jesus Christ believed, obeyed, known and loved.

1) The interview method

a) Questions

Through 9 interviews of about 30-60 minutes and a survey, Credo Student's team has investigated

1. How would you describe the needs of non-Christian students?
2. How would you describe some examples of worldviews that occur among participants in your business?
3. How would you describe what attracts participants in your ministry to the Christian faith?
4. How would you describe what discourages or challenges participants in your ministry from the Christian faith?
5. How would you describe participants in your ministry's attitude to conversation and existential and spiritual questions?

b) Activities

Credo Student's team has contacted people based on the following activities

1. StudentAlpha[1] in Örebro, Gothenburg, Stockholm and Lund
2. Use of Perspective Cards at Örebro University
3. Kefas (share initiative)
4. Discovery lectures
5. Det goda Samtalet (The good conversation)
6. Grubbel Café (Pondering café)
7. Welcome fairs
8. Örebro University Church's meetings with students

c) Basis for the result

The results are based on nine interviews and one survey. The people who have participated are 6 students, a team of student leaders for StudentAlpha, an employee at Credo School and a missionary from Agape Sweden, finally conversations with student pastors from the university church Örebro have also been taken into account. The informants come primarily from Region East (Örebro, Stockholm & Norrköping), but there are also voices from Gothenburg, Lund and Umeå.

The interviewees have met an estimated 735 schoolchildren and students[1] for occasional or continuous conversations about existential or spiritual issues primarily during the past two years (Spring 2021–Spring 2023). This is a large number of people, but a small percentage of the total number of students in Sweden. Based on the number of students and the data from the primary region east, the result has more of a sample character than a comprehensive result, like SKR:s Unga troende i samhället, but on a smaller scale.

As one of the interviewees comments, the result is subjectively influenced by those we interviewed. It is thus the interpretation that our informants make that forms the basis for the results and not "pure" data from the estimated 735 students. This entails a risk that our informants read conclusions into the data, but at the same time our analysis is colored by many voices on the ground and we thus become a reflective movement with a listened central organization.

2) Interview results

Below are general features of the interview results with some specific examples. The headings are based on the five questions we asked during the talks.

a) Student needs

Our informants identify the following needs of non-Christian students (and school youth):

a) Community

Five informants highlight community as a central need. An informant comment here that students long for a community that goes deeper. And another tells the following anecdote.

Someone from Agape was out and doing. Like, evangelization conversation. And they said like they're talking about, like, what different people in the group longed for. And it was four women that the agape person was talking to and every single one of them picks that they wanted community. But the thing that was interesting, was like the four of them were sitting together. And the Agape person wanted to kind of point out it's like you guys all see this like this is something that you guys are all kind of, you know like you're all you want this. But it was like that's it's like. I don't really know. What? yes, it was. It was interesting. It was like, that's something that I see every day. (Informant, emphasis added)

The quote highlights how several people in a group carry a common longing for a community, but at the same time are (from the informant's perspective) incapable of seeing it in one another. This can illustrate that there is both a longing for deeper community, but in some cases also a lack of tools to design such a community.

b) Opportunities to process one's worldview

The students that our informants have met have a need to process their worldview is in a way is given as all current forums devote themselves to this. However, the high frequency of positive attitudes towards these contexts indicates that it is a general need rather than the desire of individuals. One informant describes the positive response to advertising for the Alpha course. They also get encouraged to hear that the people at the Alpha course appreciate the open and inclusive atmosphere.

c) Meaning

An informant comments

Many people want something more than everyday life that rolls on. The need for that purpose may rarely be sought in religion or Christian contexts, but instead in secular contexts.

And also says: "There are perhaps many who think that you are not looking for anything. The further you get from Christian history, you end up looking even more. (informant)" Another

thinks they see a general emptiness and disorientation in students where there is no guidance on right and wrong. Two people further highlight that many want to live in the moment and that a flip side of that may be that there is a lack of weight in one's decisions. Finally, an informant comments that she can sense a lack of hope. Another informant believes that many lack tools to deal with the evil that exists in the world, both in the personal story and on a larger level in society.

d) Mental illness

Both informants and statistics that we have received from the University Church in Örebro show the challenge of mental illness. The following can be stated:

- In 2018, every second student (nationally) is reported to suffer from mental illness (FHM & Ungdomsbarrometern)
- In 2019, 49% of today's young people (16–29 years) have symptoms (MUCF)
- 2020: more than half of the students at Örebro University experience stress, anxiety, worry, loneliness and depression. (Survey from Örebro Student Union about the effects of Covid-19)
- In 2020, Örebro University Church has 366 pastoral counselling sessions and in 2022 371. In a way, this is a figure that is difficult to interpret for outsiders, but the primary function of the university church (from the university's perspective) is student health and their call times and retreats are generally sought after. The conversations are confidential and therefore cannot be analyzed, but it shows both a need to process one's life situation and deal with various forms of mental strain.

b) Students worldview

The following worldviews are highlighted by the informants

a) Atheism/Naturalism

Atheists or naturalists are described by an informant as:

Generally skeptical. This is most evident there. They are skeptical. Skepticism makes you try to find a natural explanation. "You received answers to prayer? It's just a coincidence/coincidence/placebo." They want to know things, but they are also skeptical.

These students may express that: "I believe in science" and may even feel a certain contempt for belief in something that, according to them, cannot be proven. In their interaction with our informants, these students lean more towards debate/discussion than dialogue. However, it is clear that this is not the dominant position of the students that our informants meet.

b) Agnostic

According to several of our informants, this group is characterized by the fact that they like to discuss. You appreciate the open conversation, where you do not have to come up with ready-made answers. However, one informant comments that this group is happy to stay in the conversation and find it more difficult to arrive at conclusions.

Underlying this category is a relativistic stance of "my truth is my truth" that does not have to be true for another person. This is something that virtually all of our informants mention and that creates openness for good dialogue while Christian beliefs become difficult to digest for students. Characteristic of this attitude is the inner authority pointed to by two informants. Here, then, it is a matter of arriving at one's own decision or truth based on one's own emotional and intellectual processes. This is in contrast to a reliance on external authorities as guiding or authoritative for these processes.

c) People from other religions, primarily Islam.

Several of our informants meet people from other religions. It is possible that contexts with a multicultural character and those with outreach are better at creating interaction with this group. It could be said that there are two or three subcategories in this group. Those who have distanced themselves from their parents' faith, those who retain their faith as primarily a cultural identity marker and finally those who have a more classical religious belief.

Informants point out that this group is generally easy to create conversations with and that discussions about karma, Jesus' divinity or the reliability of the Bible here can become lively discussions with respect. At the same time, a sting may occur in the conversations that might have been perceived as offensive to a more agnostic group. Those who have distanced themselves from their parents' faith may feel that the religion worked in their home country, but that it does not work in Sweden.

d) Other characteristics and groups

Informants also highlight that they meet Christians with varying degrees of understanding and security in a Christian faith. One informant also highlights that self-realization "if I achieve x, I will be happy" is a strong characteristic.

c) What attracts students to the Christian faith?

The following attractive features of the Christian faith are highlighted by the informants

a) Community

Several informants point out that what attracts non-Christian students to participate in Christian activities on campus is often the community dimension. This can encourage you to participate in a Christmas party, for example. Deeper, this is linked to the identified need for community. One informant points out that many students perceive Christian fellowship as something beautiful. A community that can also be characterized by honest conversations is perceived by several informants as something desirable. A context to be seen, known and loved in.

b) Meaning

An informant usually says in evangelistic conversations "when I wake up in the morning, I know exactly why I'm alive." This started as a way to counter the general attitude that life is meaningless and that you just have to try to be happy. The words had to sink in in several conversations and the statement was something that students afterwards commented on by saying that it was something they longed for or were even jealous of.

Furthermore, the need for meaning can be described as the longing to be part of something bigger. Something that two other informants describe as the opportunity to be part of a counter- or contrasting culture. This culture can also be characterized by a faith that provides clarity in life's questions and thus security according to another informant's reflection.

c) Christian ethics

According to several of our informants, Christian ethics are perceived as good on a general level. There may be some specific objections, but in general it is perceived as desirable. How Christian ethics arose is another question, and here several students can seek natural explanatory models rather than supernatural ones. This is, of course, linked to an apologetic argument for/against the existence of God based on man's moral ability.

d) Christian faith historical significance for Sweden

Two informants highlight that Christian faith can be perceived as relevant for students based on the fact that Sweden is a so-called "Christian country" whose history and legal framework have largely been characterized by Christian faith.

e) Personal experiences of divine presence/intervention

The personal stories are highlighted by several students as both disarming and attractive in conversations about Christian faith. It can partly make you meet as people and not just as representatives of different worldviews. At the same time, one informant believes that the stories can create a longing to experience similar experiences yourself.

d) What discourages students from the Christian faith?

The following deterrents of the Christian faith are highlighted by the informants:

a) A potential dominant external authority

Several informants point out how the Christian faith can be perceived as dominant and that God, the Bible or the church can become an oppressive external authority. This can be expressed by an overly narrow worldview that makes critical thinking or openness to others difficult. Furthermore, the Christian faith is perceived as narrower than, for example, new age, which is described as more open to inner authority.

b) The exclusive truth claims of the Christian faith.

Linked to external authority is the Christian faith's conviction of objective truth and that the Christian community carries this truth. The criticism of this can be expressed by other religious being equally sure of "their truth" or that a defensive attitude among students arises when definitive claims are made in dialogue with non-Christians.

A partly related issue is the view of hell, which is perceived as challenging by many. That Christian faith is exclusively what leads to the right/good afterlife can be perceived as difficult and some other religious students may relativistically express that "God has put us in different religions."

c) The division of the Church

The division of the church was highlighted by an informant as an obstacle to people approaching the Christian faith and as an argument against the truth of the Christian faith: "There are so many Christian views, how do you know which one is true."

d) Negative experiences

People who have grown up in a church environment may experience the Christian community as legalistic and several other informants highlight that there are negative experiences of Christian faith. Here, an informant highlights how experiences or statements from Christians may have caused harm to people and that it is important to calmly ask questions that provide the opportunity for reinterpretation and processing.

e) Stereotypes

In parallel, there may be pure prejudice or loosely grounded opinions such as "my father is a priest and therefore I know that Christians do not believe in science." The relationship to science is something that is raised by several here and to challenge stereotypes about scientific views or a narrow Christian culture through questions, claims and sometimes even through style or expression is highlighted as essential.

f) Relationship to LGBTQ+ issues

Four informants highlight that the relationship to LGBTQ+ issues can complicate dialogue with non-Christian students. At the same time, an informant emphasizes that she has not faced this. Examples of this are that students may want answers about how to navigate LGBTQ+ questions and people's right to marry in church before they are willing to listen to anything else that person has to say. However, two informants highlight that when they calmly, humbly, logically and understandably explained how they landed in their stance, they are still treated respectfully. This means that LGBTQ+ people in conversations with informants have addressed the issue and then still been able to continue a meaningful dialogue. Being able to explain and sometimes respectfully explain why you landed in your opinion seems like a sometimes-necessary ability to enable meaningful dialogue on other issues as well. However, one informant highlights that this occurs, but to a lesser extent than he expected.

e) What attitude do students have towards conversations about existential issues and spirituality?

All informants highlight that there is a very open attitude towards conversations about existential issues and spirituality. There is even a great need, something that is made visible by former student pastor Lasse Johansson, which shows that the university church's counseling times are constantly booked. In many cases, students can be visibly grateful for the opportunity to be seen and listened to as they reflect. For example, they might say, "I think this is so important, but I don't have a place to talk about it." Or "I've never thought much about these issues, but now that I do, I absolutely understand why it's important." One informant further highlights that many secular students haven't processed enough when it comes to existential issues and only have vaguer perceptions that, according to another informant, are perceived as default, given rather than self-chosen.

However, one informant highlights that existential conversations can give rise to or be avoided as it can be linked to anxiety or feelings of stress. Several also highlight that, specifically in relation to ethnic Swedes, a certain security in the conversation may be required for a good dialogue on existential, and even more so spiritual, issues to be possible

f) Summary

Our informants draw a picture of high schoolers and university students characterized by an openness, longing and sometimes some inexperience for conversations about life's larger issues. There are statistics that show a large proportion of stress and mental illness. Worldviews vary, but a common tendency is relativism, which largely emphasizes the inner over the external authority. However, this does not apply to science, which is considered by some to make a Christian faith impossible. The relativistic attitude also influences other religious students, but there are also students who have a belief in a more objective truth and where a climate of conversation can arise that is more clearly characterized by discussion. The relativistic stance opens up for good dialogue and interesting conversations, but at the same time makes the Christian faith's exclusive claim and emphasis on an absolute external authority difficult to digest. Collectively, our informants have a fundamental contribution to a larger school/university environment to enable existential and spiritual conversations where conversation itself can be an expression of an act of love. Combining this good dialogue with an ability to still highlight the possibility of an objective truth seems important.

B) A DEDUCTIVE APPROACH – A SKETCH OF YOUNG CHRISTIANS' FAITH

Här för att stanna (Here to stay) (2020), *Unga troende i samhället* (Young Believers in Society) (2020 SKR), (2020) and *Kristen tro på glid* (A gliding Christian faith) (2022) have in recent years drawn attention to features of primarily the faith of Christian young people and young adults. Especially *Här för att stanna* (Here to stay) has also taken inspiration from the Norwegian Erling Birkedal, who among other things is behind the theory of the need for social, emotional and cognitive building blocks for a stable faith. The following features are visible in the reports:

a) Relative vulnerability as a young Christian

In *Unga troende i samhället* (Young Believers in Society), SKR, based on 393 answered surveys, noted that "every other believing youth feels violated because of the Swedish society's problematic relationship with religion (p.2)" Furthermore, they show that one in four

believing student feels violated by their teachers. The frequency of how often you feel offended varies, but statements like "The Bible says that Adam had more ribs than Eve, but since you guys don't have more ribs than the girls, the Bible is not true." from religious teachers or "the Pope is a whore" from a classmate are not uncommon.

Vad tror unga vuxna på (What do young adults believe in), a survey study presented in *Kristen tro på glid* (A gliding Christian faith) with young adults in a Bible school environment within SAM, Pentecost and EFK in focus, confirms the picture that abuse in the school environment is common. Only 20% perceive that they have never been subjected to violation for and in relation to their faith, the majority also believe that teachers have spoken disparagingly about Christian faith and even religion in general. This also reflects my experience of meeting students who often need to process derogatory comments and as well as get intellectual revenge for their beliefs.

b) Many leave the fellowship of the Church

Här för att stanna (Here to stay) from the Bible Today, 2020 noted that 50% of the children who grew up in the church (within Pentecost, EFK and the Ekkumenia Church) left the faith by the age of 23. Similarly, *Should I Stay or Should I go*, part of the "A gliding Christian faith" rapport, noted that 60% of those who in their teens were a participant in 6 congregations' youth ministry left the church community 12 years later. It can thus be stated that many of those who grow up in (non-denominational) Christian homes leave the faith. Understanding why this is so is important for Christianity and for Credo's work.

c) The relevance of the Christian community is often central

Should I stay or Should I go, shows that the Christian faith of adolescence is strongly associated with a social community. Many of the young adults who are not part of a Christian community today still look with joy and gratitude on what they experienced during adolescence and similar activities. The researchers point out that community orientation has been a stronger feature than the explicit intellectual or theological side of faith. The downside of the centrality of the Christian community is that, according to a *gliding Christian faith* rapport, it can be replaced by another community. Many feel there was nothing wrong with the Christian community, it just didn't keep up over the years and gradually lost its relevance.

d) The ability to reflect as an aid to continued faith

Här för att stanna and several of the articles in *A gliding Christian faith* show that reflectivity is important for maintaining and deepening a Christian faith into old age. Mattias Sennehed points out how deconstruction and reconstruction of faith is a crucial process for young adults. Martin Björkander shows how the ability to process the faith from home, the relationship with God, church experiences, Bible school time, own decisions in faith and ethical issues, and family formation are important for reaching an adult faith. All of these areas can provide experiences that challenge and strengthen faith, but an ability to reconcile with wrongs and still maintain strong hope is important.

e) Cross pressure

The philosopher Charles Taylor has coined the term Cross Pressure, which puts into words what occurs when a person is part of two or more communities with completely different conditions. For example, it may be a classic view of marriage that in one camp is perceived as faithful to the Bible and in a larger society as inhumane or homophobic. This makes the person in question both hero and perpetrator and finds it difficult to negotiate their self-image and convictions. The higher the tensions between communities on the specific issue, the more pressure the person is subjected to. *A gliding Christian faith* shows that the church's ability or inability to handle cross pressure, not least in relation to sexuality issues, is central to maintaining faith among young people.

f) Worship central

The survey study *What do young adults believe in?* shows that 80% consider worship important (i) and 59% that it is very important (vi) for them to believe. Something that surpasses one's own Bible reading (50% vi), youth work (43% vi), mother's faith (43% vi) and camp activities (39% vi). Worship as a form of worship, but also as a gateway to experiences and experiences, is thus perceived as central by young adults.

Ulrik Josefsson and Fredrik Wenell talk about how to relate constructively to this and point out, among other things, how Hillsong in recent years has managed to convey a greater theological depth through worship songs (with themes such as incarnation, Jesus' preexistence & the Trinity) than through its preaching on Sundays.

g) Congregations have (to a greater extent) accepted the challenge

Student pastor Mattias Sennehed describes in *Christian faith on glide* how as a youth pastor in the 2000s he had a great focus on high school students, but had difficulty knowing how to relate to young adults. When the parishioners graduated, the job was done and the idea was that they had landed in an adult faith. Even then, he discovered that this was not entirely true. There were still those who studied, a course here, a course there, took an odd job and maybe finally landed in a longer education and only then a more stable life situation. Sennehed realized that the process from graduation to that more established existence was crucial for the formation of faith and identity and has as part of Pentecostal young adult work worked for local churches to prioritize this target group. And congregations have responded to the challenge, and young adult events such as Bible and brunch, home groups with a young adult focus, worship nights, and community forums for young adults occur in the majority of cities.

Student pastor Jesper Kronhamn in Umeå and former employee of Credo drew my attention to how this puts Credo in a slightly different position. Previously, Credo has been in a unique position in its focus on young adults and students, but today, thank God (!), we share that focus with denominations, local churches and organizations such as Agape Sweden, Navigators, Ny Generation and YWAM.

h) Summary

In conclusion, we must state that the reports draw our attention to a known tragedy. In Sweden, Christianity has an inability to guide young people into an adult Christian faith. A one-sided

emphasis on the emotional and social dimensions of faith seems to contribute to this to some extent. Furthermore, young people and young adults are in a process of shaping identity and worldview where strong cross pressure is a contributing factor to the faith journey coming to a halt. In this process, the Christian faith can also be stigmatized both based on the violations that Young Believers in Society demonstrate, but paradoxically, the faith can also be perceived as offensive. A young Christian may therefore have to deal with both victim and perpetrator feelings. Healthy spaces for dealing with these experiences are probably necessary to both dismiss, but also absorb, relevant criticism.

c) MAKING JESUS CHRIST BELIEVED, OBEYED, KNOWN, AND LOVED IN A POSTMODERN AGE

The portrait sketched by young believers and non-believers in Sweden based on Credo's interviews and our three reports, is largely a portrait characterized by postmodern trends. It is in [1] postmodernism that relativism, or social constructivism, emerges, that inner authority is emphasized, that the fear of oppressive perspectives and authorities is strong, and that individualism and one's own truth live in parallel with a deep longing for community. Below are four perspectives of what characterizes the mission to make Jesus Christ believed, obeyed, known, and loved in an era characterized in part by postmodernism.

a) Trusted in an age of doubt

Our three reports show that 50-60% of those who grow up in a non-denominational church, or are active in a non-denominational church, as young people, left their faith when they became adults. A contributing factor to this is doubts about the truth of the Christian faith (in relation to science), goodness (in relation to ethics) and beauty (largely in relation to modern culture). Christian communities face the double challenge of explaining and defending the Christian faith as true, good and beautiful while creating space in their own community to question the true, goodness and beauty of the Christian faith. This is something that may seem difficult and that either capsizes into a conservatism with deaf ears or a liberalism that has lost its own voice.

An interesting observation in this context is made by the Old Testament theologian Walter Bruggeman. He shows how the very structure of the Old Testament is built around a tension of faith and doubt, or as he puts it core and counter testimony. Both the testimony of God's glory and the experience of His painful absence are contained in the same canon. The vocation of the Christian community and of Credo as an organization lies not in finding a balance between faith and doubt, but in forming a movement in which individuals can join in the worship with a full voice. And at the same time allow individuals to express doubts about the truth, goodness and beauty of the Christian faith. When that victory is won, an honest wrestling with the scripture where we can cry out with Jacob "I will not let you go, for even you bless me (Genesis 33:26)." and with Job can experience how God reveals himself in the storm (Job 40:1).

Concretely, through different teaching formats, we need to explain and defend the Christian faith as true, good and beautiful while creating contexts for dialogue about doubts about the same. Examples of this are teaching formats that include opportunities for dialogue, but also supervision of groups (often boards) and individuals.

b) Obeyed in an age of listening to one's heart

Both our interviews and *Kristen tro på glid* (A gliding Christian faith) show that respect for inner authority. This can be expressed more colloquially as listening to one's heart (intuition) or thinking oneself (intellect). One's own intuition and/or intellect should guide one's own life and the formation of one's own identity. Limiting one's own found identity is perceived as deeply offensive. Something that not least makes itself visible in LGBTQ+ issues. It is tempting, and to some extent necessary, in the face of this culture, to assert the authority of God's Word in contrast to the authority of my inner self. But it is necessary to consider how the external and the inner authority relate to each other.

A comparison between the submission of Islam and the conversion of the Christian faith may be helpful here. At the risk of misrepresenting Islam, the Quran's message contains a central admonition: submit to the will of Allah and you will live. This may seem reminiscent of Peter's words: "Think for yourselves whether it is right before God to obey you more than him? (Acts 4:19)" There are two choices of God's will or man's. Surely there is something in this. At the same time, the Christian faith does not long for a humanity freed from its will but a humanity freed from its sin. Romans' talk about God's love being instilled in our hearts (Romans 5:4), the Jerusalem meeting in the book of Acts which boldly means they made a decision with the Holy Spirit (Acts 15:28), and Paul's constant exhortations for a renewal of the mind (Romans 12:2) and the ability to make right decisions (Philippians 1:9–10; Colossians 1:9–10) indicates that something else is going on.

Inner authority, desire, intellect, and intuition are perverted by sin (cf. Jer. 17:9–10; Matthew 15:19) and therefore we cannot rely unilaterally on an inner authority. We need God's Word to guide our lives and see the truth about them. At the same time, inner authority influences how we read and interpret God's Word and causes us, left to ourselves, to misunderstand, to choose a canon in the canon, or to misuse the Bible in a way that drives us into discouragement or pride. Therefore, we need a community that discerns God's will together and that through prayer and fasting, study and critical thinking, debates and dialogues, seeks God's will and in this spirit submits to God's Word.

Specifically, Credo needs to find a way to address ethical issues such as organization and movement. When it comes to LGBTQ+ issues, we also need to see that our students address these issues by respectfully representing their own opinion. When students are pressed on these issues, we need to provide tools to deal with the pressure. A positive example is the lecture [Gender, Faith and Hope in the Gospel](#).

c) Known in an age om many narratives

To make Jesus known, we must first answer two questions:

1. Is it possible to make Jesus known?
2. Why should Jesus be known?

The first question relates to the clear relativism demonstrated in our interviews. Is it possible to get to know the real Jesus or is he forever doomed to become a projection surface for the ideals and longings of different communities? A relativistic answer could be that Jesus has existed, as there is a consensus on this in research, but that his person means different things to different people. Who he really was is inaccessible to us and we are thus doomed to face our own longings in Jesus rather than another being.

A Christian response can recognize that this risk exists. Prior to the 2013 church election, the Social Democratic Youth Party (Socialdemokraternas ungdomsförbund) was able to use Jesus as a poster boy to sell Social Democratic policies. Under the Nazis, the German Church pushed the conviction that Jesus was not really a Jew. With roots in Nicolas Notovitch's *The Unknown Life of Jesus Christ*, New Spirituality claims that Jesus traveled to India and was taught there by Buddhists and Hindus. The Talmud claims that Jesus was a heretical dark artist. Finally, the various academic quests for Jesus have often led to a portrayal of Jesus in tune with contemporary ideals.

It is possible to use Jesus for a variety of agendas, but as a church we believe that the true face of Jesus is fully possible to find. In the scripture, a portrait of Jesus is drawn, and especially in the Gospels, which the church defends as credible. It is also in continuity with how the Church encounters Jesus in scriptures, sacraments, and charismatic experiences throughout Church history. Therefore, it is possible to discern the true Jesus in contrast to political, academic, or religious use of him. And here we are back to the question of objective truth. There, a Christian faith must embrace that all votes are equal, but all the opinions or theories put forward by the votes are not equally reliable.

So how do you convey the value in voices while correcting the message of the voice? This ties in with the question of why Jesus should be known. A postmodern tradition is anxious about oppressive authorities who, not least through big stories, claim the right to oppress other minorities, such as other ethnic groups, religious communities or people with different sexual orientations. A clear example of this is the British Empire and the story of the white man's burden that in a way legitimized colonialism. Similarly, there is a fear that the great story of salvation in Jesus will be the basis for the oppression of minorities. This fear is reinforced when evangelism is about communicating the gospel as quickly and efficiently as possible without meeting the person. However, none of our informants use such an evangelistic method. Here, evangelism can instead be described as dialogue. And in dialogue, the other's voice is valued. Not everything the non-believer puts forward is a correct understanding of the Christian faith, but the person is seen and heard. At the same time, not everything the Christian puts forward is correct and a lot of what the non-Christian puts forward is important for a Christian community to absorb. These nuances emerge only when evangelism becomes dialogue-oriented and where Christian students and Credo as a movement learn to both listen, speak and when necessary; question.

Specifically, Credo needs to equip university students and high schoolers to face a relativistic culture. This can be done both by making visible how the current culture arose, but also by showing how one can interact with culture. Both by taking advantage of the good conversational climate, but also by challenging the obvious truth about "my truth." Good examples of this are, for example, the good conversation (det Goda Samtalet), alpha and perspective cards that take advantage of each person's voice while the belief in objective truth is never abandoned.

d) Loved in an age without roots

Our informants make it clear that many students long for fellowship. One anecdote shows the difficulty of seeing the answer to this longing in their neighbor. There is a volatility that characterizes the postmodern era where the possibility of moving in connection with studies and careers makes it more difficult to cultivate relationships over time. This volatility may to some extent also be an underlying factor in the widespread mental illness.

The volatility is also recognized in Christian contexts where the flip side of increased ecumenism is a larger movement between congregations. Ecumenism is fantastic, but in parallel with this, the question is asked: how do we actually build Christian fellowship over time? A community based not only on consumerist push and pull effects, but on surrender and deepest love for God and for neighbor. In an ecumenical age, the Christian community needs to become transgressive. It is somewhat challenging, but at the same time it is in the DNA of the Christian faith where Jesus gathers a zealot, fisherman and a tax collector to a group of discipleship, and the early church is characterized by the tension between Jews and Gentiles.

Eleonore Gustavsson problematizes the longing for community in the article *The price of community is suffering* (Gemenskapens pris är lidandet). The article shows how the longing for community in itself neither builds nor keeps communities alive. Community is at its strongest where it is brought to life by a vision of something bigger. In the case of the Christian community, the vision and purpose is to love Jesus or to put it another way: "To love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength (Deuteronomy 6)." It is in fellowship that longing goes from a grand ideal to a daily experience of love, sin, shortcomings and reconciliation. It is in fellowship that, according to Zosima in Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov*, we get to practice practical love. And it's when we tear ourselves through the fact that we don't get anything done with student x on the board, that employee y doesn't see all the hard work we put in, or when colleague z creates frustration with his constant comments. These everyday experiences can come to us as a gift from God as we turn them to Him and are more deeply influenced by the gospel story.

So, what does it mean concretely for Credo's mission to make Jesus loved? Because we need to build cross-border communities that come together around something bigger than their own survival. Namely, the love for Jesus and the mission to make him loved. As we do this, through prayer, struggle, and conflict, we can grow into love. A beautiful example of this is the communities that are formed with international and Swedish students. To sit and worship in a room with siblings from countries that in the political arena are enemies is fantastic. At the same time, to see how these communities have their eyes on Jesus and how they can love him is inspiring.

e) Crossing river Jordan – a conclusion

Back to Moses and the people of Israel outside the promised land. The people are fully aware of the challenges that await on the other side of the Jordan, "a people larger and more numerous than we are, and of great cities with soaring walls. Even the Anakites (giants) were seen over there by the scouts (Deuteronomy 1:27b)." They are "mighty enemies, from adversaries who were stronger than I (Psalm 18:17)" to speak in the words of the Psalms. Yet God's people know that the path of discouragement is closed to them, it led only into an arid desert, which, although it taught them much, could not be returned again. As Moses lies dead and the people prepare for entry, Joshua is told by the Lord: "Be valiant and strong! Don't be intimidated, don't be alarmed! The Lord your God is with you in all that you do (Josh. 1:9)". More than an attitude of silencing every doubt, this is an attitude that has heard the doubts, yet chooses to cast itself into trust in the Lord. An act that knows that the challenges are greater than one's own people, person, charisma or organization. And so you go, go in a praying effort to make Jesus Christ known, believed, obeyed, and loved. The challenges facing Swedish Christianity are greater than Credo, but when we have sketched out an approach for Credo's response to contemporary challenges, it is a prayer that can create a basic joy and confidence for future work.