CHAPTER 11: CONCLUSION

It is appropriate to conclude by integrating the perspectives of the three theoretical lenses now with the theological reflection of the previous chapter. There it was demonstrated that that the degree of change in each situation was significant and surprising. Interplay between the lenses enables the reader to develop a richer degree of illumination regarding these change dynamics than would be possible from using one or other particular lens even if a complete integration is beyond the scope of this study. Together the lenses act as a prism through which various aspects of the same reality may be analysed in abstract. But diffracting out the individual insights through a sequential reading is dissatisfying as we have shown that an interplay of perspectives is called for. One lens leads us to engage another. None of the lenses preclude a theological interpretation of these phenomena. To speak of culture is to speak of shared beliefs and spiritual values. To speak of courage is to speak of a principled centre within those who constructively work for change. And to act in a culture is to be the subject of projections and symbolising as psychological objects. Such significant change is not likely to have resulted just from wise social engineering and individual maturity. There is good reason to attribute culture change to the confluence of the Spirit of God and principled human leadership. It is not so much that we can or should separate out the impact of the effects of God's Spirit from those of man's nature here. But it does appear that God's 'grace acts through nature' in authentic church renewal and follows the contours of the particular cultural configuration in which the Spirit is at work. To conclude this thesis then we briefly recapitulate this interplay of perspectives commencing with the insights of the psychodynamic lens since I believe it provides the most foundational framework through which to grasp the subjective experience of both the change in culture and the working of God. Object Relations theory in particular serves as a most fruitful heuristic device for this interplay and

therefore is the preferred 'manuscript' upon which to recapitulate the typical features of a narrative of decline and renewal.

This lens demonstrated its usefulness by discerning, in particular, the oppressive forces constraining the particular culture especially during their peak periods. Neurotic aspects of group life make sense of the irrational aspects of the narratives, which in turn create cultures that are sub-Christian. These aspects can take the form of those familiar to the surrounding secular context. Communities are always attended by primal fantasies and potentials that stem from the common human developmental experience of infancy. The potential for defensive routines and regression may always be present as an alternative to addressing the demands of the real work of community and mission with its challenges and disappointments. The fantasies that have been an acknowledged aspect of small groups is evident within these larger communities too. It is more accurate to attribute decline to more vital factors than the common explanation of some evolutionary or 'life stage' principle of organizational ageing. These narratives demonstrate the capacity of a church culture at the height of its growth and popularity of its larger than life leaders, through the very coherence of its cultural strength, to enshrine certain neurotic aspects of the leader's charisma that generate the seeds of whole neurotic constellations.

We can identify at least three ways in which theological perspectives within a community interplay with other lenses. Firstly, a neurotic culture can be quite attractive to many especially if it is justified by a compelling theological perspective or local brand of orthodoxy. These in turn are both reinforced and defended by the theological perspectives and emphasis of the particular group that serve to seal in the neurotic fantasies, the unethical or unhelpful leader-follower charismatic connections. These prevent the sorts of rational strategic visioning of the church

within its changing environment that could result in the renewal of its culture. It is this coalescence of perspective and fantasies that make intervention in dysfunctional situations difficult. Theological conviction can reinforce the defence of fantasy and make neurotic habits "undiscussable", and even the "undiscussability, undiscussable" (Argyris: 1990). We have seen three forms of this disabling theology in the three churches studied closely: rigid conservatism, 'docetic' spirituality disconnected from the life of the rural church, and aggressive antagonism.[1] To the extent that organizational culture is also a pragmatic and conserving force, those leadership patterns associated with the strengthening of the churches culture, cohesion and growth are reinforced by these theological perspectives as un-addressable qualities of the church climate.

The interplay of cultural, psychodynamic, theological and cultural factors that set the church on a depersonalising course are intensified by the sorts of splitting and projection that occur when a major figure or successful pastor moves on. The charisms of the 'founder' or patriarchal figure become expectations and scripts for the replacement to fill both at a cultural level of the pastoral skill set and theological position valued by the church and at the deeper level of psychological denial of the 'death of the founder'. Sometimes willing aspirants from the churches are found to offer themselves with some political backing for such scripts.[2] Other times the intervening pastors before the renewal period, while possessing similar pastoral competences to the founder, lack the dysfunctional leadership styles of the hey-day pastor, or, simply do not

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[1] Other forms that are equally useful ways to seal in the neurotic aspects included a strong subordinationist Trinitarian view that dissolves the capacity for the member to dissent from the leadership, at Petersham, or, at Forrest Hills a hyper spirituality obsessed with the Spirit, that so focuses on the miraculous as to again render the member a passive onlooker, with little commitment to the work of the church.

[2] This was the case especially in both of the other two churches during periods of pastoral vacancy when a replacement pastor was difficult to find as well as to some extent Carinia Downs strong figures on the diaconate.

'play' according the psychodyamic scripts assigned to them at the level of the preconscious characterizations of the church.

Church decline really is a 'double bind' situation for leaders. On the one hand, there is the splitting and projection experienced by the 'death of the founder' phenomena. This has little to do with the actual performance of the present pastor but does seriously affect their functioning. Sometimes this was evident in an irrational level of hatred for the pastor even before they had begun to affect any changes. Then there is also the homeostatic conservation of basic assumptions. The prevailing culture would prefer the equilibrium restored in the form of a leader with the sort of 'valency' that could receive the projections of the group and to perpetuate the prevailing fantasies within it. But, this itself would hasten the decline and stifle the emergence of a true working group or a church that could otherwise be occupied in fruitful mission which would in turn spark a maturation of its members via the 'transitional objects' of their ministries.

On the other hand if the leader does not accept their assigned role at the unconscious cultural assumption and psychodynamic pre conscious level, they likewise, can find their leadership resisted. Instead of being heroes, such leaders are viewed as impostors or incompetents. In Christian theological parlance, the appointment of such figures is viewed as a 'misreading of God's will' by their electors, or, a 'lack of spiritual giftedness' of the pastor himself. Again sense-making here involves the use of the prevailing theological perspectives through which the psychodynamics of the drama is expressed and therefore hidden and reinforced.

Alternately, the nature of church in times of renewal and refreshing, cease to be dominated by these irrational forces. There seem to be three vital aspects to this form of change agency.

Firstly, the leaders and pastors who catalyse renewal through their actions must be differentiated selves as, unlike those who come before, they are not dictated to by the systemic enmeshments that held they church in rigid positions. They not only disturb the existing homeostasis but change the culture in ways that aid development of group maturity in ways that are consonant with individual maturational processes. At the conscious level the actions of the change agents are fuelled by a community vision, principled upon Kingdom concerns or congregational principles expressed by the provision of firm ethical boundaries, and the activation of dialogical processes. Through these cultural changes, the member is encouraged to be an adult participator in focussing upon and thereby forging their future. This is an invitation to the members to act as whole persons and subjects rather than as objects of fears and fragile fantasies. Missional initiatives are generated out of these changes as a creative spirit begins to find expression. Sometimes the initiatives and vision for renewal are already present within the minds of some of an influential group in the church. But the coming of a new pastor catalytically assisted the political process for change by the provision of strategies and political processes to structure the desired renewal. These stories demonstrate the power of pastors, acting out of a set of theologically informed assumptions, by their own bold and public actions to effect cultural change. Ecclesiological visions contradict the hegemony of basic assumptions including the role that the neurotic zones in the culture would have for the new pastor.

A second distinction between leadership that renews and that associated with decline stems from the fact that a differentiated way of functioning is not uniformly appealing to all within the culture. Even when there is an opportunity for all to exercise their voice this consensus making, this also sparks personal confrontation with those folk that would preserve existing balance of the present forces. Remaining resolute in the face of this resistance demands significant courage, a

resilient spirituality and ethical clarity of the leader. Thus the second critical difference between the renewal period pastors and those who preceded them is that these leaders effect change at a deep level of culture evident especially in those times when their work results in liberating catharsis for those who were key defenders and symbols of the prevailing fantasy. As truly differentiated pastors and leaders, they remain in contact with those who are often their most strident opponents, even though they are sometimes symbolized in even demonic proportions. This egalitarian caring contact even when having to confront the resistant with the nature of their problematic behaviour, is itself a critical factor as it helps to construct the adequate holding environment in which the group can sense it is 'held'. In this sense the resulting culture is not a pure form of collaboration or cultivation because it is entirely appropriate in dealing with the unethical aspects of resistance for these new leaders to confront and to apply ethical-behaviour or performance standards as a defence of the emerging culture.

The third effect of such agents of renewal weakens the strong cultures that have resisted renewing attempts in the past. Part of the resistance stems from this sense that 'things are falling apart at the seams'. And, paradoxically, they truly must. For each renewal period signals the end of an era of a highly defended 'control culture' and the commencement of something akin to a 'nurturing system' with components of a 'collaboration' and a 'cultivation' culture and the open-endedness that such a cultural pattern implies. The essence of this third aspect of the change process is this: the effective agent is distinguished from the leaders of dysfunctional periods, by their ability to wean the church from its habitual and disabling primal strategies for achieving security and significance. Such strategies multiply fear and irresponsibility in ever constricting cycles of delusion and coercive controls that hamstring a creative engagement in ministry or mission. In the place of former symbols and unethical charismatic connections, they are able to

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introduce a new cultural feature of a disciplined dialogue and model a style of robust engagement within their friends, their foes and their surrounding environment. Their alternative way of leading effectively symbolises reliable ways of being whole persons in community with other real selves that has similar structuring properties to an adequate holding environment for the infant.

This form of pastoral engagement too is both inspired by an alternative theological perspective, conception of God, or vision for Christian community with greater dignity for the individuals within it. One could suggest a parallel 'object-relations' explanation for their success here. The theory we recall, allows for the possibility of both a real God object and the corollary that being created in his image implies that we also have parallel "deocentric intrapsychic endowments" (Spero:1992, 139) or, apriori mechanisms by which God's actions may be subjectively known through creaturely internal structures. This pastoral behaviour of the change leaders acts as an effective symbol that can be recognized by their community as consonant with the internalised God representations that are already known and internalised within the selves of the congregation. It could then well be that the word and life of these leaders have numinous qualities that release the member from oppressive models and projected God objects that they have had through poor charicatures from their church culture, oppressive experiences in the workplace and even their own infantile experience of their parents. Not only do these internal psychological pathways for knowing God become cleared of the debris of inadequate narcissistic and neurotic self-object gods, but I would argue, in the absence of superior explanations, that the Triune God becomes known in a manner analogous to a developmental process. That is, God's true nature is mediated through mechanisms that parallel the interpersonal mechanisms. The experience of church fellowship, leaders and pastor by the follower can provide a more receptive ground for encounter of the Living God. And such encounters also validate the genuineness of the leaders he

gives to shape the particular church culture releasing the culture from the oppressive images that have overshadowed their interrelationships.

This could explain the sense that these cultures have changed in ways that are greater than the arithmetic sum of the events that occur at a surface level. The influence of these leaders was usually a 'catalytic' rather than 'determinative' factor inducing the conditions for a quite dramatic change in the culture. Sometimes others had already expressed an awareness of a need for change, but the coming of the pastor made this the critical agenda item. This change was transformational in all situations from 'control' to 'collaboration' or 'cultivation' culture. This in itself could imply a 'second order' or transformational level of change. The stronger the former culture the more transformative the order of change and aggressiveness of the processes. Even so, those leaders who were less determinative of the direction of the change, but focussed more upon interpersonal process issues achieve a remarkable level of change through incremental 'first order' developmental processes unleashing latent potentialities within their communities and helping them become more consistent with their deeper indigenous values.

These catalytic agents of renewal, also serve the psychological development of the culture through the provision of an adequate holding environment and introducing transitional objects through the various cultural change strategies they employ. As predicted for the secular organizational culture (Hirschhorn: 1988, 212f), the adequacy of the new holding environment is seen in their capacity to foster consensual forums for decision making, determining fundamental directions for the culture. In these instances a theological perspective is the inspiration for the agent. Their commitment to the mission, the policies and principles of this type of renewing church group indicates the theological perspective from which they operate. Here, the transitional

objects come in the form of identification and encouragement of particular spiritual gifts, training programs, indigenous participatory forms of worship, building programs manned by volunteers and the sharing of ministry that contribute to an abundance mentality in church mission that is greater than the group's own sense of self-preservation.

An equally valid way to interpret these phenomena is according to the doctrine of the Trinity, God lives as the "mystery of love among persons" (Lacugna: 1991, 378). Thus the characteristics of the earthly ministry of Christ are evident within the practical life of these communities as they serve in His Name. This does not mean that Jesus life is the model for a pragmatic solution to the problems of community decline or reform. Such cognitive deliberation was missing from many in the narratives[3]. The community-making that happens does so as the life of these characters and communities is fleshed out in artless ways, rather than by conscious transference from theological reflection upon the nature of God into community pragmatics. That these renewed cultures end up with a form of community life appropriate to the Divine economy would suggest that the nature of community structuring and empowering strategies has a sacramental quality; the actions of renewing leadership, of culture structure work are the hands of God, the ongoing mystery of the ministry of Christ to and through his members. This maturational mechanism of the transitional zone, which enables a positive strategy for renewal to occur in the economy of creation, is given a redemptive expression in the economy of salvation. And the Trinity happens to be as the Trinity is in historical redemptive action. So, to comprehend the phenomena of church renewal in an integrated way I would argue, we are quite justified as Christians to make space for, if not to give primacy to a Trinitarian vantage point along with the

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[3] The exception being Graeme Mcleish at Carinia Downs.

illumination wrought through the other powerful lenses. Insights into these mundane things are insights into the life of Christ in our midst where he lives out his eternal/divine life in the midst of these human communal events (Colossians 3.1-3). To the extent that leaders and churches then could consciously reflect upon the nature of Christ's life and teaching regarding his reign and the new order for the household of God, the significance of these ministries and structures for the church would be strengthened and the cultures that develop would have even greater coherence and strength. Cultural development could become cultural conversion.

This insight has a corollary for the change interventionist. If the Triune Nature of God revealed in Christ is the model, goal and inspiration for human action then it is God who must ultimately take the credit for raising up his church again in these instances. This should make us wary of thinking that renewal can be applied as a reproducible or model technology that can be mechanistically applied elsewhere through wise culture engineering. The ease or difficulty by which helpful change is induced could well depend upon the extent to which the change agent pastor understands that their role is to be catalytic instrument in the sovereign purposes of God that are broader than the interests of the particular church. This theologically informed mentality in itself could also lower the likelihood of the sort of over-functioning that can deskill the member and burn out the leader. To the extent that leaders comprehend their partnership with God's own renewal initiative, they will focus more upon the nurturing of a 'possibility-personal' culture, and less upon determining the pace and exact form of the change. And to that extent one would expect that they would not then complicate this fellowship of change by the forms of aggression and coercion that were indicative of the neurotic culture of the decline era in the first place. They could be less liable to internalise the projections whether idealizing or demonising as the case may be.

In summary, there is a certain asymmetry between the period of church decline and renewal demonstrated in these unique narratives. During decline, basic assumptions that have developed through the hey-day and were firmed by cultural homeostasis are capped into the next era by visible control measures, reinforced by both unhelpful theological perspectives and deskilling psychological projections onto and identifications with the charisma of significant leaders, the absent founder and even the church itself. In these renewal periods one could argue that leaders inspired by alternative theological visions and values, devise strategies for dialogue and ethical leadership that enable and empower rational decision-making and the devising of future directions. This process too is reinforced by complementary holding environments and ministry based transitional objects which are fuelled by a Christian perspective for the new humanity. The new strategies and structures provide opportunity for robust interchange and personal maturation. This is often the result of persons entering a 'depressive position' or alternately, they become less fixated with paranoid splitting and projections onto others. Paradoxically, the strength of the former cultures leads to their demise in distinction to the relative weakness of the more inclusive culture of the renewal period. A bi-product of this change is a refreshing revelation of a more adequate image of God, sometimes even of the Triune Persons in communion. I have argued that within each church narrative one can discern a subtext of the work of the Spirit to reform a new people in the likeness of the Triune Being. At this point there is a convergence of the economy of creation and the order of salvation. Whether culture cultivation, maturation, or differentiation within the system, "All things work together for good for those who love God and are called according to his purpose" (Rom. 8.26).