

Chapter 6: Family Systems Behind the Narratives

In this section the stories arising from out of each church are reread through a family systems lens. Through this reframing we aim to determine both the resonance of Bowen Family Systems theory to each narrative's reflection of how changes occur within each churches emotional systems as well as to discern the nature of those changes. This re-reading of the narratives aims firstly, to find evidence of the theory's expected explanatory variables within the dynamic of the narrative plots and characters and then, to ascertain if such a dynamic itself can provide a coherent rational narrative at the level of the emotional system where this theory posits the causes of health or dysfunction. Certain aspects of the composite narratives recede into the background as the theory highlights aspects and apporions significance to actions of the protagonists in terms of the positions and tacit roles played by these actors within the family system. Extensive coding of the stories and the actual recollections of the participants has been done using an 'N-6' NUD*IST data differentiation and storage program, in an attempt to discern which variables that the theory would propose are actually strongly represented within narratives. The value of the theory would be low if there was little demonstrable evidence of the explanatory variables suggested by the theory at all. Alternately, the theory would have little resonance if these variables show up in situations contrary to the expectation of the theory. The theory's resonance with the phenomena of change in churches would be weakened if it was found to be the case that the positive transformation period of the churches associated with styles of leadership that were dysfunctional in family systems terms and visa versa. Consequently for each church there is a table that compares the past dysfunctional period with the present 'differentiated' emotional field. This is based upon the frequency of citations of the expected variables from the freely chosen accounts shared by the various candidates within each setting. Comparisons can

thereby be made across each table and between each table to ascertain the degree of turnaround or recession from previous, supposedly negative eras to the allegedly positive eras of the present.

After this analysis the stories are compared for what they show with regard to the explanatory power of Bowen theory across all the data and what role the family systems theory can play as a predictor of positive church cultural change. A conscious choice has been made to give preference to the participants who were actively involved in the events. This sample usually included church office bearers and their spouses, pastors or pastors' wives with few exceptions. The number in the columns refers to the number of discrete citations referring to the particular phenomena. The number of respondents shown at the column heading in [] brackets.¹ In the summary at the end of the chapter the salience of the theory is given an approximate rating of either 'High' 'Moderate' or 'Low' which is based on the sheer number of clear citations of typical features expected in the family system underlying each narrative situation and on the plausibility of the explanation as an alternative dramatic plot. If the theory is adequate the plot that is constructed solely upon variants in the variables suggested by theory should be both coherent and continuous. While this issue involves one's own subjective assessment, the exercise of sharing a sample of typical citations of the various theoretical variables in a family systems reading allows readers to validate the strength of this rating for themselves.

¹ For instance if three people cited the same incident and one other cited two incidents this would show up as a '5'. If two people cited the same two incidents this would show up as a '4'. Thus the number is potentially greater than the number of respondents in each case. This is not any particular index, but a simple indication of a possible phenomenon discerned by the actors in these dramas for the purpose of comparison.

Carinia Downs Circuit

Dysfunctional Symptoms in Decline Period	Incidence of Citation [5]	Differentiated Symptoms in Renewal Period	Incidence of Citation [5]
Over-functioning / Identified Burnout	0	Differentiated Leadership	2
Unresolved Conflict Distancing	0	Conflict Resolution	0
Triangulation	0	Sabotage by Anxious Members	0
Loss of Playfulness / Rigidity	1	Playful Creativity / Risk taking	8
Distorted Communication	0	Open Politics	4
Distancing / Disempowerment	2	Acceptance of Distance	0
Dysfunctional Parenting/leadership	0	Nurturing Parenting/leadership	2
Fusion / Enmeshment	0	Differentiation of Membership,	2
Emotional Field Overlap	1	Family of Origin Issues Resolved	0
Conformity pressure in thinking	3	Flexibility and Trust	2
Under-functioning of members	1	Functioning of family members	4

Dysfunctional Symptoms in New Cycle	Incidence of Citation [6]	Differentiated Symptoms in Down Cycle	Incidence of citation [6]
Over-functioning / Identified Burnout	0	Differentiated Leadership	2
Chronic Conflict	0	Conflict Resolution	0
Triangulation	0	Sabotage by Anxious members	0
Loss of Playfulness / Rigidity	0	Playful Creativity / Risk taking initiative	0
Distorted Communication	0	Open Politics	0
Distancing / Disempowerment	0	Acceptance of Distance	0
Dysfunctional Parenting/leadership	0	Nurturing Parenting/leadership	0
Fusion / Enmeshment	0	Differentiation of Membership,	1
Emotional Field Overlap	0	Family of Origin Issues Resolved	0
Conformity pressure in thinking	0	Flexibility and Trust	0
Under-functioning of family Members	2	Functioning of family members	0

Dysfunctional Symptoms in Decline

As regards a measure of rigidity within the church the common perception was that despite the warmth of the individuals, the church was a difficult one in which to serve as rigid folk were hard to sway with new ideas. This is not unrelated to the fact that the emotional field within the church is described as "... stable, long term ... they knew each other well, were related to each other; a 'closed shop'." (Graeme). There were a few individuals who dominated the largely passive group and set the agenda. The present pastor's wife found one woman discomfoting when she arrived.

One lady in particular seemed strong and dominant and wanted, sort of organised, you know “This is how it is going to be! This is what we are going to do!” and I said right back then I didn’t want anything much to do with the church except be one of the congregation. Another impression I guess I had was a fairly staid country church where not a lot was happening. Probably reminded me a lot of the church I grew up in. (Lisa).

However as they formed new relationships she found the woman changed her tone and became a fond supporter of the pastor and his wife. In the close confines of a small relational network, family patterns are imprinted upon the relational patterns in the church. These comments are consistent with Friedman’s notion that the family of the church and the biological family form one interconnected system so that the differentiation in one affects the flexibility in the other.

I would describe the culture of the church before I came as ‘enmeshed’ and ‘close’. ‘Close’ in the sense that the circumference of the social world of the church was close to the boundaries of the church. The church was central to the world of the members. You didn’t get involved in the wider community. So much so that the Baptists had a reputation for being separate. (Graeme)

The pastor bemoans the fact that some patterns have been difficult to break even given the new culture of openness:

And some of the leaders are pretty dysfunctional. ... Their communication is pretty poor. They say a lot more with body language than they admit. ... They really do. You know uhm, they swing the whole meeting by a well directed sigh or a shifting in the seat, or a look at the watch and that sort of thing. I’ve seen that time and again.

And it's a form of bullying. And some people really use that. ... That's the way they operate in their families I notice. (Graeme)

These behaviours tended to match those from these leaders' family of origin.

Differentiated Symptoms in Renewal

But the evidence of renewal certainly is a lot more evident in the terms of systemic health as the theory would predict. The pastor himself has been able to encourage the church to consider significant physical change in facilities and styles of ministry that would severely stress the church in previous years. This has involved him having to make principled stands. He was urged early on to make his opinions known to the church over the rebuilding program that he did without over-regarding the detraction of those with emotional attachments to the status quo by long time members. Likewise his merging of two sets of fellowship has shown a capacity to empathize but not be overrun by the emotionality and resistance of those who didn't share his consolidation solution.

The differentiation of the pastor is matched by, rather than at the expense of, the personal differentiation of the members. Incidents were related on tape and in conversation of significant persons who once would have raised the anxiety levels in church meetings now being noted for a more temperate tone. One fellow noted for his conservatism had roundly criticised the first builder's plans for the church development as they involved turning the old 'sanctuary' into a youth activity room. At a later meeting he changed his mind and came in behind the proposal as he had been given time to see the logic of the proposal.

This would tend to suggest that we have here now a church that is, in Richardson's (1996) terms, 'differentiated' but at the same time, a more 'distant' emotional field. In contrast to the former times of 'closeness' and 'enmeshment' the relaxed spirit engendered by the pastor's own relaxed style also has resulted in both an influx of new comers into the heart of the church but without the sense of need to spend their social hours in church company indicating a greater distance. "People come if they're interested. They chose not to attend" according to the pastor. Graeme cited a few examples where in stark contrast to the more formal era some of the more reliable members will place a barbecue invitation or horse-jumping event ahead of church attendance. So this distance is not reactive but a reflection of a greater freedom and lowering of the influence of the more legalistic, former members.

The impact of his venturesome outreach in the district has been a positive advertisement of the church. But at the same time, much should be attributed to the fear reducing impact of the preaching of his more earthy perception of the Gospel in contrast to the preaching of the past. This has given justification for the more embracing tone of the church. The preaching and modelling of the pastor has diluted the power of the mental taboos regarding their connection with local culture. This at least reinforces the trend towards a lower level of anxiety across the whole system.

All participants implied that the climate within the church reflected a degree of 'playful creativity' to use Friedman's term. This included references to the worship service that is conducted in very good humour. Interjectors add colour and laughter is welcome. The pastor has initiated many ventures that fall under the broad heading of outreach that have involved members stepping into roles with which they are completely unfamiliar and yet becoming competent in them. Respondents mentioned 'café churches', at two sites, the

'Gospel hour' during the country music festival, prominence in revitalizing the local theatrical society as well as other ways that the church membership has taken on bold initiatives beyond the walls of the church. Much input was gleaned from the membership in coming to a final design of the new church buildings and refurbishment. A common reference here was to the fact that members didn't want a building along conventional lines, but one that served their purposes in having welcoming public gatherings within it, a remarkable feature for what was once a small declining rural church.

The decision making of the church happens with an open political spirit. The pastor aims to find consensus rather than rushing through his or the leadership's wishes by getting the required majority. As a consequence decisions as emotion laden such as closing a fellowship and fixing the main church worship service to one location have proceeded without long-term bitterness. Political processes are robust and consensual.

Decisions in our church if people have ideas they put them forward talk to Graeme or whatever and it will be discussed. It is pretty much let's have a talk about it and have a think. ... I wouldn't say that decisions were likely left to the hierarchy. It is very much the church. Yes [the leaders] are open to suggestions. If a deacon can come up with an idea whatever they ... can bring it to a meeting and it is there for everyone to look at and get a vote on. Graeme doesn't push his own barrow. If people are unhappy with the idea they voice it and at the end of the day if it is the opposite way to what they think well they just say that is democracy. There's no grudges. Occasionally there might be something people hold for a while. But on the whole. (Harvey)

This is a distinct shift from the former times when particularly negative or dominant members made the decision making quite formal to the point where active members in exasperation left to go into the regional centre church.

There was not a freedom inasmuch as the elders were far more prominent and dominating. They had no fear that anyone would dissent from their views. One in particular, Ron Blowers would not stop short of bullying tactics. But the majority of the people were relaxed all the same. It wasn't a tense situation. ... Leaders now are not strong leaders. As well there are more women. And they often have a different point of view on things that they are strong to express. But that is not on things like Baptism or doctrinal issues. (Graeme).

People seem to have historically allowed themselves to be dominated by strong personalities but for reasons other than personal insecurity or low differentiation. The pastor's role in confronting such behaviour has most likely had repercussions for the emotional system. The present pastor reflected upon the contrast between the new and the old arrangements:

People are dominated at one level but not terribly fussed by it. Mind you the strong leaders also have now moved on. ... Ron could be difficult. His manners were terrible. He would criticise slowness in the meeting or start to read something while then he'd start himself discussing some story that had no relevance. In some sense he was a bit of a prophet in terms of what eventuated. But, I would say at times that I was afraid of Ron. But then I would have to confront him and I would discover he was a bluffer and confronting him would not be that difficult. (Graeme)

The other major shift in church life is seen in the broadening of the level of ownership and participation in ministry, a feature of the church life that is mentioned universally. Many notice the difference between an era when only a privileged few, usually the office bearers, were involved in public ministry beyond the pastor and the present.

The church is [characterized by] a lot of participation I think a lot of people at the church really enjoy that part and feel that they are all contributors. I would say that 80% of the church would contribute in some way over the period of the roster. Taking up the offering, or greeting or leading the service or doing their communion or helping with morning tea. ... It just got , I don't know, a good feel about it; a non-threatening church. People want to come and get fed and help with the feeding, in the smallest of ways. I have never heard anyone complaining about cleaning the church - well maybe one. On the whole people look forward to doing their jobs and enjoy it. (Bill)

No clearer example of the emotional climate of the church in the recent period post the coming of the Mcleish's is seen than in this summary. Bill Twible the sound technician had left the church with his parents over some incidents in the previous decade that amounted to 'legalism' in their view. On returning with his own family he could discern a systemic shift.

The feeling that we got when we rocked up to the Downs Church was a feeling of friendliness, openness, non-judgmental from everyone not just Graeme; a feeling of acceptance and the relationships between the old and the young and the caring from the old to the young and vice a versa. That is a big thing about church. There is no cliquy groups within the church. It is all one small happy family. Anyone can come into the door and are welcomed and accepted. (Bill)

The one converse signal of systemic improvement is indicated by the type of participation that the bulk of the church exhibits. In the present period there is still a sense that the church as a whole is under-functioning and leaving too much to the leaders.

I wonder that at times and yet they always are thrilled with the result and are happy to be a part of all of that but it is almost like you are carrying a cartload of people who are happy to get in there and do the work but can't get up the front to help pull the load and that is a bit frustrating ... *very* frustrating at times. I just feel we need in our leadership, ... we need a few more people who will take initiative and are enthusiastic. I think I feel sometimes they are too, sit back and cautious while we will just wait and see what happens. Or, Graeme sort of has to give definite direction before they know which way to jump. They don't sort of think to themselves "If this happens this is what the result will be so why don't we do this?" (Lisa).

In this way the resurgence of the church, the doubling of its membership and rise to prominence in its community has not reflected a major shift of functioning across the members apart from fulfilling their normal mundane duties or falling in behind Graeme's creative visions. In fact the major reasons Graeme Mcleish proposes for the changes, have to do with the absence of theological convictions, and at the same time his concerns were not so much to manage his emotions or those of the church, but to deepen their spirituality and bring about a broader consistency. These couple of citations are revealing in this regard.

Doctrinally, they were not strict at all. They wouldn't detect a shift of teaching. They were in fact a weak group spiritually. And all that worked to my advantage. It is as if a personal spirituality is missing! Their Christianity is a matter of culture not of worked out conviction, so I could virtually say what I liked. Like down at

Green Lake, I can preach anything and no one would be the wiser. ... By the same token there was not a strong sense of themselves as Christians throughout their other involvements. I could be quite embarrassed. For instance there was a lady who was a president of the bowls club. And there was a conflict going on in the club with this other person. And she could behave quite badly and publicly and not see that there was anything wrong with it. That was the nature of their faith. It was not integrated. Church was more cultural than spiritual. (Graeme)

Graeme's theological vision for the church is rich in Biblical motifs and quite evocative. But while it informs his own leadership it is not articulated by the membership. An absence of shared convictions means that the removal of legalism is straightforward. But paradoxically, a lack of restrictiveness does not foster the sort of system where the group is motivated from its own internal sources.

In summary, the narrative of the Carinia Downs church could be restated in family systems terms as:

- (i) *Close and Enmeshed Era:* The church was marked by an initially rigid emotional system, overly structured by a conformist concern about parental figures in the regional church, and a few system 'patriarchs' within the church itself, who sought to reinforce the relational boundaries of the church against perceived corrosive elements outside. The result of this was an increasing homogenisation of the church and lowering of creativity exacerbated by the exodus of those who wanted to express their unique contributions within the Carina Downs circuit. There is a fixity in the emotional map due to family interconnections and the drift of the younger generation and newcomers out of the district producing a group with low expectations or sense of a need to consider change.

- (ii) *Differentiated Parent, Connected Family*: The arrival of the McLeish family corresponding also to the arrival of several new comers disturbs the rigidities in the emotional system. Remarkably, this does not result in whole scale conflict. The pastor is both accepted and accepting and feeling for once able to be himself uses his talents and asserts his uniqueness both within the domain of worship and beyond in the public arena through music and writing in the local press. This has an almost immediate impact on the rigidity of the family boundaries.
- (iii) *Inclusive and Creative Growing Family*: A second wave of change in the health of the overall emotional system occurs as the relational stocks of the church are also replenished by an influx of needy people. The separated judgemental images of the church are overwhelmed by an opportunity to express a humane compassionate connection and welcome new people in with the status immediately conferred of being 'adult' members of the church family. It is now the relational atmosphere of the church itself, not only the pastor's reputation that is known within the wider district beyond the church family. The freedom of the member to make decisions without the pressures to conform has resulted in a greater dedication to the church. There is still however a residual tendency that is probably a carry over from former eras whereby many members look to the pastor to be the major initiator and organizer. And this lack of readiness to take the mantle of leadership becomes more telling the more ambitious the mission ventured by the church.

In terms of distinctions between emotional fields (Richardson: 1996) this church has moved from the close and enmeshed, field that resulted in a degree of social isolation. Now the sense of the systems reflected in the climate is one of a differentiated and yet less closely

connected inside the church family while increasingly connected in its social location relative to the wider community.

As to the helpfulness of the Family Systems lens to resonate with the changes in this church, one would have to note that the major family systems connection would focus upon the impact of the personal differentiation of the pastor and his wife as the explanation of the change of mood and growth. This differentiation could be seen in their courage to be vulnerable while wounded and determination to express their talents boldly. However, it is particularly remarkable that they were able to change so much of so great a symbolic importance such as the worship style, the music and the sale and renovation of property with remarkably little resistance from those who were former 'parent' figures, the self appointed law keepers within the Downs' emotional system.

Astoundingly, of the members who once dominated others for stability's sake, some now become ardent supporters of change and a new hospitable inclusiveness. A church that had not attempted much in living memory became mobilized for mission indicating a new degree of self-assurance. If anything this is too startling a confirmation of the power of a non-anxious, playful presence to influence a whole system! Family systems theory certainly could not predict that the church would direct its more joyous spirit outwards into serving and witnessing to their local community. There is no particularly compelling reason to see why systemic flexibility generates extra community initiative nor compassion toward the needy within. Also there is not the anticipated 'sabotage' of the most anxious family member here which normally would be an indicator that the system has in fact shifted. Part of the difficulty is in deciding just how healthy the system of relationships was prior to the coming of the present pastor, or since his inception. If anything it would appear that the normal homeostasis

had been transformed by the learning through experience from direct involvement in mission and embracing the needy entry with natural compassion. Differentiation within the group was enhanced by boldness toward outsiders modelled upon the pastor's own initiative. Such things are not expected or explained by Family Systems theory per se.

With regard to the first issue, it could be that the initial enmeshment may have been an expedience of the context rather than a systemic feature. One suspects that the closeness and enmeshment may itself reflect a typical rural reliance upon key family figures instilling a stability forged by years of precarious economic conditions. And here it is certainly the case that the dominator elders of the prior era certainly are economically more independent consumers of labour than the average member. This would attribute the turn around of the church to more primary socio-cultural phenomena rather than the aggregated emotional anxiety being lowered. But even despite this externality, family members are now able to differ fearlessly and yet remain close, and embrace more change than in the rest of their recollected history.

Then the second issue is to determine how widespread the systemic differentiation actually is beyond the pastor's self. Although the congregation is highly enthusiastic and participative in ministry, there is still no great growth in the numbers of differentiated leaders who could share the whole burden of ministry with the pastor despite the attempts to nurture and train others. This also has a sociological cause due the typical turnover of professionals through this typical rural district. Personal differentiation is a limited commodity distributed across the whole system rather than growing evenly with the resurgence of the church. The paradox here is that the very success of the pastor leads to an under-functioning at some levels within the church family who are overawed by the artlessness of his self-expression and his

family's extraordinary talents. The models of pastors that these churches have been accustomed to did not attempt to develop a spread of ministry competence through the church. Paradoxically the pastor would now wish for greater membership independence. By his own talents he could inadvertently discourage the very differentiation that he longs to see. And, at the same time, new Christians are coming into this church without the confidence to be initiators in ministry. There is an interplay between some entrenched features of the culture and the emotional system that is at work here. Socio-economic forces could be more significant than systemic shifts. If so, the real emotional system was not that unwell to start with and limited the actual differentiation in the renewal period. The major change then in the system would be the pastor and his family's major contribution to the limited stocks of rational talents within the group.

One also has the sense that such a viewpoint neglects the actual beliefs and habits that have a greater shaping influence their life and purposes together. This was certainly the major focus of the pastor along with a missiological determination to resonate with the surrounding culture. The members attitudes had been formed over the decades due in part to the otherworldly version of the Gospel they had been fed over generations. This was reinforced through sermons that separated church life from real life. This version of Gospel implied that a certain distance and separation was necessary from the 'outside world' for holiness in the internal realms of faith. Once this has been rebutted effectively the family has been released from unnecessary shackles to behave in a flexible, natural and spontaneous way. This also would suggest that there was some latent wellness in the emotional field of Carinia Downes that had been suppressed by other ideological considerations rather than styles of 'parenting'. The church in its essence has not so much ceased to be suppressed emotionally so much as cognitively, by virtue of having to sustain a faith that implicitly encouraged cultural

separation. This is simply because the greater share of their life is sanctified or able to be included as a valued expression of Christian faith. In releasing the church from false obligations not germane to the Gospel and by indicating the pertinence of the Gospel to the whole of life, he has provided an effective basis for persuasion of the existing 'adult' family members to be more hospitable and venturesome. If this is the case, a degree of religious conversion has occurred no less which is more primary than the manner in which the church or its parents deals with anxiety. To the extent that few could articulate the source of the new ecclesial vision to that extent they do not seem to know their 'part in the script' nor show the initiative to become leaders within the ministries of the church. They are therefore dependent upon the Pastor rather than interdependent selves. They are in a healthy system and are open to change. But the agent and agency are supplied from the resources of the Pastoral family.

Whichever way one looks at it, this theory is deficient as a sole explanation of change at Carinia Downs. It has a moderate resonance with this situation raising as many questions as it answers. That the church is on such a positive incline while some key family systems features remain unaltered suggests that this was not the domain upon which the 'motors' driving the changes were primarily operating. Conversely, this narrative would suggest that other issues of a cultural and ideological nature have to change for a significant and radical renewal to occur.

Ivy Street

So much of the Ivy street story is set against the backdrop of the period of their longest serving pastor in the nineteen sixties and seventies during which the church becomes proud of its heritage and strong and influential leaders define the culture matched by the austere and

aloof manner of the next pastor. Because this culture persists and is entrenched in the present, the tables here define decline and renewal in terms of the periods before or after the effect of the current pastor after around six years in his ministry when the power and influence of the major personalities from the former peak of the church has been broken and the church has returned to a new family service from two services.

Dysfunctional Symptoms in Decline Period	Incidence of Citation [6]	Differentiated Symptoms in Renewal Period	Incidence of citation [6]
Over-functioning / Identified Burnout	1	Differentiated Leadership	14
Chronic Conflict	10	Conflict Resolution	1
Triangulation	2	Sabotage by Anxious members	11
Loss of Playfulness / Rigidity	22	Playful Creativity / Risk taking	4
Distorted Communication	7	Open Politics	3
Distancing / Disempowerment	7	Acceptance of Distance	0
Dysfunctional Parenting/leadership	10	Nurturing Parenting/leadership	1
Fusion / Enmeshment	2	Differentiation of Membership,	3
Emotional Field Overlap	3	Family of Origin Issues Resolved	0
Conformity pressure in thinking	13	Flexibility and Trust	3
Under-functioning of family Members	2	Functioning of family members	2

Dysfunctional Symptoms in Renewal Period	Incidence of Citation [6]	Differentiated Symptoms in Decline Period	Incidence of citation [6]
Over-functioning / Identified Burnout	2	Differentiated Leadership	2
Chronic Conflict	9	Conflict Resolution	0
Triangulation	1	Sabotage by Anxious members	1
Loss of Playfulness / Rigidity	11*	Playful Creativity / Risk taking	1
Distorted Communication	0	Open Politics	0
Distancing / Disempowerment	1	Acceptance of Distance	0
Dysfunctional Parenting/leadership	2	Nurturing Parenting/leadership	2
Fusion / Enmeshment	0	Differentiation of Membership,	2
Emotional Field Overlap	1	Family of Origin Issues Resolved	0
Conformity pressure in thinking	1	Flexibility and Trust	0
Under-functioning of family Members	2	Functioning of family members	2

These eleven instances of rigidity and refusal to entertain playfulness correspond to the incidents cited under sabotage by the anxious in the renewal period features.

Dysfunctional Symptoms in Decline

The period up to and including the early years of Clive Crowe's current pastorate seem to stem directly from the strength of the culture devolved during the Max Grover period and the period immediately following. A spate of quick and less than successful pastoral arrangements led to an entrenchment of a managerial and patriarchal style of deacons and elders where power related also to socio-economic status; factors which are dealt with in the next chapter. This style of relating was strengthened during the late

seventies and early eighties when these leaders were nearing retirement and the pastor at the time, James Glover presumed to challenge the style and structures of the church. Although it appears that this saga is a reflection of deep cultural issues, the family systems framework does indicate that certain dysfunctional features typify this era right through to the present.

The volatility surrounding the resignation of James Glover in the late eighties was a notable indicator that the emotional system of the church was highly enmeshed both among the hundred and fifty members who resigned following him and between them and their opponents and their leading 'parental' figures (Richardson: 1996, 92,106). These divisions cut across family connections as well. Siblings who had been at the church all their lives left Ivy Street but then went to different churches as they differed so strongly over what was happening. The emotional fields of the church relationships recognize no boundary between those tensions in the church and the biological family.

The most striking impression of the church is reflected in the domain of the 'officer's court' and church business meeting. The single most disturbing characteristic is the lack of creative playfulness, the sheer rigidity in the patterns of interaction and in a blatant refusal, usually on constitutional grounds, to countenance any change or risk taking. This may have also had a socio-cultural aspect.

Ivy Street is still a very conservative church. And because it is so conservative it seems to have a, a ... bite to it,... that if you try to break into that conservativeness you er ... look out for it! Now whether it is, what causes that culture to develop ... But it's the same kind of thing that has always been there. Whether it is the socio-economic group from where it comes they're all managers and high profile people. ... used to cracking the whip. (David)

Family systems theorists would see this as indicative of a subsurface collusion between leaders and followers to apportion the roles of parent and child, assertion and deference rather than either attribute this to culture, demographics or ideology. The church climate reflected a certain ideological mindset that was ultra conservative. Even practical suggestions such as having an after service cup of tea in the church out of the draughty hallway scandalized many (James).

The current pastor, a theologically conservative, meets this determination and rigidity in the form of spokespersons and the unwillingness of the diaconate to contemplate formal change making. He summarizes the core values he met in the church in this way.

Safety first! Protecting! There was an overwhelming sense of protecting their past. And protecting what the church was. It was abundantly clear to me, even when I came to the committee that called me, I remember saying, "Please understand, that I am not someone who will just keep the wheels turning over. I don't mind if you want someone to do that, it's not me." And they said, "No, we're ready for change" and "We're open" and all that kind of stuff. But I don't think they had any idea what that meant." ... "And... I'll give you an idea of how that worked. I had a deacon come up to me after... and I'm going back now. I reckon it was four years I'd been here, and he came up to me one time. And he said, "I think it's probably time I let you know... you've probably noticed that I've opposed you on everything." And I said, "Yeah, I noticed that." He said, "I made a decision when you first came that I would oppose everything you proposed. Just so that you didn't get the idea that this was going to be easy." Now, at least he came up and said that. Because I suspected that that kind of mentality was pretty widespread. There was a coldness and a hardness. ... And it probably seems like I

just wanted to do whatever I wanted to do. But there was actually a coldness to even consider “What is God really wanting to do?” (Clive).

This signifies that there were some particularly highly anxious people even beyond the line of leadership and that the whole system was triangulated and their rigid ideology corresponded to their relational methods.

All selected respondents put this down to the style of leadership that commences with Max Grover in the ‘golden era’ of the church’s formation. The former secretary notes that this era really has persisted right through until recently now that the aging ‘parent figures’ of the past have ceased to have their former influence over the current thinking of the church. But the dictatorial and intimidating, patriarchy of the former deacons is a common referent and the distortion of Max Grover’s own patriarchal style. Not surprisingly he was termed, ‘the Boss’ and any initiatives came through him.

By the time Clive Crowe arrives, this dictatorial style adopted by the deacons in relation to the average member is extended to their style of relating to the incumbent pastor.

The kinds of statements that were made regularly to me were, “Remember, we called you here. Right? You are only temporary!” “The church will remain long after you go.” Um... One of the elders, at one stage, came to me and wanted me to take a course of action that I simply couldn’t take and ah, he actually said, “You don’t seem to understand, I was the one, more than any other, who got you here. And you owe me!” ... (Clive)

A family systems interpretation of the system would regard such strong resistance as confirmation of the theoretical principle of 'homeostasis' and the highly anxious members are the spokespersons for the threat to this equilibrium from the independent thinking of the new pastor. The Leaders aim to bolster the deference patterns even if this involves unethical patriarchal manipulation.

Clive resorts unconsciously to family system type metaphors of the leadership patterns he unearthed by his entry into the heart of the system.

[They were] definitely 'patriarchs'. It was a totally patriarchal and, in some areas, matriarchal situation. Um, I just suspected a lot of the people... and I've found this out since, a lot of the people were hurt people. But, it's like people in an abusive situation in marriages and homes. Often they can't leave it. Because a lot of people here thought that to leave here or to 'betray this place' is just the unforgivable. This was Ivy Street! Um, the leaders were wealthy, powerful, men of enormous control in their business worlds, managers, directors, even millionaires.

There is certainly here evidence suggestive of a high degree of fear and enmeshment exerting a fearful level of control over people. But also there are obvious power differentials as well that stem from cultural distinctives of the church in that era. Potential psycho-dynamic interpretations of the force upon the individuals are compelling. If the family systems perspective is primary, all one could determine is that the emotional system was sustained by a high degree of coercion and control and exhibited the anxiety symptoms of triangulation.

The choir, deaconesses, elders... it didn't matter what group, they perpetuated ah... I can always remember the elders used to... There were two guys in the eldership, who would invariably begin their meetings with, um. "People are saying...", "The people are not happy with that...", "I've heard some people speaking during the week and ah... they want me to pass on that they don't feel your preaching is..." you know... "Laughing in church is..." You know. And this is what would happen all the time. So I'd say to them, "Guys, c'mon. If you're going to find out one thing about me, our focus is fellowship here. I said "Let's come clean..." "No. We're not revealing our sources". Every week "People are saying..." and then I'd found out later on that it wasn't 'people were saying', it was they who were stirring it up. (Clive)

Recollections of the control that the major 'parent' figures within the leadership held over the church are common.

I think things came to the church meeting but the leadership would come into the meetings and say "We think this should happen." And there was a number of people that were highly respected. If they stood up in a meeting and said "Look this is this situation. You know this is how we decided this or this is how we came to this decision blah blah ... We want the church to endorse it". Everyone said "Yes!" (Sue).

Sue herself had been the brunt in Clive's early years of the most vicious public attacks in a church meeting from one of the long standing 'adult parent' members for expressing views contrary to those who sought to constrain the church (Sue, Clive).

Such intimidating parenting certainly proved an effective way to galvanise support for the church's structures. "You abided by the rules ... No one dreamed of staying away!" (Clive).

Consequently, this control key had ramifications for the degree of intimacy of relationships with other members. But here is evidence that there may be more irrational and preconscious reasons for the systemic rigidities and distancing.

And once you start to open out, things come out. Look, we were struck by the fact that there was this dreadful lack of personalisation within the church. People that had known each other for thirty years, didn't know the names of their children. Um... You know... I suddenly discovered that there were children and families that nobody ever knew about. There were scandals. You know, there was a multitude of 'stuff' that I thought, "No wonder.... No wonder the focus is on authoritarianism and structure and image and "Let's maintain this outward picture of what Ivy Street is!" Cause the inside of it is actually putrid. It's unfriendly. It's full of sores. It's full of people who can't actually embrace the basic principles. I know that sounds hard, but... but that's the way it was from the top. (Clive).

This system resisted any disclosure at a conscious level of discussion for rational reasons. The pastor on more than one occasion let it be known that if he had wanted to he had been made privy to so much negative information that he could "rewrite the denominations history". Again it is the bruising of the consciences of these people rather than their own personal differentiation is driving the rigidity and oppressiveness of the church's conservative culture.

Differentiated Symptoms in Renewal

The significant difference in this present era is that the pastor has a healthy self-esteem that enables him to confront the intimidating. It is evident however that his own fearlessness does not reduce the level of conflict in the church leading to a more harmonious climate but if anything exacerbates volume of conflict.

That issue came up about “that’s not the way we do things around here.” And I made some comment, like, “If something is wrong, at the beginning, it doesn’t matter how often you do it, it’s still wrong at the end.” ... And one of the guys, the old men, jumped up and he just screamed at the top of his voice. And he said, “You,” he said, “You wouldn’t know what it was to be a Baptist pastor.” And he said “And, in fact, you’re not a pastor’s bootlace”. And ah ... and that, at that stage, we were being fairly commonly ill-thought of. ‘Cause, by that stage, I’d been here about two years, they were getting a little unnerved by the fact that... they’d always been able to push buttons and force issues and knock people over... and it wasn’t happening. And I think a number of them were getting quite unnerved by that.

(Clive)

Only a very strong sense of one’s inner convictions and worth could withstand this constant stream of determined opposition and sabotage by the change resistant parental figures.

Clive also reveals both the family systems theory notion of the interconnectedness of pastoral family system and church emotional system and more importantly how he managed to maintain a proper perspective of his true inner self and not let the ferocity of his opponents detract from either personal or family health. He and his wife chose to be explicit with their

teenage children about the issues without destroying reputations. I asked whether he found this empowered the family to deal with the stresses in the manse.

Oh, it did in a way. Yeah. 'Cause they saw that I was not actually ever... they actually saw that, the ministry, at its absolute worst; it was never more important than them. And I kept saying that to them, I kept saying to the kids... because me winning or losing in this situation, whatever that means, in the end is not the important thing. The important thing is we're trying to do something and, look, in the end, if it doesn't work, then we haven't lost anything. And that's the kind of things we're trying. (Clive)

He is able to join and invest himself in the system without losing himself within it. Clive maintained that this was due to his maintenance of his cultural interests and quality friendships outside the church. This rendered him less susceptible to the anger from those who pitched their best efforts to meld him into the role the system demanded from him.

Family systems view would regard the reaction of his opponents as confirmation that he is, in fact, being effective in changing the system. This is attempted 'sabotage of differentiation' and indicative that the anxious members sense the changes to the system are real and their positions within the system are being affected. Similarly, these statements reveal that the pastor had the capacity to derive his sense of self from sources beyond the church family and to also dispassionately avoid labelling those who opposed him as would be the case were he less differentiated and more enmeshed.

The recollections of his own and others show that Clive had the astounding capacity to refuse to allow the distancing of the reactive member dictate his own emotional response toward them.

Because you're not... it's not me versus you. It's, wait a minute, there's a lot more to this than just, you know, "Oh, he's a real mongrel". He's either learned this; he's had that modelled. Or, "he's had hurts and is trying to protect himself". Or "He's trying to ...". There's all those kind of issues. And I, again, I sort of, it's not competitive, that's not the right word... but for me, it became this passion to actually try and understand why this culture was like it was. And I think I did in the end, although ... just a real passion to try and love them, even though I probably accepted that I may not change many of them.

He retains his closeness to his ardent opponents while not compromising his principles or losing perspective. It appears that this enables the church itself to be less anxiety prone and reactive. Clive recalled one incident when he removed the membership status of the son of one of the elders over an affair with the daughter of Vince Bagley. We look into this in detail later. Suffice it to say that keeping in contact with his bitter opponent led to Vince's reinstatement as both elder and ally. In systems terms this would have resulted in a major reordering of power. This reordering does not arise independently of spiritual considerations being resolved in directions that reinforce the disruption of the homeostatic balance of the system.

It is an interesting bi-product of the Clive Crowe era, that many of the new members who have joined the church in the last four to five year period have swelled the Ivy Street ranks from out of nearby churches that had a similarly oppressive reputation of strong rigidity and

patriarchal domination of the lives of their ex- members. The church therefore has not been able to be as effective in its mission as its present leadership would have liked due to the sense that many who have joined have sought out Ivy Street as a place of respite and normalcy, to be nurtured back to faith, rather than to be proactively responsible for the state of the church themselves. This is only recently being addressed structurally by the initiation of a training function within the church as a means of assimilating the active members into roles appropriate to their gifts.

As a simple narrative of climate changes in the family system the narrative of Ivy Street would have a plot developing as follows:

- (i) *Benevolent Patriarch Period:* The over-functioning of the omnicompetent parent figure, Pastor Max Grover, sets in store a highly controlled patriarchally governed family. As a pastor without his own family, the church became his surrogate family and he nurtured it with a very protective patriarchal eye.
- (ii) *Patriarchal Rigidity Reinforcement era:* Years after his departure the ‘ghost figure’ of Pastor Grover influences the church interactions even into the start of the current pastor. The turnover of the next pastors and the rigidity of the leaders, reinforces the dis-empowering parenting style taken on by the family patriarchs, the deacons and elders. Despite the church’s apparent success it comes to rest in an intimidating and triangulated equilibrium. Those who were ‘adult children’ under Max Grover, became system ‘parents’ and masters of the pastors that followed Max in quick succession.
- (iii) *Reactivity and Rejection of Parental Aspirant:* The pastorate of James Glover is increasingly turbulent and conflicted as his attempts at differentiation and rational change threaten the rigid structure. It is unlikely that in the eyes of the parents

within the system that Pastor Glover is ever granted the status of parent himself. But for those supporters who are enmeshed with him there is no way to express their self hood or grow in autonomy without breaking out from the Ivy Street family. The prevalence of coercive politics and the polarization of the church around the pastor indicate a relatively distant yet enmeshed family system.

- (iv) *Non Threatening Rescuing:* The ministry of Pastor Fleet serves to preserve the remaining family systems and move them beyond the trauma of the previous period but again this is not a parenting role so much as a temporary care-taking that does not interfere with the patterns of deference and influence from the traditional and aging parents. He is 'adult' but perhaps not 'adult parent'.
- (v) *Strong Differentiation arousing Acute Reactivity:* The first five to six years of Pastor Crowe's ministry attracts new members into the Ivy Street family, many of whom are not accorded membership status by the existing powerful patriarchs and matriarchs. For a time, his differentiation results in operating in distance from the existing leadership and the membership again polarizes around the pastor and their feelings toward him dictate their distance. He refuses to let their emotional distance dictate his response. Eventually through the influx of new members, new worship services and new nominees for leadership the rigidity of the system is overcome and the 'ghost parent' of "the Boss" is laid to rest. Some former 'parents' find the changes too great and reactively make their anxious exits. Others conciliate and a new equilibrium is formed.
- (vi) *New Equilibrium, Close Connectedness with Under-functioning:* The absence of the former parents and dysfunctional patterns is a significant improvement upon the harmful culture but in its gracious and flexible acceptance of new members tends toward the over-functioning of the present pastor and leaders to compensate

for the under-functioning of many new members yet to take up their membership responsibilities in full. Clive Crowe has tended to over-compensate for this by his accessibility to the needs of the new hurting member.

As a theoretical motor driving the narrative, Family Systems Theory provides a particularly useful description of the climate of the church in its main eras. It is not totally satisfying as an explanation for how these patterns of deference and distance developed, although there is some resemblance between the leadership/parenting styles of the pastors in any era and the patterns they induce around them.

While it is very evident that the Ivy Street story involves a significant degree of differentiation on the part of the pastor and a corresponding reactivity from the 'most anxious' members, this perspective underplays the significant role that the Pastor's own spiritual maturity brings to the story. Pastor Crowe's clear perspective and compassionate consideration even of his most ardent enemies reflects a calmness of spirit that the systems terminology of 'high differentiation' does not capture as it represents both a sense of the value of the other and a clear perspective of the limits of his responsibility and capacity to induce change. It is true that these are the characteristics of a differentiated leader in not taking on more responsibility than that which is his own to bear. Yet Pastor Crowe has an ethical sense that is fed by his perspective of how the purposes of Jesus Christ should be reflected in the inter-personal conduct of its members and the nature of freedom in fellowship that this entails. The integration of this perspective then governs the principled boundaries of his responsibility as much as his own general healthy esteem. We also note that this differentiated self does not have a calming influence upon the whole system but provokes intense opposition from those who most keenly wish to preserve the system in the balance in which it had come to rest. The

family systems perspective does not reflect the impact of power differentials that derive from the class structure of the church in its various eras. It is difficult to do justice to the Ivy Street Story and many of the recollections that see parallels in the workaday cultures of the managerial deacons and patriarchal elders and the average clerical worker and Ivy Street ordinary member. These issues require a cultural interpretation as occurs in the next chapter.

Red Hill Regional Church

The incidence of critical family systems variables in the narrative of these key players within the transformation of Red Hill church is as follows:

Dysfunctional Symptoms in Decline Period	Incidence of Citation [8]	Differentiated Symptoms in Renewal Period	Incidence of Citation [8]
Over-functioning / Identified Burnout	8	Differentiated Leadership	19
Unresolved Conflict	7	Conflict Resolution	6
Triangulation	7	Sabotage by Anxious members	12
Loss of Playfulness / Rigidity	8	Playful Creativity / Risk taking	6
Distorted Communication	15	Open Politics	18
Distancing / Leaving	10	Acceptance of Distance	2
Dysfunctional Parenting/leadership	21	Nurturing Parenting/leadership	6
Fusion / Enmeshment	14	Differentiation of Membership,	2
Emotional Field Overlap	8	Family of Origin Issues Resolved	0
Conformity pressure in thinking	5	Flexibility and Trust	9
Under-functioning of family Members	5	Functioning of family members	6
Dis-empowering Distance	9		

Dysfunctional Symptoms in New Cycle	Incidence of Citation [8]	Differentiated Symptoms in Down Cycle	Incidence of Citation [8]
Over-functioning / Identified Burnout	0	Differentiated Leadership	10
Unresolved Conflict	9	Conflict Resolution	0
Triangulation	5	Sabotage by Anxious members	2
Loss of Playfulness / Rigidity	1	Playful Creativity / Risk taking	1
Distorted Communication	11	Open Politics	0
Distancing / Leaving	11	Acceptance of Distance	2
Dysfunctional Parenting/leadership	1	Nurturing Parenting/leadership	0
Fusion / Enmeshment	4	Differentiation of Membership,	0
Emotional Field Overlap	0	Family of Origin Issues Resolved	0
Conformity pressure in thinking	2	Flexibility and Trust	0
Under-functioning of family Members	0	Functioning of family members	2
Dis-empowering Distance	7		

Decline Period Dysfunctional Features

Of all the scenarios, this one has registered a relatively high incidence of recognition of many of the family systems explanatory variables. One notices that conflict and distancing between members is typical of both the eras before the present pastor and in the periods beforehand. All the instances before the present renewal period concern conflict between leadership and the long-term pastor Clarie Friedman or his associates. All the instances in the new period of growth concern conflict between the followers of the former pastor and the new pastor or those who had an influential position within the family in the heyday of the church such as the Brigades director and her family members. This conflictual culture appears to be a direct result of a very paternalistic form of pastoral leadership on Clarie's part which on the

one hand, drives the capable and independent thinker to the point of exasperation and on the other spawns an sub-surface culture of secrecy and triangulation. Some founding members summarized this pattern discerned in typical patriarchal tendencies and the stultifying effect it had on the maturation of the church.

Yeah they really relied on him in a lot of ways rather than relying on God and other people basically to be [...] dependent. Now whether that was through him being who he was, I don't think he set out to make that happen. He was a charismatic personality and he drew people towards himself and that just happened. In hindsight you wonder whether he didn't have the knowledge of skills to build structures so that people were ministering and make himself less depended upon. He liked to have his finger in every pie. ... Clarie was an evangelist, he did most of the stuff himself, found it difficult to give other people responsibilities. Sometimes would give responsibility and then take it back. He was virtually a one-man band and if you crossed him that was it, you were gone, you would be hounded out. (Natalie).

...

People used to say well you are just a bunch of 'yes' men and a lot of times we were but a lot of times we agreed because he was the one that was doing most of the stuff and if he went then there was going to be an awful big vacuum, so it wasn't an every member ministry type arrangement. It was almost a benevolent dictatorship I suppose you say. (Len)

The coercive, charismatic power of pastor Clarie is significant enough that even in the face of overt bullying of one of the associate pastors, the diaconate decide that they will only confront Clarie if they are all unanimous that it is the right thing to do. Attempts to do so in the past had been less than successful. Only one of the deacons who was now aging, had ever

been able to “talk Clarie down” (Gary). Sensing his power over the leadership he then was able to manipulate their sense of dependence upon him to shore up his interests and to get his own way.

Clarie was probably a one-man band really. Even though he did have extra staff he struggled to work in a team and I know for a fact that, my dad was on the diaconate at the time, I know that he handed in his resignation many times that most people in the church never knew about and that will be good and "She'll do that and she'll do this". But when I think about Clarie's ministry I think of it as very successful while he is at the church. But I think he was the sort of guy who was very good at putting people in ministry as long as you did it his way and when you didn't do it his way, he stomped his foot and made you get out and I think he did a lot of stomping of his foot in leadership and I think he stomped his foot once too often and they wouldn't take it anymore. (Gary)

The former associate pastor who experienced the brunt of the pastor's displeasure recalls the degree of control and distress this style of leadership evoked.

I think to legitimise his position so he would present his view and we would have five minutes to discuss it, he used to speak mostly in the meetings, it was more preaching during a deacons meeting and that was it. And we sat there and listened and some of us were convinced and some weren't quite convinced but then we in the end mostly agreed with him. (Cyril)

If anyone did disagree with Clarie the following reaction would occur.

He would make it very difficult for them. I suppose there were situations where, I just think of one young fellow who disagreed with him and he basically told him to not come back and in very strong terms. I personally had at one stage, I had a fairly major conflict with him on the street and threatened to punch him myself because I was just so frustrated because he had actually yelled at my wife and made me appear very small in her eyes. And he came around to see me to fix it up. And I said “Don’t you ever do that again otherwise I don’t care I will flatten you!” I mean I probably couldn’t have. I have never threatened anybody before. (Cyril)

Most respondents commented that on quite a few occasions Clarie had used the ultimatum of threatening to resign only to be supposedly talked around into staying. Each time they begged him back the diaconate would sense they had lost leverage in the relationship. The lack of accountability for his actions set up a similar theme within others of his confederates who led ministries throughout the church. It is only when after a significant building program that his performance quality starts to wane that the diaconate and elders find the courage to confront him and maintain their resolve against his petulance. Perhaps this ‘chink in his armour’ was their opportunity to place the interests of the church as a fulcrum for a more differentiated response. Clarie’s patriarchal style automatically implied that he would over-function as the church and its structural demands grew with size and maturity.

My perception and it is only my perception, but I was really involved in most of these things. What happened was that Clarie was becoming under more and more pressure. In fact one of the outcomes of that was the way that he dealt with people could be fairly explosive and fairly hard. ... A number of people had felt that he was almost abusive in relationships towards people who were ministering in the church. I think from a more broader perspective I think the load of what he was doing had become heavier and heavier but his personality and nature meant that he had to fight

to keep control of it. So, he was more and more under stress and the stress was therefore showing itself out in difficult sort of ways. (Neville)

In effect, Clarie had become one of the most anxious persons in the family system. It is no accident that during the summer retreat in 1994 when the collaborative and collective power of elders and diaconate together demand a change of behaviour and refuse to be intimidated by another threatened resignation, Pastor Clarie will not reconsider his resignation and leaves almost immediately. A differentiated collaborative front line finally outflanks the charismatic power of the patriarch. Unfortunately, there are many members who are enmeshed in pastoral relationships with Clarie. An alternate viewpoint would say that they felt indebted to him having come to faith in Christ through him and are thereby rationally inclined to accept his version of events. They chose to believe that he was dealt with unfairly. During the next period Clarie while not being physically present still exerts a 'ghost parental role' (Cosgrove and Hatfield: 1994, 112) over these fragile family members. For instance, the next pastor Doug Walker can never become an 'adult parent' within this system that is still largely enmeshed with both Clarie and the leadership according to the polarity within the congregation that had emerged out of the recent events.

Douglas is not a poorly differentiated self as can be attested from his immediate resolve to unearth the paedophile within the midst of the children's ministry and other pastoral 'hot potatoes' that he courageously resolved within some of the leading marriages within the church. Yet, he is gradually worn down by the lack of responsiveness of the system to his calls for missional action and attention to his vaguely defined vision of Red Hill becoming 'a community of hope'. Such actions require mature independent selves in the general membership, something that has not been left as a legacy of Clarie's co-dependent parenting style. Whereas Clarie had increasingly tested the tolerance of the system through

his over-functioning, Douglas becomes increasingly an under-functioning pastor, listless in preaching and uninterested in influencing critical staffing appointments. In systems terminology, the homeostatic balance of the system was still intent to find a Clarie like figure to maintain its equilibrium despite the stresses that implied.

The under-functioning leaves the way open for interim team leader, Russel Norris to coopt the help of his youth pastor and trainee pastoral associates to re-set the church in theologically Reformed footings. The dogmatism of Russel and his apprentice pulpiteers, serves another important function on behalf of the system. The members who are still emotionally dependent upon Clarie and hanker for his regular evangelistic performance, now begin to move away from the membership in increasing numbers. Given the pulpit display of Russel's cognitive Calvinism over a whole year, it becomes increasingly clear to the perceptive that Clarie is not coming back in any particular pastoral 'incarnation'. This implies that the primary commitment was to Clarie rather than to the Red Hill institution. More importantly, while enmeshed with Clarie many members were not traditionally close to each other. The church is not the same family without the same father figure. Bonds of fellowship simply were not strong enough to compensate for the exit of the family 'adult parent'. It is significant that some members remain in contact with Clarie as the subsequent pastors come and go and siphon news of the changing state of the church back to Clarie for his evaluation. Simultaneously, increasing numbers of members and adherents of Reformed and fundamentalist persuasions create a new family system. The various competing interests within this system and expectations had not yet resolved itself to a new equilibrium. It would not take much disturbance for this brittle system to fragment further. As had always been the trend with previous pastors (Larry), certain segments of the church would show their

displeasure by leaving rather than flexing with the changes that inevitably arose with the expectations of the new pastor.

Dysfunctional Symptoms of Renewal

When David Ross arrives he quickly asserts himself as the appointed leader of the church, confronting moments when Russell Norris and his understudy have stepped beyond their jurisdiction. He finds then that he faces three sources of resistance which include the new Reformed adherents and supporters of Russell's candidature, those attached to the style of church worship under Clarie Friedman, and those strong figures who had become entrenched in long-term ministry leadership. He sensed that a great deal of negativity was caught within the system due to the long-term political machinations of the former pastor. Clarie's reputation was well known to the pastor both from within minister's fellowships and the church.

(He was) a very feisty sort of guy by the sound of it and it sort of created a feisty culture. So if you are going to be like the leader you are going to be political and feisty, and – and intrigue and working behind and doing things around the back door ... So it sort of became you know, working subversion underneath. So that's why probably deliberately I was the opposite. And so we started to bring things out in the open and ... Even an accusation that came to me besmirching one of the leaders. So I said to them "I just want you to know, this is where we have tracked it down to, this is what we are saying. We want one of the leaders to come with me to go and talk to this person so that ..." Once you start taking some action, people get the message. (David)

The connection is made between leadership style and cultural climate. So much so, that for around four or five weeks he took the gossip circulating in the system to the church worship meetings prior to communion. This opened out the political culture to fresh light and made the habitual processes of triangulation less difficult. David recalls his protocol for such occasions during morning worship.

Welcome to Red Hill District Church. Before we look at this morning what God has got to say to us there is just something that has come to my attention and I will just bring it to your attention. I hear that people have been saying that gossip is going around that I have put on a secretary and I am paying her an exorbitant amount of money and I just want you to know that's a lie, that's gossip and that's sin and if you want to know the truth just talk to the treasurer, Jim could you just stand up, that's the treasurer and if you want to know what I am paying her, the fact is actually I should be paying her and I should be paying her an exorbitant amount of money because she is worth every penny of it but actually she has volunteered! (David)

Others remember deliberate attempts at emotional manipulation from matriarchal figures within the system, including Edith Crocket the Brigades leader a known source of venomous rumours. The present youth pastor, then a pastor in training recalls this telling incident while trying to coordinate a meeting of the youth, children's and Brigades leaders.

When David first arrived we used to have a ... youth leadership meeting and it was brigades and I was the senior youth leader, there was a junior youth leader. Elsie came up to me, we had a meeting tomorrow, and she said "We are going to have to stick together in this, we are going to have to stick together! ... Against David, whatever David wants we are going to have to stick together to hold our own.

That's a really deliberate coalition forming isn't it? It was, it was blatant. Me this young person had no idea. But the problem for her was that I was David's field work student who met with him weekly and worked in the office sixteen hours a week so he's probably going to have a bit more influence over me. The hard thing for me, they have been at the church, they were my youth leaders and that, ... that was the hard transition when I came on staff even having to treat them as the people I have to lead. (Shane)

The ironic choice of the metaphor 'stick together', in this imperative reveals the already existing 'fusion' that this most anxious member attempts to retain. At the same time the youth pastor is finding that his new role requires a differentiation from his peers that he had not envisaged. Consequently, there is just as much conflict in the period of renewal. The distinction between the past and the present is that the leadership, staff and pastors stand firm against this type of determined opposition and that the terms of the conflict are brought out in the open through the political processes of the church business meetings.

There are three clear ways that the differentiated self of the new pastor affected the church system through proactive measures consciously taken. Firstly, David Ross deliberately sought his mandate to lead the church be clarified from the outset. He set about through open dialogue to capture the consensus of the church around a synthesis of the particular vision he brought to the church, while attempting to both unearth and resonate with its unique mission and values. His purpose was to give the church the ownership of their direction and the structural adjustments that went with this would then easily follow as a matter of sheer logic.

So we really took the whole church along with that and slowly you dug, slowly... In comes the leaders doing a lot of that and reforming the church. But in the beginning I wanted to get as many people on board with what we were doing as possible so we called a congregational meeting. And then of course people complained, and why we did that [was] that people go “Oh I wasn't involved in that!” “Well I am sorry we had a congregational meeting. You were invited. It was publicised. If you don't come well that's fine but ...” you know. And then the thing usually do I didn't do. What I did this time was then I get it voted on at a proper members meeting. So it now becomes what this church has decided on. Its not *my* mission, vision and values, because that's what the previous pastor had done, people saw it as his idea and they never owned it.

(David)

Unlike Doug Walker's era, the vision is not imposed upon them but voluntarily reached through dialogue. In other words, the new pastor presumes to treat the individual member as 'adults' in their own right in a democratic process that affirms the worth of their own values and sacred notions. Then on that basis he sought to align the practices of the ministries of the church with these. This takes a great deal of emotional maturity, as regardless of the outcomes of the decision making process, anxious members perceived this was not the usual manner of pastoral leadership they had come to expect. This became more of an issue for him as those loosely attached family members who did not agree with the consensus were left with few options but to either tolerate these logical implications or find more suitable spiritual homes.

There was a lot of, I feel I should mention in that Brigade thing. There was a lot of “That person is my friend” and so on. “So I am going to support them and show my disagreement by not coming to the church anymore.” And those people have gone to other churches somewhere else, they are not lost to the church altogether and they tried to say that this had been a long term thing, it wasn't just a rash quick

decision, maybe if it had been left to the end of year when staff changes anyway. I think it was one of those things that was going to happen. It was just a matter of when it was going to happen and I don't know perhaps if it was the wrong time or not but I think it is probably better done and out of the way in my mind, we can go on from here. (Gina)

Pastor Ross was aware that dominant figures would normally dominate business meetings. But a new structure of brainstorming and vision casting was not regarded as important to them. Being a firm advocate and able exponent of group processes, Pastor Ross effectively relativises the dis-empowering distance between these dominant persons and the average member and neutralizes their power to intimidate. Being strong for fair processes rather than desired outcomes is a differentiated response to political processing. It gives each member a chance to break the shackles of their emotional enmeshment while at the same time it did not make them dependent upon himself as another patriarch with an imposing vision.

Differentiation is called for a second way when the pastor is met with the reaction to his differentiated stand and his natural parental instincts are tested. We note though that some of the more anxious members, predicting the changes that are about to depose the existing equilibrium, attempt to thwart the process in the only way they can, by refusing to be a part of this new invitation to differentiation. Then when it is clear they cannot sabotage the mood and mode of the changes occurring they leave in protest. Allowing these people to leave without pursuing them went against his pastoral grain.

I think the difficulty is in the church, it is more difficult with me, I have tended to always back down. I think the Christian thing is to back down, the other person is always right and I should always give in. That that's the 'spiritual' thing to do and I

guess as a leader what I am trying to say is, “No this is not a personal issue with me. I’ve got to say what is good for the church.” And I have had to force myself what’s the mission, vision and values, what’s good for the church, not what’s good for me. What’s good for the church long term? And so is this behaviour if I allow this behaviour to keep happening, in this leader is that good for the church? If I allow this ‘anti’ feeling is that good for the church? If I allow this gossip to keep going is that good for the church? (David)

Conversely, allowing people to find their distance from the church is a matter of treating them as adults. We also note in passing that Pastor Ross’s theology is attributed to his tendency to avoid confrontations, not his inner anxieties. A new outlook then creates the situation whereby a strong principled self is called for. David recalls his thinking through the reaction to his stance and his reaction to the reaction. We notice below his sense of his own reactions having a shaping affect on the system.

We fought some pretty significant battles historically early on. Not so much raging battles but tests of resolve. ... The bottom line is you've got to choose your leaders. The hardest thing for a pastor is to let people go and don't, I used to chase them. I have had to bite my tongue and let them go. My natural bent would be that looks like you've failed. “Don't let them go. Compromise all you can to get them back on the team!” ... Bad mistake! If their heart is not there, if they are not committed to where they are going I don't care how much they love Jesus, they need to find somewhere where they are passionate about and are committed too. You've got to let them go. Otherwise what happens is, because some people will never be happy. So they don't like the service so you change the service for them. But they don't like what you've changed it to. So you change it again. And what happens is then those

who are really committed don't know what's going on because you keep changing everything for this grumpy bum. (David)

Thirdly, personal differentiation is shown as the pastor then brings about an accountability structure on behalf of the membership to which he is subject. Pastor Ross instigated a process of consultation leading to a new policy governance structure which had systemic health implications. For one thing it forced the church leadership to resolve the issue of deference in terms of exactly to whom the pastor was accountable as this recollected conversation with the leadership team indicates.

In the end you've got to decide who's responsible to lead this. If I am going to be held accountable at the end of my review for the results but I haven't led it, Mrs So and So's led it because she has complained, then let them also take the rap at the end. So in the end I say either you've called me to lead or, you've called Mrs So and So to lead. You just tell me. I do the same with the Board. I am happy to lead with the deacons or you lead. Like I can work for you. You just tell me what you want me to do this week, or if you've called me to lead let me set out a plan I will pass it by you. You affirm it, but back me up on it. I don't mind which way you go, but lets clarify it. If I'm the senior executive here, using that sort of term, then I am willing to work around the clock, do what has to be done to get this job done. However if I am working *for* you and you are calling the shots that's fine. I will do my forty hours and I will do just what you ask and I will go home and have a lovely time with my family. I don't mind which way just as long as I know. Which is it to be? ... It can't be both. ... You can't have responsibility without authority otherwise that's why you get frustrated, burnt out and drop out. So if the board or the church wants the authority that's fine. Lets have a meeting once a week, you decide, special

members meeting this Sunday, special members meeting next Sunday, that's fine, you make the decisions. (David)

As a result of this sort of discussion the board of elders and deacons therefore has willingly shifted to a role of defining explicit limitations upon his authority and set up a mutually agreeable process of ongoing review for Pastor Ross, rather than approve every decision he and the staff make. With these firm boundaries in place he has pressed against these with an enthusiasm in an expression of his inner vision and values. This in turn has generated a positive commitment to ministry by the many knowing they too, are given a similar authority for their own sphere of ministry. Also we should notice that these three differentiated acts have moral and pragmatic motivations rather than thinking in terms of systemic health and dissipation of reactivity. This narrative suggests that there is an interconnected chain reaction of a differentiated self, the new system parent, making principle driven changes in the political structures of the church which, in turn does not so much change the level of differentiation of the followers, so much as create space whereby committed individuals may express their inner values. They can 'differentiate' themselves, without the hindrance of other structures that are normally inhabited and manipulated by the highly anxious. It takes parental differentiation to make space for maturation of the family.

At the same time as the willing took their chance to commit to the new church structures, the well rehearsed reactions of former system parents formed a pattern to resist the system change through a second wave of triangulation, gossip and distortion. Other long-term members not directly involved interpret the major issue not as a resistance to, or, sabotage of authority but simply as a human inability to handle the either the fact or the rate of change.

Eventually, not straight away – some people actually saw it as not a good thing because they wanted, you know the ministries that they were involved in they wanted them to run the way they wanted them to run and they didn't want to fit in with a church plan. And that's what David was really trying to get was that everyone was going in the same direction. We wouldn't have this little group who had their own little thing going on here. It was aiming for a particular goal over here and another little group here but everyone was the same goal, the same vision. You could do it differently in different groups because there were all different types of ministries but it was all focused in the same place. ... It was a time of fear too in that people were worried that their particular organization might be wiped, that they might not fit into the vision and so there was fear. ... I think the change fear was fairly big. People don't like change in anything and this was a fairly dramatic change ... they most probably thought "Yes, this is going to get worse!" you know – I think they thought "If we are vocal enough and if we get enough support behind us this man might go!" and they tried very hard. I think they felt that "He was not called to be here. This is our church and he has no right to come and make these changes to our church!" But it was still only the minority – but a very, very strong minority – families who had been in the church for 20 years who had leadership roles. I just don't think they could handle the change really, or, just didn't want to accept the change. (Larry)

Conversations regarding this second wave reactive period inevitably turned to the Brigades leader Elsie Crocket. Other pastors and deacons had avoided the encounter with Elsie and some regretted never 'solving that one' (Shane). Her own family emotional field and the distortions within it had been overlaid upon the church for more than twenty years. Again the family systems notion of interconnected emotional fields is evident here. One of her contemporaries, a present member of the board shared his experience of her family patterns and church political style:

I was warned 20 years ago, it would've been 20 years ago, watch that lady. Her mother was an absolute same thing, disaster. Doug said she had a reputation for having a wicked tongue and it took 20 years for it to come to a head basically and that lady wasn't talking to her mum or dad. She wouldn't talk to any of her siblings. She had five children and all of them had moved in and out of home. They would come home and stay when they were absolutely desperate and they would go again as soon as they could. And their youngest daughter who was 20 at the time, same age as our daughter, and she actually said to [our daughter] in the midst of all this, because [her son and daughter] were in the same year, said "We know what our mother is like. We have an understanding in our house that when we know mum's lying, dad just winks at us and says "It's okay. Just back off I know she is lying." (Sandra)

Similar dysfunctional avoidance had become a symptom of the culture of the wider church family for the previous generation. As family systems theory predicts, the emotional field of the family of origin and family of faith overlap. But a significant mood change had occurred across the church whereby Elsie now would be called to account by a more differentiated leadership team, pastors and diaconate than ever before. The same deacon, a contemporary of Elsie's, recalls the struggles that the leaders individually and corporately have had to confront. But his reasoning for this has to do with new Biblical insights more than a surge of emotional maturity.

There was certainly a lot of conflict going on in that time and it has taught me the value of Matthew 18. It taught me the value of passive leadership. ... I mean passive leadership in the diaconate at that time. We have as Christians a thought that to be a spiritual man we have to be long suffering, gracious to everybody. We cannot 'upset the apple cart'. We don't want to instigate conflict, anything that went on was not

resolved and got pushed under the carpet, a lot of that sort of stuff. And I think we have been taught from David and not only from David but he has pushed us to educate ourselves how to do ministry and by reading books, by going to conferences, by having people in to talk, just educating us more about the value of leadership. And Matthew 18 I think that has been his biggest, let's walk in the light with one another, let's deal with conflict as it comes along and don't let it fester, ... straight onto it. (Gary)

One notices that a change in understanding the fundamentals of the faith in some ways arms these leaders in a way that former 'passive' thinking thwarted their thoughts of confrontation. This principled discipline of the malicious member does not prevent the anxious sabotage from then moving into a more frantic key, in the form of scurrilous rumours concerning an alleged affair between Pastor Ross and the administrator. Then, in terms reminiscent of the exit of Pastor Friedman, a false version of events was circulated to a range of members and those parents connected with the brigades. Right to the last, and undaunted, the leadership presented the facts of the matter to the public sphere of the church meeting without fear of the discomfort that may have meant for either Elsie or her fellow disgruntled members. Anxiety becomes more and more diffuse in its targets. Those that cannot be enmeshed, like Shane the youth pastor, also become victims of gossip and triangulation.

He [David] had to be very, very strong. I admired him for his stand in a lot of times you know in church meetings when he had to stand up and be honest with people and you know not necessarily mention peoples names but they knew that he had to say something to them. ... It was very much a refining process, a painful one in that he and the church had to go through and people were sifted out and if it meant losing some of the backbone of the church, they move on, then it was a necessary thing and ... So that you were left with people who would support their pastor and who were

with him. Young guys like [Youth] Pastor Shane Wooten, you know. He went through a horrific time from some of these people who were against David and they vented it against Shane as well, young guy, a year into his ministry it was really bad.

(Gary)

The results of this refusal to be intimidated by covert politics have been largely positive except where members have chosen to accept Elsie's version of events. Soft-hearted bystanders, closer to Elsie through years of shared church life, find themselves caught up by the swell of Elsie's fury and being less motivated by larger principle and more swayed by emotion become critical of the leadership firm line. These members now make up the majority of the first morning service that has been allowed to perpetuate.

I think they really are ... hoping the whole new structure will collapse. And the silly thing is, is that if you talk to any of them none of them would want to be where we were five years ago but for some of them it has to do with there was hurt and misinformation that they think bad things have been done and because of that they still see that that affects the whole thing, taints the whole thing, then it all must be bad. Although, they are the ones who are enjoying the fruit of our new day. (Shane)

Again we note that right alongside the change in systemic health is the vital contribution of a change of faith perspective. A few of the respondents cited that the pastor preached a recent sermon entitled 'Moses is Dead'. It was specifically geared to those caught up in the second round of enmeshment inviting these folk to take a fresh principled view of the church. In systems terms the rhetoric of the sermon was to lay the 'ghost- parent' figure of Clarie Friedman, the Mosaic symbol, to rest and call for a free decision to work collaboratively in the transcending mission God has given Red Hill people at this time.

We can tell you who have come post Dave's arrival and who came pre Dave's arrival by how painful they are to work with or not. We can draw a line down the middle almost. For those who have realised it, 'Moses is dead' and have moved on then they start to form up on one side but those who are still stuck in the old ways and probably still feel that our church services shouldn't be open to outsiders and should be family only are painful, not only have a different opinion but are painful.

(Shane)

The youth pastor then recounted how some of the former sub leaders in the Brigades who were canvassing their impending exit from the membership changed their mind after this word.

A pervasive culture of trust has replaced the former fearful triangulation that affected the mood of the church.

I say leadership I say the board and the staff have a much better, higher degree of credibility I guess. We've worked fairly hard at our processing meetings for example, business meetings are pretty dull these days which is good, from the view of controversy and, we've spent four years really working towards no surprises so that when stuff comes to the members meeting you know it's been documented, it's been researched, motions are in writing, they are given out before the meeting, all those sorts of things, which means that there is sort of less volatility in the meeting.

(Len)

Like the pastoral staff so also the board members have more courage to confront unethical acts. As the theory would predict, the 'most anxious members' of the family system had to

adjust to a new lack of reactivity in the office bearers' response to their threats, ultimatums and complaints.

The level of active commitment and initiative has grown it would appear as a direct result of the trust invested in staff and ministry leaders to set their own goals, the consistent follow through from the trust that Pastor Ross has been accorded. Giving has quadrupled and other indicators would show that the passivity of the Douglas Walker era is no longer a problem. The following are indicators of commitment to the mission of the church.

So this year we reflected back on our vision last year, so we had some goals last year, 80% in ministry, so we have so many in small groups so we have 60% of our members in small groups and we've had 35 baptisms and here are the names of all those baptised and our goal is so many members in ministry, well here are the names of 224 people in ministry – And what is really encouraging now is that we have the growth in the young people, the night services is the biggest service now and the way they are getting trained and the culture they are coming into is totally different to what we came into. (David)

The critical feature in the enhancement of the functioning of the system is the confluence of several streams: political legitimation of leadership, the strategic leadership of the pastor and the differentiation of the leadership team now supportive of the pastor while maintaining their critical independence. Eventually, despite the loss of nearly thirty-five members the outcome has been remarkably transformational for the well being of the whole church as an emotional system. It seems in this church that the level of emotional maturity has in fact grown in an aggregate sense.

Dave has actually led the church significantly in saying it is okay to leave, we will love you as you leave, because there was probably after two years there was still people significantly upset with change. And it was obvious that the leadership was backing David and the changes that he had made and it was obvious that they were good healthy changes because people were coming to know the Lord. We weren't so inward focused and we are not looking at our belly buttons and actually making disciples which was a change in my mind from the last ten years, because we have just been reactive not proactive. (Len)

The family systems dynamics are evident here. A healthy emotional system has enabled the cherished goals of the church to bear healthy fruit, become more conscious of their environment while not being so enmeshed that they pursue those who wish to change the system to their own liking through their threats and decisions to leave.

As a Narrative of Family Systems dynamics, Red Hill's rise fall and rise could be constructed around this simplified plot.

- (i) *Over Functioning Patriarch fosters Rigid System:* Clarie's strengths and habitual manipulation eventually find him out as he cannot function effectively as a patriarch and build a strong supportive structure. 'Adult children' once no longer dependent, finally stand against this patriarchal parent to defend one of their own, their associate pastor and find renewed energy in making firm directions and convictions as 'adult parents'.
- (ii) *Enmeshed Under-functioning Family:* The theory cannot explain the regression away from this display of differentiation in the next era. It seems the backlog of Clarie's parenting and Douglas Walker's frustration allows the rise of the aspirant Russel and the influx of members with highly conditional attachment to the family

and highly rigid expectations of pastor and church. Thus Douglas Walker is never able to become 'adult parent' but many members are still enmeshed with Clarie Friedman and at best he can be 'adult child'. His position in the system is not helped by the political manoeuvring of Russel Norris who would like to become 'family parent' but is not recognized as such by the other adult children and parents in the leadership.

- (iii) *Refounding Differentiation:* Pastor David Ross through open processes calls forth and enshrines the commitments of the church family in the new pattern of church policy making. While accomplished through a democratic vote that dis-empowers system matriarchs, the collaborative processes of deciding fundamental direction not only helps unleashes the collaborative power of the leadership it also serves to awaken the reactivity and sabotage of the highly anxious.
- (iv) *Highly Functioning Inter-Connected System:* More flexibility is possible once the system is functioning and parent figures are legitimated. The highly anxious members have now departed, still enmeshed in their displeasure over the changes. There is some secondary reactivity then from those who were somewhat enmeshed with the members who left

As a heuristic device, family systems theory tends to have a high degree of explanatory coherence with the turns of the plot. Enmeshed and patriarchal 'parent' figures breed enmeshed and anxious 'families'. Differentiated nurturing parents breed adult children with a propensity for interdependent cooperation and low anxiety while the reactivity of the most anxious members indicate the former dysfunctional homeostatic balance has been disturbed.

However, there are three qualifications that this story demonstrates. Systemic health is also interconnected in a non-linear fashion with three other themes: character virtues, structural change and theological perspective. The wilful and unethical power broking in the plots shows key actors opportunistically seeking their own advantage when the pastorate is vacated and again when the new political structures are first tested. These brokers of power seem to be acting out of drives that have more to do with a sense of entitlement and pre-rational internal issues rather than just the dispelling and reactivity of the highly anxious member. The political processes are not left dormant but provide the means to curb such issues and a new theology of the pastoral role provides the moral justification. Consequently, one would say that while Bowen family theory provides a high coverage of the narrative, its status as an explanatory model is not exhaustive.

Conclusion: Evaluating the Interpretive Power of a Family Systems Perspective

We can now evaluate how well Bowen Family Systems theory performs as an illuminator of the church dynamics reflected in the narratives. The critical two variables to discern as far as this theory is concerned are ‘differentiation’ and ‘closeness’. Closeness is relatively more straightforward to discern within contrasting accounts of the patterns and habits of fellowship. Stories of care and reconciliation are easily identified. Differentiation is a more fluid variable to discern and depends upon the content of the narrative plots. The differentiation of the pastor associated with the most positive change is reflected in a variety of ways depending on the contours of the particular situation. This has to do with displaying the capacity to not compromise their essential values and beliefs in contexts that may reject their self-offerings. The self-expression of the pastor is mentioned at Carinia Downs. Courage to confront disorderly members and fellow leaders is the case at Ivy Street and Red

Hill especially and in fact in all churches analysed. It would appear that change agents have a relatively high capacity to handle their anxiety especially within conflict situations.

One difficulty we have with this lens is there is no objective measure of the differentiation of a leader or follower as it is a personal quality of the individual in relationship. We can only surmise such issues on the basis of narrated evidences concerning leaders who act in ways that either maintain their convictions while remaining in contact with those who oppose them or otherwise. It is simpler to deduce changes that have occurred within the system from the appearance or removal of symptoms associated with dysfunction or healthy relationships between leaders and followers, system 'parents' and 'children' respectively.

Explanatory Power of the Theory For Narrative Development

As the previous analysis has demonstrated Family Systems theory has a mixed capacity to drive each narrative in a meaningful way. This has been inferred on the basis of a separate reading of each church systemic narrative. If the theory is sufficient it should be able to explain in a connected way the development of the plot line of each narrative and the reactions of the main characters around which the narrative revolves.

The periods in church life that display conflict, rigidity and decline are associated with unhealthy parenting or enmeshment with members in each situation. These are often figures with a particularly obvious leadership trait like the three dysfunctional parenting styles of patriarchy, matriarchy, or autonomism and set the church climate. And in all but one instance, Carinia Downs, these figures are reluctant to relinquish their position within the system. This results in high-level conflict that affects the larger proportion of the church

family. Therefore the change in health within these systems was not due to a change in the operation of the 'parents' own levels of anxiety but due to the change of pastors and or leaders who prove themselves as differentiated parents within the systems. Consequently, in all other cases, the negative influence of highly anxious parent figures with dysfunctional styles arise during the periods of church life during which there is a quick turnover of pastors or a pastoral absence. These figures uniformly oppose key initiatives proposed by the Pastors or make initiatives very awkward to enact.

Family systems theory would make a causal connection between the differentiation of the pastor and leader families and that of the larger church. If they share the same emotional field, disruptions in one family would disturb balances in the other. There is not enough to suggest that the anxiety from the biological family was spilling over into the church family in any causal sense. That is a direction of causality that is not ripe within the memory of the narrators. Nor is there any evidence that the pastors or leaders by resolving issues within their own biological families released tensions and anxieties from within their church families. On the contrary, some stories show that there is a changing of the major figures that could well have served the system's homeostatic interests as 'parental child figures'; that is, to be leaders by name but not in order of deference to strong figures who resisted the changes. Thus the theory may explain that the health of the system is not as total as may have been indicated by the renewed morale of the church system; anxiety being shared disproportionately and dispensed beyond the boundaries of the church.

Fourthly, in terms of Richardson's four quadrants, systemic change is always towards the more ideal system where people are both connected yet differentiated. However sometimes there is a loss of closeness as a result of the freedom brought by the new era. In

Carinia Downs, people are more discerning as to what church events they attend and their friendships now range more widely into the local culture and its institutions. In Ivy Street again the spirit of loyalty forged by being the remnant of a split is diluted by an individualism that exploits the new freedom to differentiate. Less enmeshment may result in less loyalty. Conversely, Red Hill² has shown a rejuvenated commitment to the church and its ministries as an essential commitment. A greater connectedness and ownership of responsibility has arisen shown in both budgets and creative risk taking ventures.

Finally, there is a confirmation of the theory in a couple of churches where the ascent and acceptance of a new pastor in the 'adult parent role' corresponds with the ultimate laying to rest of the influence of a 'grandparent' or 'ghost-parent'. That is, the influence of the pastor associated with the last peak period of the church no longer serves as a critical icon in the church member's consciousness. Neither do the forms and ministry strengths of those eras linger on as restrictions upon the forms of the present. This is the case with both Ivy Street and Max Grover's influence and Red Hill with Clarie Friedman's influence as 'ghost parents' or grandparents now outside the system.

Areas not as clearly addressed by the theory

It is clear that some of the stories show communities that were defeated by their own assumptions and external cultural issues that directly affected the manner of interaction and the church's viability. Carinia Downs people assume that since religious allegiance issues have been sorted out they should keep faithful to their 'religious camp' rather than infiltrate the wider community in any overt way. Disturbance within Ivy street would not be as severe

² This was strongly evident at the fourth church Petersham where a strong contingent of members now enrolls for ministry training on a semi-regular basis.

were there not high levels of paranoia concerning the insidious nature of the charismatic movement.

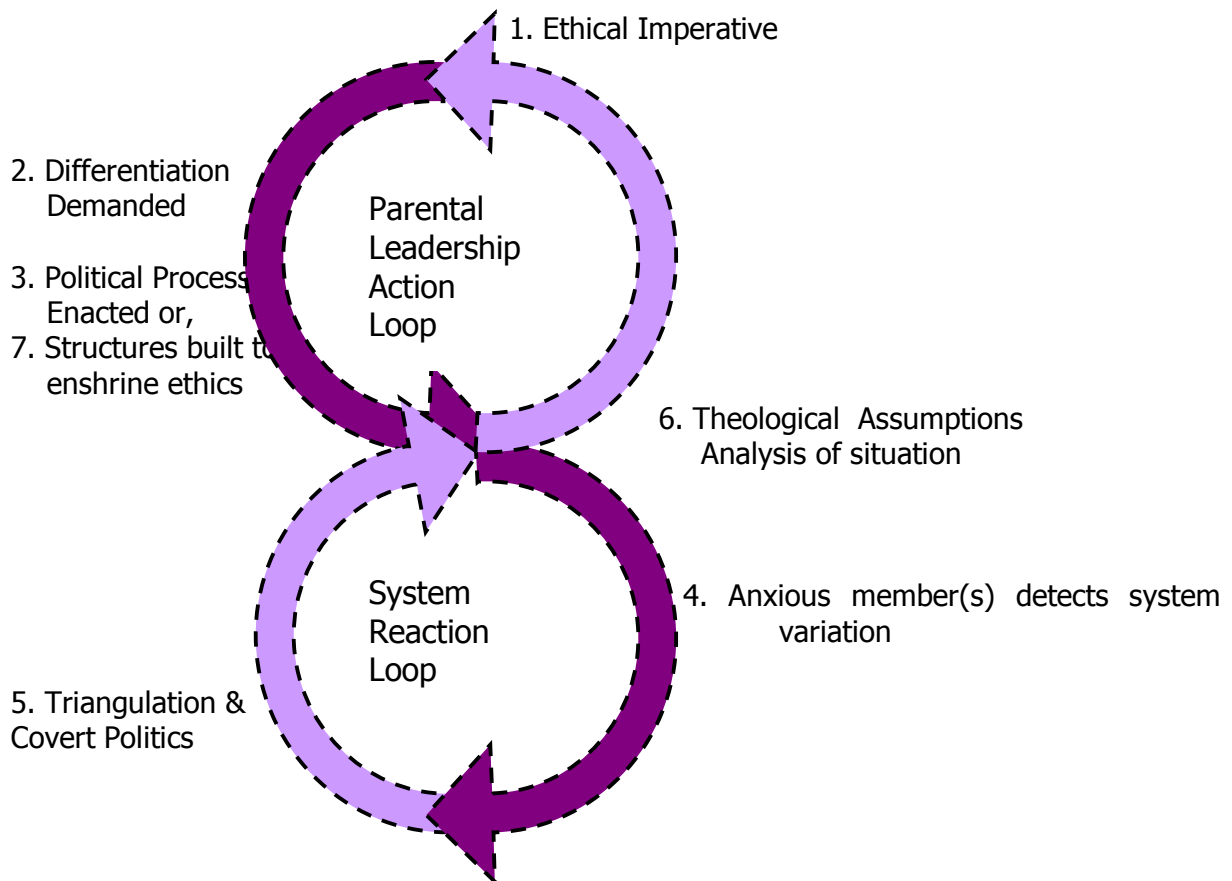
It is also clear that theological perspectives are in fact critical to the narratives. The absence of personal spirituality allows Graeme Mcleish to build in a missional theology on a 'tabula rasa'.³ One would have to dispense with a significant portion of the narrative were we to presume along with Friedman and Bowen that 'the issue is not the issue' but a pretext for interpersonal relationship changes. These issues are explored more adequately under the eye of the cultural lens which, in the next chapter detects linkages between social arrangements and ideology.

In conclusion, while it is evident that system change requires significant emotional maturity of the agent, it is too simplistic to conceive of the great turn-around that happens here simply being due to the capacity of the differentiated calm selves of the leaders to serve the lowering of anxiety within the system. Churches are less evenly composed, and incidents and actions more critical to the narratives of change than mere foils for the roles they play as 'parents' to the system. It is better to see that family systems health and flexibility increases in positive eras. But a closer view of these narratives would see that differentiation of parents and members does not 'cause' the positive upturn although there is a relationship evident. Correlation even theoretically speaking, does not prove cause but may imply a mutual dependence, a co-linearity, upon deeper causal variables. These stories indicate that there is a non-linear interconnectedness between systemic health, differentiation and closeness, the political structures of the group, and the theological outlook of the leaders and the people in within the church system. A double loop arrangement is proposed to demonstrate the

³ Likewise the charismatic non-charismatic polarities provide the continual undergirding of the conflict inside the fifth church, Forrest Hill.

relationships between such interconnected issues.

The top loop shows a sequence of deliberate leadership actions and the bottom the systemic reactions to these.



The narratives serve to show something of this interconnectedness as the first phase of the loop. The introduction of a new pastor into the old situation brings with it a relatively integrated ethical outlook (point 1) that evaluates the situation theologically or morally. Having sufficient emotional detachment, (point 2) enables them to begin to fulfil their leadership role marked out in political actions so (point 3), that are called forth by the state of the system and the prior theological convictions. But this sets off a reactive loop of anxiety, (point 4) enacted by habits of triangulation, (point 5), and other forms of anxious political reaction. This is a retarding cycle aiming to work against the changes enacted by the leaders.

In reaction to this the leaders firstly interpreting the meaning of these reactions theologically (point 6), and for their ethical implications, rationally devise or strengthen the processes and structures to deal with these within the political boundaries permitted by the church polity (point 7).

Systems which dis-empower or disregard the former power of anxious and significant system parents set off a second wave of reactivity in the wider scope of those who are enmeshed by the initially dis-empowered anxious members. Being differentiated selves, the leaders proactively utilize the new structures that, in turn, call for a differentiated leadership to see these enacted. However, this sets of a second wave of reactivity, a more difficult reactive cycle with which to contend. Differentiation is therefore required not only to induce change but to capitalize upon and stabilize any gains made toward a more healthy pattern of relationships.

Therefore, a sole reliance upon family systems analysis to grasp the complexity of community change is a reductionist move. If one removes the ethical, structural and theological elements from the model the system analysis itself would not generate the polarities and powerful dynamics that are generated with great resonance effect around the systemic changes. Later chapters will seek to add clarity to this hypothesis as we aim to discern the weight of play given by the narratives to cultural and internal psychodynamic issues.