

Chapter 1: Symbols of Dysfunction, Strategies for Renewal

The Direction of the Study

This research seeks to understand the nature of renewal of church communities that were once in decline. When speaking of a church as declining stagnant or, in some sense dysfunctional, the implication is that the particular community functions in a manner that contradicts what the church could or should be as Christ's sign that the New Creation has dawned. To use a more 'secular' parlance, some churches that the nature of the human interrelationships, the climate or culture of the particular group is distressing to its members and not conducive to human well-being and relational potential. These exhibit a lack of vitality and persist without sign of freshness, openness to change, flexibility and hope. Some go so far to describe this as a malaise that is a feature of churches in this current culture (Capps: 1990).

One could easily assume that all churches eventually reach a point of unavoidable stagnation or decline if it were not for the fact that, at the same time, there are churches that move beyond the period of distress or decline and take on a new positive climate, begin growing again, attracting new members across their boundaries. Such churches provide an opportunity to learn about both the meaning and nature of dysfunctionality and also of the processes through which the culture of such churches changes. The primary concern of this research is to see what these types of communities can tell us about the process of constructive change and the sources of decline. Those who minister within these churches as pastors or interventionists, would then have some insights through which to understand the nature of cultural rejuvenation and their role in congregational renewal. If the church cannot learn from such experiences then we are left with accepting that either decline is somehow the inevitable outcome of some underlying law of social entropy, or that renewal is incomprehensible and accidental. It is hoped that such an

investigation may supply some insights for those who seek to bring a greater health or wholeness to the communities in their charge. One does not have to accept decline as inevitable.

The Context of the Investigation

This investigation seeks to address these questions by attempting to understand such phenomena through the experience of churches with a recent history of decline followed by a renewal period. The churches are selected from amongst volunteer communities from the Baptist Union churches from four states: New South Wales, Queensland, South Australia and Victoria. The executives of these associations were approached with a view to being able to access this type of church through their official media. I have a history of access to such churches having been an ordained pastor within four of these associations and having held teaching, committee or consultancy roles within the three state denominations. Being familiar with the general culture of these denominations and known, at least by name, to many members of these churches made access straightforward. Nine churches responded and another pastor offered his church as a research subject through direct contact.

Apart from similar historical origins and comparable doctrinal positions, the most common feature of these churches is that they are congregational in government and evangelical with regard to the shared convictions of the members. While there are denominational office bearers and central departments which the individual church can access, the churches are each judicially autonomous and define their own faith commitments rather than conforming uniformly to a particular historical creed. Such autonomy means they rely upon their own internal competence and political systems to resolve conflict or to change directions. There is no higher court of appeal to which such churches or disgruntled individual members may appeal so as to overturn decisions. This is a critical structural factor for this research inasmuch as the processes

of positive change have come from the interpersonal dynamics within the individual church rather than the interventions of external denominational judiciaries.

However, the feature of being autonomous makes generalizations very difficult regarding the actual functioning and belief system of these churches. Even denominational allegiance is a tenuous feature of church membership and it would be rare to find any member with an awareness of the historical origins of the Baptist movement even when denominational connections are strong. While beliefs and ecclesial values would be derived from interpretations of New Testament patterns, the doctrinal positions of these churches range from liberal, through charismatic enthusiastic to a reformed style. Relative to many other protestant churches, the official structures of power and politics within them are quite flat vertically. Pastors exercise what leadership they can as a trust invested in them upon their appointment by the membership. In theory at least, political power is accorded equally to all members, although normal interpersonal dynamics dictate the actual distribution within each church.

Membership requirements may vary from church to church, but nonetheless, it is a formalized conscious choice of the member that is acknowledged formally by the membership of the particular church. These churches are constituted formally and that involves adherence to a shared faith and a shared responsibility to the particular community. Membership is formally conferred upon the member and the pastor alike by the community upon the confession of faith and profession of an intention to make the particular community one's 'spiritual home'.

This distinguishes these sorts of churches from those where the ecclesiology implies a priestly or ontological distinction between leaders and members. Trust is delegated by the whole membership to the leader rather than legitimated from other sources including the divine realm. Leadership is an acquired rather than an ascribed honour and Pastoral ordination usually is not

seen to confer special graces or separate privileges beyond the preaching of the word and administration of the ordinances and pastoral care of the congregation. It is increasingly the case that managerial competencies are expected of these pastors in the current climate that emphasizes an expectation of growth or other results-based pragmatics.

The members of such communities as a group and as individuals have then a legitimate capacity to affect their own church culture in a way that moderates the influence of any one individual leader or pastor. Pastors and church leaders in such groups have little formal authority to command change or coerce compliance from the membership compared with those from churches with a priestly ecclesiology. And yet, the stories compiled from these churches major upon the impact of the pastors role as the main characters in the narratives. This makes the impact of a pastor who provokes such an egalitarian voluntary community toward positive change all the more significant. By hearing the experiences and interpretations of the participants first-hand we aim to clarify the nature of such dynamics.

Presuppositions Beneath the Interpretive Processes

All these ways of thinking bear common 'social constructionist' presuppositions (Hatch: 1997, 42). That is, they presume there is indeed a reality behind the presented stories from a particular church situation which lies encrypted in the symbolic form of the narrative even though the language used to interpret the specifics of the culture themselves has a role in shaping it and bringing it into being. Furthermore, as a research paradigm, this socially constructed 'reality' may be discerned, albeit imperfectly, by an external observer. Whether community behaviour takes the form of emotional enmeshment, neurotic thinking and behaviour, or strong and persistent values, there is a belief in these lenses that the community life makes sense at some level and can be distilled or summarized in simplified communicable form that captures the essence of the complex reality of church culture if not its totality.

A range of alternative approaches that stem from postmodern presuppositions is also possible line of inquiry. Deconstructive techniques highlight the unique, irrational and paradoxical nature of human interactions rather than seeking rational or integrated explanation. Such approaches are more concerned to analyse the construction of the texts of narratives and the researcher vested interests rather than the content itself (Parker: 1992). The critical questions of who gets to tell these stories, and for whose benefit were they told, highlight a different set of features within the data as such lenses open one's eyes to the hidden power dynamics within these groups by virtue of who tells the stories as much as their content. Postmodern organizational research cautions the researchers to reflexively be aware of their own assumptions taken into the culture. If taken to an extreme such a philosophy of investigation disavows the researcher's privilege of bringing any experience of their own in the terms of a community of explanatory variables to the data in order to interpret what is driving the phenomenon of church change under the surface. In this view, the only reality is the existential reality of the subject at the surface of the culture. Such analysis not only tells us about the realities within a unique organization, but whose definitions of 'reality' matter. According to postmodern organization theorists, they can enshrine the prevailing myth of those who broker the power (Boje: 1995, 999) or, they can be told to critique or subvert the exercise of power by authorities when told by those who are victims within the system (Gabriel: 1995, 485).¹ They are told to define success and

¹ The issue of moral evaluation is critical to postmodern approach to organizational analysis (Kilduff: 1993, Boje: 1991,1995, Elmes: 1997, Wendt: 1998, Hardy, Palmer & Phillips 2000). Such analysis employs a narrative approach by detecting the 'shadow' or unofficial and unstructured side of the organization. Here however, the focus is not solely upon the plausibility of the story produced in interview or official documents as would be the case with a deconstructive approach to such data. Such an approach also looks beyond the function of the stories to ask questions regarding who is characterized as hero or villain, who is given voice and who is not. Deconstructionist considerations can discipline the hearer of stories or reader of official 'artifacts', ensuring the outsider/analyst is not swayed too easily by one-side recollections. Such an approach relies on sensitivity to 'dualities' in the stories. These theorists believe that such analysis can reveal a disparity of power between leaders and followers, the status quo and the dis-empowered. In terms of narrative methodology the postmodern perspective is not uniform. There has been a vigorous debate about how to move from stories to theories in recent years (Tushman and Romanelli: 1986, Whetten and Myung: 1987, Dyer and Wilkins: 1991, Eisenhardt: 1989 & 1991, Orbuch: 1997, Van de Ven and Poole: 1995, Pentland: 1999). The major importance of this here is to realize that a researcher attempting qualitative analysis needs to be able to bracket out their own theoretical bias so as to ground the theory richly in the

failure, to evaluate criteria and allow a variety of language games that define what has the right to be said and who has the right to say it in the particular culture.

The epistemological preference of this thesis is to pursue the meaning of these story events at a rational level, rather than immediately assume that the realities communicated were merely constructions of the subjects bearing no relationship to any shared reality beyond these. It is a modernistic approach inasmuch as we here presume that a multiple perspective approach could supply deeper insights into the experience of church decline and renewal and somehow explain what was happening for the subjects within these times. As a consequence of this presupposition, data gathering methods are required which are compatible with and highlight the human origins of the meanings through which people experience their church worlds but allow also for the subjects to be able to construct their own theoretical explanations of their experiences.

Being 'interpretivist' in its style, this starting point presumes that group behaviour may indeed be understood in terms of structures and forces that underlie the unique experiences of community change. It proceeds on the 'critical realistic' (Kraft:1994, 28) basis that despite the imperfect knowledge of the researcher, human experiences are not so unique that they cannot be shared and communicated and become sources of learning. Theories and models constructed by both researcher and story-teller, (story telling being in itself a form of sense-making), while inadequately representing the world of the events from which they come, refer to and resonate with patterns and events that are not only in the mind of the subject. If one's interests are to

full texture of the narrative data. Yet, if one wants to avoid the deconstructionist position that views each situation as unique and exists only upon the surface of the existential level, then some 'middle ground' analysis is needed whereby the underlying structures within the narratives may be identified and preliminary comparisons made across the cases presented so as to heighten this very uniqueness. A narrative itself as with an explanation of what occurs within it, is itself a theory about the process of change. The postmodern approach is suspicious of attributing explanation to unobservable subsurface processes whether these are based on any theoretical cultural, or psychological processes. However, one can value the experiences of others without having to assume the position that reality is disconnected, meaningless, or, superficial.

comprehend the experience of these churches then one must press beneath of surface of unique particulars so as to discern or produce models of deeper underlying causes acting as generating motors for the surface narratives. If theory generation is to occur rather than pure postmodern description, there is a necessary trade off that must occur between focusing on the particulars and making broader comparisons.

The way one ensures that the experience of the subject is respected then, is not so much to dwell on its uniqueness as to let the data suggest which theoretical explanations and concepts may be brought into dialogue with the data to explain to the plots discerned in the stories. In the research that follows, not only are the 'organizational stories' read through a selection of such lenses, but the lenses have in turn to be critiqued by the stories as to the adequacy of their ability to capture the ebbs and flows of the overall plot of decline and renewal. The issue of 'research validity' has to do with whether we can expect the analysis of stories to enable one to discern the cultural and interpersonal dynamics that pervade the experience of church for the interview subjects.

Data Collection

Each church community is treated as a unique human culture. Such an awareness privileges the perspectives of the participants who live through all the times of pain, change and present renewal of their community life. With this in mind, I approached these denominations in three states to allow me access to churches whose recent history would loosely fit into a plot line of a period of dysfunction, or depression, then positive change and new vitality. Advertisements appeared in their denominational newsletters or pastors' web sites. As a result, eleven churches were willing to participate in my research whose pastors felt they fitted the requirements of the brief advertisement. When the pastors of such churches were approached, it was found that ten of these actually fitted the description. Nine of these churches then were able to find volunteers

besides their pastors from amongst their memberships who were willing to take a part in interviews.

Over a period of two and a half years, I visited the individual volunteers of the nine churches and conducted interviews with each. The churches supplied between seven and twelve volunteers each. I also visited the churches in various capacities on several occasions at a variety of its worship times where I was able to engage in informal conversation with the members. In all but two of these churches, prior to the research, I had been able to serve within denominational capacities making a contribution at a level of planning, training, participating in church camps or, having numerous conversations in person and by phone with the pastors. This involvement enabled me later on to identify the various characters shared in the various stories and to sense the distinctives of culture and climate and mood within each church in the present era. Two of the churches, Ivy Street and Carinia Downs allowed me also to witness focus group discussions around the themes of the distinctive values of the church and share their recollected history. Others did not permit this as it was either not a convenient moment in their church life, or, they had recently asked much of their membership for the sake of strategic planning activities. In the case of Ivy Street, Carinia Downs Circuit and Red Hill, I was able to interview the pastors several times over these years to clarify details as the stories emerged from the fragments shared by others. This exercise also generated a clearer description of finer grain details in stories alluded to beforehand, as well as extending the history of the recent era into the present.

Two churches were despite the selection criteria found to be in a serious decline phase. Their members were willing to be interviewed, in one case because they envisaged closing and dissipating in the next months, which in fact occurred. All interview candidates in all churches were sent a letter of endorsement from my research supervisor that had met with the approval of

the appropriate ethical committee of the Flinders University as well as a similar sample letter to be given to individual participants. I requested them to seek out volunteers who had been in their church over the last couple of pastorates, both through lean times and the present positive period. Most complied with this request and only on the rare occasion was the interview candidate was ignorant of the major period of decline and renewal having been too recent to be privy to such information. It was insisted in each case that the sample not be chosen but be a random collection of self-selecting volunteers.

The Initial Approach

As the arranged time for my visit to the district or city in which the church was drawing near I received the names and phone numbers of the candidates who had volunteered. I arranged a time to meet with each one at their chosen location, usually their own home, and again used this occasion to build a relational bridge with them, assure them of my bona fides as a genuine researcher, and assure them that their opinions would be received in the strictest confidence. I sent each some guide questions in advance to help focus the conversation when we met. These questions were distributed within two weeks prior to each meeting. I stressed to each candidate that these were only suggested ways to enter into the process of recollection and that I was not specifically looking for them to research these issues, nor should they feel bound to answer any of them. What was more important to me were the issues they believed were significant as typical incidents or turning points in the tide of events in their experience of their particular church membership. Nonetheless, in many cases, particularly with longstanding older members, many had compiled notes and historical time lines which they referred to when we came together. In any event I found that these guides were more than effective in prompting those responding to effectively touch upon the most vital memories and feelings associated with their time in the church. Once they began their story telling all candidates very quickly began to

cover the areas suggested in the prompt questions and well beyond. The questions I supplied each candidate in advance were as follows:

- (i) What are the most significant 'turning points' or pivotal events that have happened in recent years that make your church what it is today?
- (ii) Can you tell me of any incidents that were major challenges to the church or, its leadership in recent times, coming up to or during the present pastorate?
- (iii) Have there been any issues over which the people here have disagreed with each other or over which there has been long standing or protracted debate? Have these conflicts been solved satisfactorily or only superficially?
- (iv) Has your faith helped you to frame or understand what was happening here at the church during those times? Or, How if at all do you see God is at work here? What did you think God was about during the crisis times, if there were any such times? Has the way you or others think about God changed through this period to which you refer?
- (v) Are there any incidents that you still find it difficult to comprehend even now?

Questions 1 and 2 allow the church member to focus upon the 'safer' recollected history of the church in their experience, while questions 2 and 3 tend to open the possibility of recalling incidents which may have been more anxiety inducing to do with the church leadership when it was stretched beyond its normal 'run of the mill' regular ministry responsibilities. Members who had not served upon the leadership team usually had a less detailed recollection of such issues and relied more upon hearsay or church folklore. This in itself is interesting as it shows the perpetuation and penetration of the story telling throughout the church life. Question 3 is a

critical question however, since conflict itself indicates moments within group life when the identity and aspirations of the group are at stake.

Question 4 gave opportunity explicitly if the thought had not occurred, for the individual to engage in some level of theological reflection upon the stories, bringing God's role into the equation of church fall and renewal. Question 5 was devised as an outlet for the individual so they would not feel compelled to force an interpretation upon their experiences, especially when these may still be in process even after quite a number of years. This was to avoid prejudicing the nature of the culture described into an integrated framework when the reality for them may have been much more disjointed.

Initial Responses

As a rule, all respondents were able to move the conversation in the direction they desired and I rarely had to prompt them once they began. The exception was with the issue in question 4 where many found the initial question and the alternative ways I could express it difficult to engage. Most pastors and their spouses who participated were able to engage at this level but very few of the members. Most members who struggled with the task would eventually make some reference to the quality of the pastor's preaching over the years. This was usually identified as the closest thing they could think of to do with what I was asking.

The quality of the interviews varied greatly depending upon the closeness of the individual to the actual events that others showed had shaped the church. Most churches supplied eight to twelve interview candidates. However usually there were only six to eight whose recollections were from their own direct observations or who satisfied the criteria of being within the church both through its decline and renewal. The others were still of some value as their story telling indicated that there was a currency of stories that was still floating within the

church culture beyond those who were directly effected by the events. All candidates gave freely of their time and usually although only requested for a single fifty minute interview, all of the informed candidates pressed beyond the hour and over half of them wanted to talk for one hour and a half. After transcribing over eighty such interviews and completing the initial analysis of the composite narratives, it became clear that the sheer volume of data when transformed into a set of composite narratives was too great and the depth of analysis required for this exercise provided a multiplication of the data when processed at various levels. It was necessary to reduce the number of churches presented within the study.

Having constructed nine composite narratives, I eventually selected five churches to present here and process on the basis of two basic criteria. These were the quality of the data, and the variation of the type of church. Quality of data was defined by the qualities of the interviewed candidates. Those churches that had more candidates with first hand recollections of their church's life across periods of both decline and renewal were selected.

Secondly, with church type in mind the models of church identified in a previous culture based study of churches was used (Becker: 1999).² This study is a serious attempt to classify varieties of churches on the basis of anthropological method. Becker found regularly that there were four clusters of features that could distinguish churches as belonging to one of four quite distinct models, regardless of demographic or ideological distinctions. We have one church that closely resembles each of the four types represented by Becker and one that is a hybrid of types. It is also fortunate that these are very distinct in terms of historical age, location, demographics, and the predominant spirituality expressed in the worship life of the church.

² The details of this study are shared in greater detail in the theoretical chapter on organizational culture.

The analysis phase then commenced and each story, discussion and account was read and reread through the lens of a particular framework. Once this data was collected again it became clear that the richness and volume of the data was far too great for the constraints of the thesis requirements. Consequently it was decided, after the various layers of analysis were completed, to select from the five churches, those three that are both typical representatives of the Baptist denomination in these states and which had permitted an depth of exposure to myself as researcher. That is, there is a typical rural church circuit, a leading church within the denomination with a century of tradition behind it, and a contemporary church affected by the evangelistic values of the 'seeker sensitive' or contemporary worship movement. The fourth church experienced a significant change because of the changing surrounds from its rural stable background to an outer suburban church. The fifth was a church that embraced the charismatic movement, a common occurrence in this denomination during the nineteen eighties. A skeletal summary of the data from the fourth and fifth churches has been placed within the appendix as an interesting point of comparison and confirmation in the final account although the details of their analysis were proscribed by size limits.

Data Analysis and Interpretative Grids

My immediate aim was to gain a sense of the core story of the particular community's life together, a plot line that reflects the change process. This is a more deliberate affair than simply attempting to reconstruct the history of these churches in chronological order or, decide who is telling 'the truth' about what actually happened in each church. The purpose here was to discern how the individuals and communities understood their own experience in their own terms and using their own symbols, metaphors and value-laden interpretations. Consequently the approach used with every participant was a semi-structured interview that left a great amount of scope for the individual to direct their recollections and make their own interpretations apparent.

After this the research shifted to an interpretive phase. There was a surprisingly strong correlation between the various storytellers despite the myriad of stories shared of various events in terms of the critical issues, characters and events that had together brought the church to its current situation. Therefore it was not difficult to identify the decisive turning points and so construct a collective composite story of a particular church life that respects the shared vantage point of the members. As this process continued, it also became evident that some features of some of the stories were remarkably similar, and that some churches having shared similar backgrounds had now moved to share other similarities in their renewal phase.

The meaning of these stories for the listener depends upon what particular aspects of the data stand out as significant. This highlighting depends upon the particular analytical lenses one employs as the dialogue partner with the storyteller. Distinct social scientific lenses enlighten different aspects or levels of human experience. Therefore, the second part of this interpretive phase required a disciplining of the story-reading role through a consciously chosen sequence of theoretically distinct vantage points or lenses. Given the type of data and explanations that the respondents provide, the purpose was to see which sets of explanatory variables give coherence and resonate with the explanation of decline and renewal provided by the tellers. Each vantage point, or theoretical lens alerts us to the distinct levels at which the culture of these churches actually changes. This allows a distinct level of explanation for the occurrences within each one. Therefore, after collecting such narratives, they are set in dialogue with appropriate theoretical frameworks that are presently available and used to analyse the nature of communities and their transformation.

Given that our interest is the group rather than the individual perspective, a number of theoretical frameworks emerge as potential interpretive frameworks for the shared events. Community phenomena demand a framework of understanding which focuses explanation not so

much in terms of individual pathology or wellness, nor the ethical virtue or malice of particular characters within the stories, but in the group experience as a shared phenomenon. The basis of the choice of each framework is justified in the following three chapters. The three lenses include the following.

The organizational culture lens: This involves the application of anthropological approaches to highlighting the inner life of organizations rather than distinct people groups. The ethnographer notices the recurring and typical within the stories of communities as a way of grasping the essence of the shared experience of groups such as our churches. This usually relates to underlying values, assumptions and worldviews that may or may not be able to be articulated by the participants themselves.

The Bowen family systems lens: Family systems theories interpret communities as analogous to biological families. Both systems manifest similar symptoms whereby one or more members are repeatedly disadvantaged by the roles they perform within and for the family and stress levels are affected by the degree of enmeshment in a shared emotional system or the dysfunctional nature of a 'parenting style' applied by the leader(s). This lens is prevalent in recent literature to do with church consultation on health and conflict.

Psychodynamic lenses: These have been developed in the last couple of decades for the analysis of secular organizational life. Organizations display patterns of behaviour as if they possess the attributes of individual neuroses. Sometimes these neuroses are generated by the neurotic habits of the leadership. This focus discerns the nature of the fantasies that prevail within these communities and perpetuate abusive forms of power relationship between 'subordinates' and 'superiors'. The difficulty that these organizations face in responding to environmental demands is attributed to unresolved pre-conscious issues in the life of the group

members, rather than present rational, cultural or, systemic factors. Anxieties arouse deep-seated emotions and set off defensive routines. The culture of an organization becomes the way such routines become structured into organizational life at the unconscious assumption level affecting the capacity of a community to be 'self righting' via rational measures.

The critical aspect of the research design is that all three lenses have the potential to bring in both significant and distinctive insight into the phenomenon of decline and renewal. When these insights are combined in parallel, a more multi-dimensional and interlocking perspective is possible and, it is hoped, will produce interpretations that a single perspective would not generate. As will be shown, they all have something to contribute to the picture of actual renewal, some more than others, as will be seen.

A Rationale For The Design Of The Research

The interview

A semi-structured interview as a generator of research data is preferable if the intention is to understand human phenomena from an insider point of view. The hunches and experiences of the researcher are allowed to serve as prompts for the storyteller but without dictating the terms of content of the dialogue. The open-ended-ness of the structure allows the storyteller-participant to direct the affair toward or away from the concerns of the researcher to those that were more germane to them as participant observers in the first instance. Adequate semi-structured interviewing seeks then not so much to keep the interviewer on track, but to let them 'lay the tracks' in the first place. The techniques involved in this keep the researcher on track as the questions of interest to the researcher can be rephrased as the research proceeds in the light of the frameworks employed by the story telling subjects.

The Nature of the Materials Gathered

Of particular interest in this research is the narratives stored, told within and retold beyond the community of interest by its members. But they are not distilled down for discrete explanatory factors as purely historical factual accounts to produce connections that could be generalized across large sample spaces. Stories are valued in this research not so much as to prove or disprove a particular theory although we would expect that there would be occasions where the phenomena related in story form resonated with the human patterns anticipated by a particular theory. The value of such data is due to the fact that people so often use the narrative form as the very means by which they strive to make their experiences of events into meaningful wholes (Polkinghorne: 1988, 163). Stories enable organizational members to have tolerable responses to experiences, especially those that are too complex or, confusing to understand. They often contain ideas too difficult or painful to clarify discursively or to represent adequately by abstractions (Meyer: 1988, 210). They function like a coping mechanism for the teller as they enable some coherence of identity to be maintained. They are told because this coherence 'works' for the teller and thus the stories stabilize over time along with the teller's identity (Polkinghorne: 1988, 163). Implicit within them may be a hoped for future.

This being the case, the rules that govern narrative discourse within an organization must also be key focal points of research into organizational culture. As communities comprise various interest groups, struggles for cherished values are not far beneath the surface (Meyer: 1995, 212). Narratives are also vital means of communicating with and persuading others about one's view of the world. The corporate experience over a period of time is, refracted through the device of stories told both within and about the organization from which they come. Some even draw analogies between storytelling in organizations and dream interpretation in clinical settings, as regardless of their accuracy at the historical level they are clues to the 'truth' about an organization at another level of emotional experience (Gabriel: 1995, 481). These stories act as

metaphors conveying levels of meaning and organizational experience beyond merely 'objective' historical details. As metaphors they act as windows into, rather than mirrors of, the emotional, ethical and psychodynamic life of the community in which they are told.

In the analysis phase then, the stories will be accepted at face value as valuable tools by which the tellers have attempted to identify the critical determinants of their community renewal and bear some relation to the experience of the subjects. They also will reveal much of the moral values and the expectations of the teller as well as the emotional experience of being within the community at that time that persists into the period of the retelling.

The 'Factual' Reconstruction

In order to generalize meaningfully for the group experience from the particular stories one needs to draw on all the relevant evidence without privileging any particular framework or imposing a particular type of story pattern over recurring details that do not fit within it. The researcher thereby has a role as a second new narrator of the collection of stories gleaned from the individuals in one church community. The action of story writing or constructing such a condensed composite story is itself a rudimentary form of theory making on the part of the researcher. The rephrasing of narratives in one's own words is effectively an attempt at explanation (Pentland: 1999). Until we can confidently retell the stories of these subjects we cannot commence analysis at a deeper level or make the sorts of essentializing deductions and comparisons from which theory may be communicated.

An explanatory theory constructed upon the implicit connections within a narrative plot must also contain more than the extremities but also the intervening events that bear a sequential and even causal connection with each other (Pentland: 1999, 718). Research reliability is reinforced not only by triangulation of the story line with other forms of data, church records and

so forth, but the consistency of the evaluative context shared by the various story tellers, the depth of immersion within that context and the presence of the perceptions of focal actors (Pentland: 1999, 720).³

The crucial data points that serve as a check upon the researcher's narrative construction are the main turning points within the narratives, the start of decline, the crisis or 'bottoming out of stagnation', the turning point to renewed life, and especially, the current or end point of the narrative. The strength of any hypothesis is strengthened if one is not only able to have a chronicle of a sequence of events, but a reconfiguration of the features of the plot that makes the interrelationships between the parts of the story clear. If the stories shared with the researcher coalesce in their essential perspectives, one can then identify a core theme of individual narratives with confidence.

This theme may be prompted by theoretical perspectives of the researcher about the underlying causes of the behaviour of groups described by the final composite narrative. But these theories will only be valid if the connections and inferences of the particular theoretical lenses are corroborated by the internal logic of the narrative plot that leads reasonably well from one transition point to the next and, in particular to the present end point that is visible to participant and observer alike. At this next stage of analysis, the strongest justification for valuing the insights then of a particular theoretical lens is that it provides, either on its own or in parallel with others, a coherent narrative across the whole reconstructed 'history'. (Dumbford and Jones: 2001, 2016).

³ Pentland suggests that there are three distinguishable levels at which narratives can be considered. The surface level is the 'Factual' level; the events themselves as retold by the subjects. Beneath that are the 'Focalization' of the events, or the value laden selected rendering of the events. Beneath this lie the underlying 'Fabula' which are the basic structures that could be reproduced in similar events with differing characters and meanings (Pentland 1999: 720).

The Introduction of a Theoretical Dialogue Partner at the Fabula Level

The researcher who rewrites the individual recollections into a macro composite narrative has, therefore, to find at which level of meaning there is coherence in the first place. It could be that the types of dynamics in the decline and reversal of communities do not make much sense at the incidental or surface level. But they could still have a degree of rational coherence and resonate well with theoretical frameworks at the level of the emotional systemic, the level of shared values and assumptions, or at a preconscious level. Ultimately this principle of the coherent coverage of the narrative determines the theoretical usefulness of a particular lens in providing insight into the particular culture. Once individual church members' stories were collected, a 'touchstone' story (Boyce, 1995), a composite of all the individual recollections was constructed. This made some degree of sense of the transition from one peak period to the present via a trough of decline. Then the direct analysis of the raw data commenced searching for primary evidences of the sorts of connections suggested by theoretical variables through which each of the three frameworks - family systems, culture and psychodynamics - interpret change. At the same time, the very way that stories are told can reveal insights into the culture being analysed, the mood may reflect some neurotic subculture. The degree of criticism or praise itself may reflect a prior set of ethical values of the teller.⁴ Thus it is necessary to analyse not

⁴ Theoretical analysis may also be undertaken by indirect means. Much has been written about the variety of possible insights that a simple narrative may reveal to the interpreter. A narrative may be a window into the psychological state of the culture. Psychodynamic realities such as paranoia may be seen in a narrative that has a persecutory theme running through them (Polkinghorne (1988: 168). Some narratives may have a fatalistic quality where life slips inexorably towards demise with an expectation of further approaching cataclysms. Others have an identifiable 'depressive' theme, whereby the present may be bemoaned, but a more positive future can still be envisaged. The form as well as the content of the narrative is important, then, for the researcher to see if the stagnation within a particular church situation is best explained as a form of neurotic dysfunction. The story in such situations, functions as a type of case history. Likewise organizational research has also made use of such data from interviews as a means of unearthing the implied moral frameworks of the tellers (Hansen and Kahweiler: 1995, 1396, Meyer 1995, 213). Some narratives will describe people or actions as laudatory while others are cast in a doubtful shadow. Heroes are usually those who demonstrate for the subject how one should act within the organization and what values should be reinforced (Meyer: 1995, 215). If stories have a positive tone, a 'comedy' form, they will tend to show desirable and successful actions that are spoken of with the approval of the teller. Negative stories show undesirable actions or events and characterize the actors in negative light. But both types betray an underlying moral framework and this may indeed correlate with deeper world-view that supplies the

only the composite stories themselves but also each individual storyteller's account so as to make richer descriptions form the basis of the analysis rather than the composite story alone.

Dialoguing Between Multiples Lenses

Recent critical realist analysis of organizations has also moved in the direction of using multi-lens description of organizational realities or even from entirely different paradigms, both descriptivist and interpretivist (Shultz and Hatch: 1996, Hatch: 1997, Morgan: 1997, 1999). An imaginative use of various lenses is one means of enhancing the understanding of the organization or group through the dialogue between the various metaphorical images of the organization. Morgan suggests that there are two conceptually although potentially simultaneous stages in reading the organizational narratives collected (Morgan: 1999, 359). Firstly, there is a diagnostic reading whereby we aim to gain as comprehensive an understanding as possible through the employment of various frameworks. Secondly, a critical evaluation follows which aims to integrate the key insights discovered in the reading phase. At one or more points a particular metaphor may enhance the story line. A combination of a dominant and subsidiary frameworks or, "metaphors", may bring a greater degree than any particular single explanatory scheme (Palmer and Dumbford: 1996, 694). In this light, it is my concern to firstly, read each collation of the most commonly espoused themes within the story of each church. This supplies the coherent governing framework that brackets the data across time. Then all the shared narratives are reread in their original form again through one lens at a time.

ethical framework that shapes these stories.⁴ The power of a meaningful narrative of the most cherished recollections is more likely to elicit norms and values threatened or otherwise rather than ones that are not particularly germane to the persons experience (Helmer: 1993, Meyer: 1995, 220). Gabriel (1991) suggests stories from such sources can reveal a level of anxiety within the subject which itself is an indication of the importance of the character or event depicted to the individual who has them. Such potentials are kept in mind during the reading process.

After each reading, it becomes evident what the particular lens has to offer by way of strengthening the connections within the composite or 'touchstone story' (Boyce: 1995). A viable theoretical interpretation should account for the various shifts in the plot and the anomalies unexplained by the touchstone story itself. After this one can then decide whether a particular framework is most resonant or, which combination of lenses are most resonant with the actual plot lines of the individual story. It could well be the case for instance that a variable discerned by one particular lens alone may activate changes that could be only discerned in another domain that could be discerned through another lens.

Alternate theoretical frameworks, both enlighten perception and obscure at the same time. The way of seeing becomes a way of not seeing (Morgan: 1999, 368). As soon as one frame is chosen, other features that are equally cogent recede into the background. No particular frame can have universal resonance with all stories or all aspects of any single story. Particular frames or ways of seeing and analysing personal and group experience may resonate with the dominant consciousness of different people within different levels of authority or powerlessness within the church. Although we will never have a comprehensive view-point upon which to evaluate the data, in juxtaposing different frameworks we are acknowledging 'up front' in effect, our inherent partiality in the reading process and which theories have shaped our seeing.

Finally then, at the end of the process of repeated readings, if this type of data permits we can then move beyond reading the shared narratives 'in parallel' and move on to an 'interplay' approach (Shultz and Hatch: 1996). Such an approach highlights the distinctive contribution of each framework at any point in the narrative. In each particular instance we may then determine which single frame, combination or sequence of lenses provides optimal coverage of the data.

After the three main lenses have been used to provide alternative vantage points for reading each narrative an attempt will be made to ascertain which lenses resonate most freely with the narrative and then to suggest a hypothetical sequence of byplay through which the development of similar narratives may also be interpreted. This would involve suggesting a model of reading that moves back and forth from one insight to the next without attempting to integrate them artificially or prematurely.

Conclusion

The fundamental reason why the frameworks which have been outlined in the chapters below are important dialogue partners is, that they all have something to offer by way of an explanation of or insight into the nature and causes of group behaviour. They are all concerned with analysis of human systems as they fail, restrict or serve and enhance the life of the group. Therefore, in the more detailed survey that follows, we address the following issues:-

The first issue concerns the way that each framework attributes to the underlying causes of dysfunction or health within a system of relationships. Following this, we survey the key theorists who have demonstrated the functional usefulness of these lenses in organizational studies. Then the particular remedies or strategies proposed by way of rectifying negative features or releasing the group from dysfunctional defensive strategies is highlighted. This issue touches upon the actions required of healthy leadership in transforming a dysfunctional culture.

At certain points it will be both possible and appropriate to discern theological implications of the phenomena highlighted by each framework. These are, after all communities of faith, whose business is not only the community itself, but the expression of a shared worldview implying the presence of the transcendent One within the historical life of the community. It would be odd indeed if such shared faith commitments were not reflected in the

reactions of the communities that are ostensibly gathered on the basis of such commitments. This would especially be the case one would think, during periods of distress or renewal when the tenets of such a worldview could be severely tested. But even if the subjects struggle to articulate or discern the dimensions of this Presence, at the least we have to acknowledge these shared assumptions form one significant aspect affecting the values and beliefs shared within the culture of each church and which limit its responses to the various crises in their shared histories. To respect such values of the subject we must allow for the possibility of the interaction of the Living God to be a contributing factor affecting both the texts and subtexts that generate the plots of decline and renewal. At the end of the thesis we therefore return to reflect upon the possibility of discerning the role played by the Triune God within these stories of renewal. This is done on the basis of the faith assumption that the nature of the immanent Triune society that would be expected to be reflected in some aspect or layer of community experience under the redemptive influence of such a Being. A survey of each of the three analytical frameworks or lenses that heighten these layers of activity is presented in the following chapters.