

Chapter 10. Decline and Renewal in Theological Perspective

The Activity of God Beneath the Narrative Surface

One surprising finding of this exploration was the limited capacity of many of the respondents, including the pastors, to take the opportunity to articulate a theological perspective concerning the change process. While it is clear that they all had a faith that they could articulate, as evidenced from the various artefacts that the churches had produced, it was rare for either member or pastor to be able to relate the working of God to their experiences, or, to interpret the history of the changes in their church in terms of the actions of God. When the pastor could articulate a theological understanding of their experience or their intentions this affected the structures or culture into which they were attempting to form the particular church. The focus here is not only in espoused theology, the sort that fills the pages of church handbooks and constitutions, but that which was operative and conscious; the awareness of God within the warp and woof of these life narratives that assured the respondents of God's presence and fellowship. This could suggest that theological reflection itself is a rare skill in these churches or that theological assumptions are buried deeper within the culture at levels not consciously accessible to the individual or group or that the symbolization process of the individuals themselves is undeveloped.

This does not prevent the observer from reflecting theologically upon the phenomenon of decline and renewal. It is still legitimate ask whether, given this lack of this activity, the sorts of changes that occurred here are in some sense, 'Godly'. This is a different question to asking what is left unexplained and assigning theological reflection upon the change to the margins once the

major relationships have been investigated as with a ‘God of the gaps’ approach. We wish to avoid viewing the lessons of positive culture change as the product of human sociological manipulation to which the blessing of God is appended as an afterthought, sacred though this may be. According to the whole of the Biblical witness, all of life is a gift from God to be received with thanksgiving rather than a reward of humankind’s best efforts.

If this is the case, that on the one hand to be a people made in the image of God is to be dependent upon him for the fruits of new life and yet the people in the study sample by and large are ecclesiologicaly inarticulate, we may well ponder how one could discern the encompassing actions of grace within the renewal of these communities.¹ I would propose that an adequately Christian evaluation of the change stories should proceed in a Trinitarian key. That is, the positive aspects of renewal, discernable on the surface of the human culture, should reflect the energizing of the Spirit of God, the efficacy of the Son and the nature of the communal life of Father and Son from which communal human life is derived. If indeed if the Triune God was involved behind, underneath or in front of these stories if not the story telling act itself, then the impact of the

¹ While on this issue, it must be said we should not selectively ascribe a church’s resurgence to the mysteries of God’s care but ascribe decline to autonomous forces beyond God’s control. It is not against the repeated thrust of the Scriptural narrative that the God we worship is the one who on more than several occasions has brought his people low from the highpoints of their institutional form of idolatry, even when that idolatry comes in the form of a false centre of confidence in powerful symbolic figures and inflated reputations of the churches they dominate. The transferences and projections that make them more significant than they should be. When the reputations of powerful people and churches or an effective track record have become the source of a church’s confidence, or the primary allegiance of the member is diverted to the institution rather than its Lord, it may just as well be that decline is not some independent scientific law of institutional aging, but the divine world giving over the people of God to themselves; to fantasy or ‘phantasy’, to identification with coercive ‘larger than life’ figures, to fears and foes without and within (Exodus 32, Judges 2.11-15, Isaiah 2.12-22, 7.12-24, Jeremiah 7.5-15, Romans 1.22,23, Matthew 24.45-50, 2 Corinthians 12.19-13.9). If this is so, renewal is a long way home, a ‘second best’ to a normal life of faith and maturation. Even if agents of renewal are aware of the infeasibility of return to the hey-day for sociological or cultural reasons, they need to be wary of repeating the history of those who have gone before lest they too lead the church into another era of dysfunctional symbol making rather than focusing the faithful upon the privilege of partnership in the Mission of the God.

change should in some way reflect the nature of the divine community as the ultimate yardstick of healthy, strong culture or functional church family system. Conversely, without such marks of this ministry it could be that the renewal of these church communities was simply a product of skilful socializing, a democratising product of social engineering. The graphic experience of the changes depicted above would suggest otherwise.

Moltmann is the first of a number of recent theologians who attribute the formation of loving community to this prior communion within the Godhead.

The perichoretic unity of the divine Persons who ek-sist with one another, for one another and in one another, finds its correspondence in the true human communities which we can experience – experience in love, in friendship, in the community of Christ's people which is filled by the Spirit, and in the just society. ... The Spirit who is glorified 'together with' the Father and the Son is also the wellspring of the energy which draws people to one another, so that they come together, rejoice in one another and praise the God who is himself a God in community. (Moltmann: 1992: 309).

This correlation between church and divine community to which Moltmann refers should be evident within the churches in larger measure in the renewal era than before if this was a renewal authored within the fellowship of the Trinity. Certain evidences would indicate that the Triune God revealed in Christ was present if the community grew through the crisis of decline to become more like Christ's idea of church in its functioning and relating.

An exhaustive recent development of the relationships between church culture and the Trinity is Miroslav Volf's *After our Likeness: The Church as the Image of the Trinity* (1998). Volf claims that monistic and hierarchical views of the Trinity do not do justice to the interdependence and inter-penetrability and reciprocity of the persons of the Godhead as witnessed to in the portrayal of the Trinity in the New Testament.² This shows up in the way they organize their common life. So, if the doctrine of the Trinity dissolves into "abstract monotheism" devoid of the notion of the society of God's love, this produces a community shaped and sanctioned by the theological model of the divine community.³ In salvation history, "political and clerical monotheism" is then used to justify totalitarian structures, whether "religious, moral, patriarchal or political domination – and makes it a hierarchy, a holy rule" (Moltmann: 1996, 191-192). But by linking God to his history within the world and its history, and by the rediscovery of the concept of God's unity as a community of love *among* three coequal persons, rather than one *over* others, the human community too can be conceived as a fellowship of "friends", rather than as "servants" or "children" (Moltmann: 1981, 221). With the help of these Trinitarian insights we can identify some of the pertinent landmarks of the Trinity that would be evident in a human community, conditioned by its own social context in history and on its way to the ideal community, the communion with God in the eschaton.

Firstly, Volf, like Moltmann, rejects the Eastern view of the 'filioquistic' procession of the persons of the Trinity (Moltmann:1992, 307f). Such a procession inevitably leads to the notion

² Much of what he proposes reflects the cumulative impact of the works to do with the same topic by Moltmann (1977, 1981, 1992, 1996). Moltmann maintained that communities reflect their foundational theological perspective of God.

³ So also the critique of Barth's modal modal of the Trinity for erroneously identifying the divine subject with the unity of the persons rather than God's plurality in relationships (Fox: 2001, 26f).

that the church is a hierarchy, or a Bishop as the image of Christ *constitutes* the ecclesial community or the locus of the divine presence within it (Volf: 1998, 215). A view of the persons of the trinity that does not take seriously the fact that the persons are *more* than just ‘pure relations’⁴ is liable to degenerate into repressive ecclesial ideologies of dominance and submission. Alternately, if the Father is only ‘conditioned’ by the Son and the Spirit in return, and He alone constitutes the Godhead in its source, then in like manner the Bishop tends to be seen to constitute the church but is only conditioned by the church. Such views pit the leadership of the church over against the church. Leadership becomes different in kind to the community.

The problem of such classical views is the conception of the ‘person’ of God (Volf: 1998, 214). The view of God that affirms the harmony of will and still maintains the distinctiveness of persons evidenced in the New Testament witness (John 17.20) has to grant space for a genuine freedom for different centres of action, united in love with a passionate concern for the same will, the same mission. A perichoretic Trinitarian view as revealed in the actions of God within salvation history would infer the fundamental equality of the divine persons both in their mutual determination and their mutual interpenetration. Just as the Father sends the Son and Spirit, he also gives everything to the Son and glorifies him. Within such a sharing community of perfect love notions of hierarchy, substantial distinctions and subordination are inconceivable (Volf: 1998, 217). Volf insists that an adequate view of the Trinity must be both ‘polycentric and symmetrical reciprocity of the many’. The unity of the Trinity does not come about from either a monarchical relationship between the persons, or, by commencing reflection on the Social Trinity from ‘the

⁴ A criticism he makes of John Zizioulas’ interpretation of the trinity in his major formulation (Zizioulis: 1985).

Oneness' of the Source, but via reflection upon the loving relational network between distinctive persons who, at the same time, cannot merely be reduced to their relations.⁵

For these reasons Volf is confident that the implications he draws correspond to both the nature and eternal intentions of the Godhead for community in the New Creation. And he points out that this transition is clearly in place within the New Testament witness of the apostles.

Conceiving of the structure of the church in a consistently Trinitarian fashion means conceiving not only the institution of office as such, but also the entire local church itself in correspondence to the Trinity. The high priestly prayer of Jesus, brings all who believe in him into correspondence with the unity of the Triune God (John 17.20, cf. 1John 1.3). Paul too seems to be arguing from a Trinitarian perspective (1Cor. 12.4-6 cf. Eph. 4.3-6). The various gifts services and activities that all Christians have correspond to the divine multiplicity. (Volf: 1998, 218)

The unity of the Godhead stems from the fact that these gifts and services, or with Moltmann (1997: 298), these 'assignments', since they are for the benefit of 'all' (1Cor. 12.7f) correspond to the divine unity. It is the 'same spirit', the same Lord, and the same God or Father that are, by virtue of the interpenetration of the persons, active and mediating the salvific impact of the New Humanity in all these different gifts. It is the perfect love of God, not some solitariness of his existence that manifests the life of God.

⁵ Contra Zizioulas (Volf: 1998).

Conversely, Moltmann and Volf both contend, that passivity within the church stems from faulty theological conceptions of the Godhead. If ministry is some privilege or power received from an alien leadership, this inevitably would result in a passive congregational recipient. This is just as possible in contexts that do not hold a sacramental or 'high' view of priestly ordination. The notion of pastor as the 'expert' and commended by what they can do, rather than who they are as a character whose identity is found in relationship to Christ's gifting of his church, can be reinforced through the professional qualifications of many. This can be just as disempowering for the member. The insider linguistic distinctions that come with such formation, draws these leader-follower distinctions just as starkly as a sacramental perspective. The 'each one' aspect of the priesthood of the believers is lost so easily in a form of leadership due to superior skill qualifications (Volf: 1998, 228). The laity can so easily get fixated with their relative lack of 'know how' and quickly the vision of the community that is constituted by the presence of the Spirit, and the Godhead via that Spirit, is obscured and their own contribution devalued. It is not surprising that the main figures dominate the concerns of so many of the narratives of decline are ordained Pastors even in this sample of supposedly 'free-churches'.

All the churches in our sample have the same charge from Christ to establish communities bearing his Name in the era of earth bound history. Because salvation introduces the New Creation it requires the building of more than events of a punctiliar nature. It requires the formation of persisting institutions, or as I would prefer, 'organizational cultures' or even 'holding environments' that have an enduring nature allowing for meaningful interpersonal transactions (Volf: 1998, 235, 238). Moreover, just as the persons of the Trinity are not interchangeable in themselves, the gifts of the Spirit to the church and the roles that go with these are only understandable within the specific church to which they are given to enable such organizational

existing to take place. Consequently, the 'roles' played by human persons are not interchangeable and inconsequential but reflect the uniqueness of the individuals themselves, pressed into the service of the fellowship of the Spirit. It is via this paradox of the quality of servanthood for others, through which one's true identity is discovered as in loving service the essence of God is manifest in Christ (Phil. 2.6-8).

Volf then draws two corollaries from the interface between God's nature and His ecclesial 'homology', which are critical to our investigation here. Firstly, he posits four potential institutional 'characters' (Volf: 1998, 236) based upon two variables: the pattern of power distribution and the manner of the institution's cohesion. His main concern is to contrast the historical model that involves 'mono-centric' and 'asymmetrical' distributions of power, with a New Testament charismatic-communal ecclesiology, which has 'symmetrical' and 'polycentric' distributions.

As regards 'cohesion' one can also distinguish on another domain models of church that are coerced in contrast to those which are freely affirming in the means by which they integrate their members into fellowship. While these never exist operationally in their pure form, the difference in culture would be palpable in moving from a coercive to a volitional culture. Although four permutations are possible from these two variables, Volf only wants to contrast the extreme forms of church: the monocentric-coerced with the symmetrical-decentralized (and free) forms. Whether in its Orthodox or Catholic form, the proponents of these would see that freedom in affirmation, or a 'volitional' value as an unattainable ideal and therefore a partially coerced subordination should follow in the earthly interim. This leads him to the principle, based upon the symmetrical relations within the Trinity and reflected in the interdependency of the charismata of

the church as a spiritual body, that “the more a church is characterized by symmetrical and decentralized distribution of power and freely affirmed interaction, the more it will correspond to Trinitarian communion.” (Volf: 1998, 236f). Such a church would be converging asymptotically within the plane of human history, to the image of God. All members of such churches would in the ideal situation both engage and receive their charismata in the salvation and for the good of all others.⁶ And, I would add, that those who form such communities without the ability to articulate the source of their mutual service and humble identification, would still reflect the constructive culture making actions of the Triune God, even more so for the lack of calculation.

The second issue concerns the way in which people are socialized into such an institution. Volf hopes that given the Spirit’s outpouring in all members (Rom.5.5) such a process, reflected in the community’s rules of interaction, would require minimal formalization. He does not see that stipulations about the nature of relationships contradicts divine love. Such ideal behaviour can occur spontaneously with or without a community rule. But within this aeon, the individual and the communal life are as yet not coincident. Some restraints are external to the believer will be necessary. Paradoxically “such external specification of this interaction may be articulated is not

⁶ Moltmann puts the contrast a little differently. He contrasts the rule of Christ to either ‘aristocratic’ justification of a company of self-perpetuating leaders on the one hand, or a democratic ‘pantheism of the Spirit’ generic society which gives everyone ‘the same’ spirit but not ‘what is his own’ contribution. The people of God are neither an aristocracy, nor, an indistinguishable democracy. He says “It is only the Trinitarian understanding of the commissioned community and the commissions in the community which is in a position to express the dignity, both of the people as a whole, and of its special ministries – and also the genetic connection of the two. Socialization and individuation are two sides of one and the same operation in the history of the Spirit. The Spirit leads men and women into the fellowship of the Messianic people, at the same time giving everyone his own place and his particular charge. ... By socializing, the Spirit individualizes; and by individualizing, he socializes. Here we live both with and for one another” (Moltmann: 1977, 305, 306). Thus there is no tension between the priesthood given to the whole people of God (1Pet. 2.9f) and the multiform ministries of the unique members in the unique situation.

only an anticipatory sign of the new creation, but also a sign of its distance from its goal.” He states this as a second principle useful for our purposes of discernment.

The less ecclesial life must be legally regulated and the more the institutions of the church are lived as the fellowship of siblings and friends, the more will these institutions correspond to their own future in which they will be identical with the realization of the communion of the church with the triune God. (Volf: 1998, 238).

Moltmann also articulates a similar principle justifying the shape of community culture in terms of the eschatological vision of the new humanity.

Whenever the church loses this justification, this experience and this perspective, the diversity of the charismata and the unity of the charismatic community is lost. Then hierarchies and monarchical episcopates grow up on the one hand, and merely passive church members, incapable of independent decision and action, on the other. This is when apathy develops and outbreaks of ‘enthusiasm’ take place. Then the common hope for the kingdom, and common service in preparing its way in the world, give way to institutions designed for the pastoral care of the whole community. The Christian church will be open for the diversity of the Spirit’s gifts ... to the degree in which it wins back its original eschatological orientation towards the new creation. The struggles for power in the church ... will subside in the degree to which the church is concerned solely about the lordship of the crucified Jesus and his future. (Moltmann: 1977, 299)

He ascribes sub-Christian organizational arrangements in the church to a loss of vision either by the sort of overly realized eschatology that identifies the authority of the Bishop with the authority

of Christ, or the enthusiasm that neglects the fact that this age is not the age to come. He does not support this with any grounded data or theoretical explanation for why this may be the case. However, to the extent that the individual church, by virtue of the actions of leadership or the collusion of the membership, represses the mutual giving and receiving of charismatically endowed service, or, to the extent that it centralizes power, ruling by coercive rather than consensual processes and disenfranchises the membership from the responsibility of decision making, it falls short of the patterns consistent with the New Humanity and obscures the image of the Trinity. In some of our case churches, despite the spiritual expressions of theology remaining the same, certain ecclesial processes, values and assumptions definitely have shifted from one era to the next.

'Perichoretic' Persons in Relationship as Cultural Variables

A survey of the New Testament ecclesiological vision in light of the discussion above reveals that the salvific purposes of the Triune God are represented in human communities of faith when the following cultures are present. Such a church by definition should exhibit the following features:

- (i) *Poly-centricity*: freedom granted for decentralized yet interdependent centres of action and participative consensual decision-making (Acts 15.2, 22.).
- (ii) *Unity*: concern shown for the same will and purpose to fulfil God's mission (John 17.21, 1Corinthians 13.8-13, 1Tim. 1.7,8). The gifts are distributed for the benefit of *all* the members (1Cor.12.7, 13.1-8a, Eph. 4.3-6).
- (iii) *Multiplicity*: the church celebrates the diversity of gifts and assignments within it, including the gift of leadership (1 Cor. 12.7, Eph. 4.7,10).

- (iv) *Fluidity*: Structures and institutions are not so much inflicted upon the church but spawned by the need of the moment and the direction of Christ (1 Cor. 12.11).
- (v) *Reciprocity*: and retroactivity of the leadership where this gift is not viewed as in some way different in kind to the charismata of the rest of the members but all are open to receive from the other (1 Cor. 12.20-22). Authority not derived from position but from the mutual subordination of all and obedience freely given as a respect for their individual charismata. An influential teaching gift is not to be neglected (1 Tim. 3.1, 4.14.) and the saint may aspire to leadership if that is their talent (1 Tim. 3.1).
- (vi) *Generativity*: Leadership is but one gift rather than an office that stands over against the membership. It serves the maturation and coordinates the whole service of the individual ministers (Ephesians 4.8-12) fanning their gifts, services or ‘assignments’ into life.
- (vii) *Interpenetration*: Freedom from the coercive use of hierarchical power relations and associated with fallen human society and a mutual sharing of recognition and honouring the other (John 17.4,5). The gift of the same Spirit is active in all the Gifts and thereby the same Son and Father (1 Cor. 12.4-6, Eph. 4.4-6).
- (viii) *Witness*: the words and deeds of the church and individual members profess Christ before each other and the wider world (1 Cor. 12.3, 14.26, 1 Peter 2.9,10). A godly church tests every manifestation of the Spirit as to its correspondence to the person and work of Christ (1 Thess. 5.21, 1 Cor. 12.1,2, 14.29, 2 Tim. 4.1-5).
- (ix) *Collegiality*: Office does not exist apart from service to others. Official roles are born on behalf of the body by the activity of service, is marked by fellowship between all members as equal in priestly status (Phil. 1.1, 1 Thes. 5.12, Rom. 12.8).
- (x) *Freedom*: Regulations are kept to a minimum and are justified only as a reflection of the ideal of loving community and must bear relationship to the goal of the church in Christ’s

salvation-historical scheme and distinguish the ways of the church from the passing aeon of sin.

We can easily note the presence of these attributes within the narratives and thus an approximation of a measure of their communion with the triune God. Similarly, by using the condensed cultural descriptions of Moltmann and Volf these theological truths constellate into distinguishable cultural options. These marks of God's image in the church can conceivably be presented upon a sliding scale from the corrupt and dysfunctional to something approximating the eternal divine essence in relationship. I have distinguished five sets of options for each of our case churches as indication of the nature of their renewal. These reduce to five possible variables upon which the communities may be located at times in their history. The benefit of a multi-lens basis for this multi-domain model is that it allows conceptually for an infinite number of options in types of renewal within differentiable situations. The five domains are as follows:

- (i) *Domain 1: 'Sense of Calling'. From 'Habituation' through to 'Inspiration'.*

Here Cultures vary from those that are 'habituated' in historically entrenched patterns either (a) a 'politicised' culture, defined by power struggles, or, (b) an 'escapist' nature. They are characterized by a simmering pressure of underlying conflict that requires the control of dissent, or, according to Moltmann, the diversion of 'enthusiasms' as compensatory spiritual experiences. This contrasted with those who are missionally focussed with the sort of inbuilt flexibility needed so they can respond to their God-given calling having been 'inspired' by a future vision of the New Humanity in the changing context in which they are situated.

(ii) *Domain 2: 'Coordination'. From 'Resignation' to 'Empowerment'.*

Here community cultures that are effective in socializing, and thereby individualizing, the membership, can be distinguished from those that disempower the 'laos' of God, into a dependent 'laity'. Some would be conspicuous for finding, identifying and empowering members into ministries to which they are suited and needed by the present circumstances of the church, as opposed to those where membership is disempowered or discouraged by the skill base or protecting of the leadership province by the 'professional ministers'. Such members would be apathetic about ministry involvement due to their experience of disempowerment or censoring of their initiative.

(iii) *Domain 3: Power Concentration.* This domain refers to Volf's '*Mono-centric and Asymmetrical*' as opposed to his '*Polycentric and Symmetrical*' options. This obviously overlaps somewhat with Domain 2 but focuses more upon the rights granted for decision-making and the presence of legitimising structures for the interdependent ministers and ministries.

(iv) *Domain 4: Source of Cohesion. From 'Coercion' to 'Volition'.*

This domain extends from those where boundaries for behaviour are limited by external 'Coercive' means vs. 'Volitional' or, freely affirmed choices. This would also relate closely to Volf's distinction between 'maximal external constraints' as opposed to whether behaviour was more in line with the eschatological community ideal or spontaneously internal and volitional. While logically these are a separate issue, this domain does not make a great contribution to cultural diagnosis. 'Coercion' does not necessarily mean 'abusiveness'. But it certainly means that the leadership, usually of a mono-centric type, has at its disposal sufficient sources of power, to demand and enforce compliance from the members.

- (v) *Domain 5: Leadership Collegiality Domain. From 'Delegation' to 'Collaboration'*
- Community leadership cultures may vary along a spectrum from an autocratic 'Delegative' process pattern, where discursive processes really are at best a farcical means of the imposition of the will of the dominant, to genuinely 'Collegial' processes where all voices are genuinely valued. A 'Collegial' culture would affirm the contribution of all members whereas the Delegative would involve the inspiration for and instigation of change flowing from within an individual multi-skilled 'Leader' figure. One would expect it to overlap somewhat with the Monocentric-Polycentric domain. But this is not referring to the culture as a whole and it adds the precision that this group in its own dealings may well have been quite egalitarian in its own decision-making processes while dominating on the whole toward the church or visa versa.⁷ Therefore this domain serves as an additional confirmation that a redemptive work has penetrated the coordinating echelons of the culture equivalent to the changes that are depicted by the other domains.

Trinitarian Parallels in Cultural Phenomena

Turning our attention to the sample churches again we aim now to devise a means by which we can ascertain the potential Spiritual dynamic that underlines the changing nature of the culture and the changing fortunes of each church. Comparisons can be made from the nature of the cultural variables for each church and even some of the common neurotic 'constellations'. By definition, only one constellation would predominate a culture. It is the combination of insights

⁷ Compare Bion's 'specialized' groups in which the dominant basic assumption is allowed to 'hibernate' while the main body functions at a tolerable level.

from these two lenses in particular that relates to community parallels to the work of the Spirit in forming and reforming communities in the image of God.

Domain 1: 'Sense of Calling'.

A 'collaboration' culture is not a clear indicator of renewal. It could indicate a high 'habituation' rating where community members are not so much emotionally committed to a redemptive mission so much as the organization within which they find themselves socialized over time. The member's sense of individuality, out of which grows a subjective commitment to a mission, could be compromised as such a culture can tend toward 'group think'. One of its weaknesses is a lack of a place for goal-centred planning, a concomitant reaction to a sense of calling (Schneider: 1994, 60). Likewise a 'control' culture while perhaps advocating a commitment to mission would lack the responsiveness to make a telling engagement with a surrounding changing environment. The means as well as the ends are predetermined.

Those at the 'habituation' end of this domain would exhibit either a politicising tendency or an escapist enthusiasm, where the *baD* or the utopian *baP* assumption was operative reinforcing the position. Both the 'detached' and 'depressive' constellations suggest themselves here. The 'depressive' would maintain habit and resist responsiveness as any attempt to entertain the notion of change is squelched by a fear of personal disappointment and hopelessness. Here calling has been lost. The motivation to plan, or to build structures consistent with a sense of calling is antithetical to a 'detached' constellation with its overly internal focus and pervading sense of the inevitability of disappointment with others' efforts. Here calling has been ruined by fate. Some 'suspicious' organizations could also be quite reactive in their paranoia rather than being responsive to a sense of calling. Responsiveness to calling would only be permitted if it coincided

with the political gambit of the suspicious leadership or the parochial interests of the detached leader.

On the other hand, spiritual renewal would be confirmed also if the renewed church had become a possibility-personal ‘cultivation’ culture as such cultures are purposive and driven to achieve high ideals not yet materialized. On the other hand there is a strong resemblance between a church operating high on the ‘Inspiration’ end of the domain and Bion’s ‘W’ group. The achieving of real work, and the accomplishment of more ennobling goals, particularly to do with the group’s service beyond the baptised membership of the group, together would resonate with a high ‘Sense of Calling’ rating. At the same time there could be a high rating on Domain 1: ‘Inspiration’ as the ‘Collaboration’ culture, according to Schneider’s definition, requires high identification with the purposes of the whole organization. A strong sense of shared mission therefore could dictate the shape of the culture.

Domain 2: ‘Sense of Coordination’

Those church cultures operating at a highly ‘Resigned’ end of the domain showing the passivity that stems from the monopolizing of ministry by the ‘professional’ clergy-staff would induce a *baD* ‘dependency’ basic assumption group. Passivity may also be a feature of a group with a *baP* assumption as the responsibility for action lies with the spawning of a new era or messiah. This can underlay a ‘depressive constellation’. Here too members lack motivation or shirk their responsibility for the community mission in lieu of magically pinning their hopes upon a messianic leader figure, however unlikely their coming. A ‘detached constellation’ would also dis-empower by failing to know people, or to provide adequate vehicles for socialization leading to the recognition of individual uniqueness. Inadequate socialization could induce the same sense

of being held by an inadequate holding environment that fails to respond to the uniqueness of the individual or push back against their demanding-ness. This could also be interposed by an 'autonomistic' parenting style that controls by minimizing feedback. Basic Assumptions *baD* and *baP* could also underlay the typical 'dramatic constellation' as it is marked by structural immaturity and lack of a cohesive set of values. The only talents that get encouraged here are activist and risk taking varieties. One would expect where these features were prominent the 'holding environment' would betray the trust of the member and be inadequate to sustain mature self-investment in ministry.

Alternately a culture that aims to empower and find expression for an individual's giftedness would externally resemble a typical 'cultivation' culture or alternately is the type where 'transitional objects' in the form of encouraging structures for ministry support are provided. A 'collaborative' culture could also be evidenced by both a high 'coordination' rating as here individual charismatic diversity is honoured and the individual can be valued as a key contributor. Success could be measured by the 'synergy' whereby the communal outcomes are greater than the size or skill of the individual inputs or their own potentials (Schneider: 1994, 117). The downside of a 'collaboration' culture is that individuals subjugate their individuality for a social orientation failing to hold one another to account and settling for mediocrity. Such a situation would be the equivalent of an inadequate holding environment. Laissez-faire management associated with the downside of collaboration culture is the antithesis of a liberating form of coordination. Therefore, those community cultures whose order of change is 'transformational' would also suggest that the potentiality of Christ's spiritual body is being manifested at a 'coordination' level.

In the same vein, a high ‘cultivation’ culture would be typified by that aspect of the culture that desires to see that people become all that they possibly could be while identifying strongly with the values of the organization. The leaders’ primary role in such an organization is indeed to enable people to fulfil their spiritual potential (Schneider: 1994, 121). The comparison between this construct and the Pauline manifesto in Ephesians 4.11-16 is striking where the role of the charismatic leadership gifts (Eph. 4. 11) is the ‘coordination’ (Gk: *katartismos*), literally, the ‘re-setting of displaced limbs’, for the ‘work of ministry’. The ultimate upshot of this is the differentiated, principle centred maturation of each and all the members ‘into Him who is the head, into Christ’ (Eph. 4.15) through the loving interconnections within this ‘properly working’ body (Eph. 4.16). Indeed the Biblical witness attests that we cannot be all we were intended without mutual relational commitments. As an isolated individual we cannot be a work in process in the image of God. A movement therefore involving the dissolution of particularly the *baD* towards a W group or a cultivation culture would be signifying a spiritual maturation in the direction of the image of the Triune community.

Domain 3: ‘Power Concentration’

The dependency of a *baD* group is spawned when a community is located at a ‘monocentric-asymmetrical’ end of the range of power concentrations. This also resonates with a typical ‘control’ culture where ‘asymmetry’ is inseparable from the very purposes of the organizational hierarchy. Group stability is more important than sanctifying progress in such a culture. The ‘maximal-external’ constraints within such culture would be obvious essentials in this cultural pursuit. Likewise the ‘asymmetry’ factor is an essential characteristic of a ‘competence culture’ as in such, people would not only be placed in their roles by the leadership of the ‘church’ but the power of leadership role stemming from a mono-centric monopoly of needed

expertise (Schneider:1994, 117). At a conscious level the dis-empowering of persons happens on the basis of cultural assumptions that members are not 'made of the same stuff' or their charismata are not as critical to the success of the group as those of the clerical 'professional'.

From a psychodynamic lens, 'external legal' constraints and asymmetrical power relations, could also be a reflection of a leadership fear that some of the 'laos' may in fact be 'of the same stuff' as the leaders! Therefore asymmetrical concentration of power could be a feature of the 'dramatic', or the 'suspicious' constellations but from entirely different motives. Whereas monocentricity is essential to a 'suspicious' constellation (Kets de Vries: 2001, 150) having to do with their inherently persecutory fears and nature of their leaders, the sense of entitlement and the leaders' craving for idealizing attention, centralizes attention on themselves in the 'dramatic constellation' where spontaneous and non participative decision making are a part of the drama of the dis-empowering leader. Narratives of such organizational cultures are a long way from the ideal of the Triune God. A 'compulsive' constellation by definition works cohesion through external formal constraint. It is inconceivable here to allow for the freedom of individual decision-making. It stifles the self-expression demanded by the fullness of personhood implied in the asymmetrical position unless the individual has a highly formal personality to begin with. While certain powers can be codified in hierarchical structures, the means to the ends would usually be too overly prescribed by policies and protocols to permit an interdependency of persons as creative agents.

Authentic community renewal according to a 'perichoretic' understanding, would involve a culture where individuals are regarded as equally but not identically endowed with charismata. This would result in a poly-centralizing of the power relationships between members and the

leaders who serve the development of the members through their own ministry. These features speak of a liberating type of power where, while leadership may launch or initiate ministries and are given some freedom to interpret broad policies rather than conform to strict predetermined guidelines. Such is typical of the 'cultivation' culture whereby the aspirations of the individual are given space for expression and inspiration derives from the convergence within the community mission for inspiration from any number of individuals. It also speaks of a type of Godhead that is open to historical possibilities and whose sovereign will, can just as easily coincide with human wilfulness. Change, caring, growth and creativity are attributes of this culture as decision-making respects the 'polycentric subjectivity' whereby decisions are made and plans enacted.

Domain 4: 'Coherence'

The lower end of this domain, the feature of 'coerciveness' would naturally correspond to the power of intimidation and the threat of attack that is indicative of a *baF* group. Coerciveness is a bi-product of 'suspicious organization' where leadership is sometimes vindictive. Similarly an organization displaying a 'compulsive' constellation of neurotic elements depends upon adherence to rules and the ability to coerce compliance with them. Patriarchal and matriarchal 'parenting' styles are alternative expressions of this coercive means of gaining coherence. An 'aggressive' change agent has the authority to command at least a behavioural level of compliance.

The healthy end of this domain relates to some volitional aspects that are features of the 'cultivation' culture, since as Schneider describes the force for cohesion "the magnetism (is) caused essentially by the level of commitment that its people can attain." ... "Decisions hinge upon content and processes that exist within people" (Schneider: 1994, 122) hence the volitionality of this culture. In such a church the people are committed to the institution not because it has

become overly identified with the divine realm, but because it achieves missional goals that they themselves value, and in which they are willing to invest themselves. One also would expect therefore that a redemptive pastor would facilitate the decision making of such a group with either an 'indoctrinative' style, attempting to change the content upon which the values of the subjects are made, or, via a 'conciliative' style assuming that such content base was enlightened. To the extent that the content of such values is determined by faith in the revelation of God in the gospel of Christ, one would be confident that change along this domain was coordinate with the saving presence of the Triune God, no less.

Domain 5: 'Collegiality'

Any of the basic assumptions would be possible in a climate dominated by one in whom greater authority was supposed to reside, especially the dependency fantasy, the utopian fantasy and or the neurotic phenomenon of 'identification with the aggressor'. The notion of 'delegative authority' is less precise than the notion of a basic assumption group. It only specifies the lack of reciprocity within such relationships that one should have in a group inspired by the nature of the Godhead. Reciprocity and mutuality is not possible in a constellation where the controls are fed by a paranoid suspicion of potential threat from ones peers or, in the compulsive constellation where the structures are designed to negate the threat of independent thinking in one's confederates.

The typical control culture is by nature 'directive' as compliance is demanded of the employee. A 'conciliative' change agency style, while preferable, is not automatically more 'collegial' in this sense. It would increase this rating only if the changes agreed upon were in the direction of a New Testament vision of the new humanity. Regressive collusions can also be

collegial. The participative aspect and the brainstorming associated with the 'Cultivation' culture could indicate the presence of this spiritual domain. This notion of collegiality is synonymous with the secular notion of 'collegial' culture (Schneider: 1994, 108).⁸

We have already seen that these narratives show a coherence that moves in the direction of greater health and less impersonality as the narratives switch from an era of decline toward one of renewal. With such a potential to discriminate between cultures on a theological plane the actual narratives can now be assessed in the light of these correlations. And we have already shown the relative power of interpretation of the various theories. To conclude given the above argument, we shall see that it is possible to discern an inter-connection between the working of God and the human agents of change through the interrelationship between shifts in culture and the prevailing psychological dynamics within these real world groups. Our aim is to discern whether there are sufficient grounds to believe that church renewal was also a redemptive process to do with the

⁸ There is another major cultural correlate of the influence of God's ministry in social structural terms that we have not mentioned here and that is the fact that the model of Christ's community as articulated in the Pauline documents is 'unity in diversity' rather than unity in uniformity. Moltmann stresses this in strongly socio-cultural categories. "Every restriction and uniformity in ideas, words and works benumbs the community and bores other people. It is only unity in diversity that makes the Christian community an 'inviting church' and a healing community in this society of ours." In such a culture "We experience at once our socialization and our individualization." (Moltmann: 1992, 185, 196). Such diversity should include such distinctives as spirituality, doctrinal frameworks, personal abilities and handicaps, backgrounds and social strata. In this sense one should expect then a period of decline should be reflected in the standardizing uniformalising of this body in the direction of a 'uni-culture' whereas, if the renewal derives primarily from spiritual sources, a 'pluri-culture' should develop in a period of renewal. I have not included this as a separate domain in this study as in Carinia Downs, the possibility of cultural variation is very limited in an isolated rural context. Moreover, all the various ways in which pluri-formity may be manifest could form a different study completely beyond the scope of this one. It is noticeable that as we have already noted, in Ivy Street and Red Hill, the marked uni-cultural backgrounds have been transformed over the renewal period into more inclusive, more pluri-form cultures especially with regard to the issue of the fear of the charismatic member entering the church, and in Carinia Downs, and Ivy Street, a wider range of people from varying social backgrounds and marital status was noted. The non included church, Petersham is interesting as it is the lack of the capacity of the church to tolerate the degree of diversity of views that came through the influx of members from non-rural backgrounds that set up a major conflict with the long serving Pastor and his hand-picked leaders. The uniformity that resulted, was not a result of standardizing but the loss of the majority of the former members. Uniformity has many guises; some accidental, some deliberate and defensive.

reparative work of the Spirit in these specific cases. This forms the basis of our conclusion as to the efficacy of a multi-lens approach for reading church narratives.

We can now evaluate the nature of decline and renewal in each church from the vantage point of the three theoretical lenses as well as attempting to integrate the theological perspective developed above. This is simplified by the following Table 2, which enables one to check on the presence of grace underlying the human efforts to confront stagnation and provoke change. This table effectively can be used as a checklist and placed across each narrative, which in Table 1 in the previous chapter had also been transformed into diagrammatic form for each unique narrative.

Table 2: Identifiable Cultural Features/Spiritual correlates.

← Unhealthy / Oppressive	Healthy / 'Triune'-like →
Domain #1: Sense of Calling	
<i>Habituation (Politicising vs. Enthusiasm)</i>	
<p style="text-align: right;"><i>Inspiration</i></p> Control Culture <i>baF</i> , or <i>baP</i> , Depressive Constellation, or Detached Constellation, or (Suspicious Constellation)	'Working' Group Cultivation culture
Domain #2: Sense of Coordination	
<i>Passive Resignation</i>	
<p style="text-align: right;"><i>Empowerment</i></p> Control Culture or, <i>BaD</i> or, <i>baP</i> Inadequate holding environment or socialization process Depressive Constellation, or Detached Constellation, or Dramatic Organization	Cultivation Culture Collaboration Culture re. Synergy Provision of Transitional Objects Adequate Socialization/holding Transformational change
Domain #3: Concentration of Power	
<i>Mono-centric-Asymmetrical</i>	
<p style="text-align: right;"><i>Polycentric-Symmetrical</i></p> Control or, Competence Culture <i>BaD</i> or, <i>baF</i> Suspicious constellation Compulsive constellations Dramatic constellation	Collaboration or Cultivation Culture 'Nurturance' parenting style
Domain #4: Cohesion Process.	
<i>Coercion</i>	
<p style="text-align: right;"><i>Volition</i></p> <i>baF</i> , Patriarchal Parenting Styles Suspicious constellation, Compulsive constellation 'Aggressive' change agency	Conciliative Style Indoctrinative Style Cultivation Culture
Domain #5: Collegiality in Leadership.	
<i>Delegative-Autocratic</i>	
<p style="text-align: right;"><i>Real-Team Collegiality</i></p> Control Culture <i>baD</i> , <i>baP</i> 'Identification with the Aggressor' Suspicious Constellation Compulsive Constellation	Conciliative Style Collaboration Culture

Each domain is described by the collection of cultural and psychodynamic phenomena that one would expect were the church in either an unhealthy as opposed to a healthy situation. Since it has been shown that there is a correspondence between cultural, systemic and psychodynamic features one would have confidence that a church in decline had been truly dysfunctional if there was evidence of dysfunction at basic assumption, constellation, culture or parenting levels.

We have simplified the exercise down to assessing the spiritual dynamics of the two major periods, 'decline' and 'renewal' for the sake of the more important issue of discerning the spiritual nature of the renewal process. The results of using Table 2 as a checklist for evaluating simultaneously the psychodynamic-and cultural evidence of the Spirit's work with the charts form of the five narratives in Table 1 of the previous chapter is shown below in Table 3. The actual score sheets upon which the next table is devised are shown in an appendix 2. Table 2 enables a clear check list of the combination of psychodynamic and cultural features that one should expect in a narrative were it to be undergoing a redemptive transformation in the direction of a community bearing the human-side attributes reflective of Triune ideals. The table summarizes these findings including the churches whose analyses were not presented above for sake of comparison.

Table 3. Images of the Trinity in Each Narrative.

<i>Church</i>	<i>Phase In Story</i>	Domain 1: <u>Calling.</u> <i>Inspired Vs. Habituated (Politicised or Enthusiastic)</i>	Domain 2: <u>Coordination</u> <i>Empowered Vs. Resigned</i>	Domain 3: <u>Power Distribution.</u> <i>Mono Centric-Asymmetric Vs. Polycentric-Symmetric</i>	Domain4: <u>Cohesion.</u> <i>Coercive Vs. Volitional</i>	Domain 5: <u>Collegiality.</u> <i>Delegative-Autocratic Vs. Collegial Leadership Team.</i>
<i>Carinia Downs</i>	Decline	Politicised	Resigned	Monocentric Asymmetric	Coercive	Delegative
	Renewal	Inspirational	Empowered	Polycentric Symmetric	Volitional	Collegial
<i>Ivy Street</i>	Decline	Politicised & Enthusiastic	Resigned	Monocentric Asymmetric	Coercive	Delegative
	Renewal	<i>(Inspirational)</i>	<i>(Resigned)</i>	Polycentric Symmetric	Volitional	Collegial
<i>Red Hill</i>	Decline	Politicised	Resigned	Monocentric Asymmetric	Coercive	Delegative
	Renewal	Inspirational	Empowered	<i>(Polycentric Symmetric)</i>	<i>(Volitional)</i>	Collegial
<i>Petersham</i>	Decline	Politicised	Resigned	Monocentric Asymmetric	Coercive	<i>(Collegial)</i>
	Renewal	Inspirational	Empowered	Polycentric Symmetric	Volitional	Collegial
<i>Forrest Hills</i>	Decline	Politicised & Enthusiastic	Resigned	Monocentric Asymmetric	Coercive	<i>(Collegial)</i>
	Renewal	Inspirational	Empowered	Polycentric Symmetric	Volitional	Collegial

The results of this comparison show that one can clearly conclude that there is a clear correspondence between a sub-Christian absence of the discernable marks of Christ's ideal community and that these correlate with both certain cultural patterns which in turn reveal underlying neurotic aspects during the decline period for each of the five churches as shown by the results in appendix 2 and summarized in Table 3 below. Likewise the sorts of combinations of

possible factors that one would expect from a world side correlate of the redemptive work of the Spirit in cultural guise, are strongly evident in all cases of the renewal phase.

The cells with the ratings in brackets show the areas where confidence is low simply because that type of information was not divulged by a majority of members interviewed. Some of these occur in the 'collegial' domain where in some churches, information was limited. One possible reason for this was that only leaders from the particular era would have been privy to this feature of leadership team life. For the sake of the theoretical confidence such details are shown in the best possible light in the decline era. The shaded cells are those where the spiritual nature of the culture does not appear to have improved in the renewal period or, could potentially have been better as the church was in decline.

As regards the exceptions, we firstly note Ivy Street under Domain two and in the renewal phase. In one sense this is not unexpected as the pastor has been very sensitive to the great number of members who have come from other abusive situations into his church. Focus group discussions showed that the fact that the church was 'not high pressured' but allowed people to become involved to the degree that they could cope with the responsibilities of ministries shows that this church instead has an extremely high regard for the 'volitional' aspect of the community in Domain 4. The larger the church has grown, the more difficult it has been to coordinate the growing numbers of people into public worship spaces. Thus, this problem is more a matter of logistical difficulties and pastoral sensitivity than a theological or political deficit. The fact that the church has undergone a 'transformational' order of change would suggest that the experience of power is far less controlling and far more enabling than in former peak times. The opportunity

for personal growth and ministry responsibility is encouraged as the conscious attempt to develop a cultivation culture has been fostered by deliberate restructuring training and coordinators of various ministries within the last two years.

Likewise, at Red Hill church, there was a sense in which the church now that it has pressed through the collaborative process of articulating its shared mission, vision and values, has now realised this in the form of the church handbook as an example of an external constraint. The leadership has had no hesitation to demand compliance from the members and ministry coordinators in particular, when resistance even sabotage of the mission has been evident. As this church has grown in size, as with Ivy Street, its leaders have sensed the same logistical difficulty of coordination and cohesion. It has instituted therefore organizational mechanisms of both external verification and objective feedback and emphasises impersonal norms of external standards of performance akin to the level of regulation associated with a 'competence' culture. The positively ethical side to this is that these standards and norms were devolved through extensive conciliative processes. Secondly, they are made very clear at the point of entry to new comers into the community so that to enter the community volitionally is to assent to the fairness of these procedures. Thirdly, those with the broadest powers, the leaders and especially the senior pastor David Ross, are held accountable by a policy board to the same process of accountability to these objectivised standards and values. The pastor and leaders expressed the belief that such processes were not dehumanising but were actually instituted to raise the levels of trust, by giving firm guidelines for those to whom more trust would be given in turn. Thus the external constraints of the new governance by policy structure certainly are designed to preserve the polycentric and symmetrical aspects of the character of the community.

The less Trinitarian aspect of this is that such processes in future may become oppressive if they cannot easily be revised in the light of ongoing learning, by the consensual expression of the members' will but are constrained by former community decision. Size and complexity seems to be the enemy of internal 'volition' or how the cohesion issue is resolved in Domain 4. Again the 'transformational' order of change as shown in the vitality of the church's outreach would suggest that the sense of 'calling' in Domain 1, has been disproportionately strong in comparison to changes in other spiritual domains. One still has reservations about a culture that is constructed around objective measures and legislated authority as a way of enforcing compliance. The 'competence' culture involving a 'management by objectives' approach to the new leadership is in tension with the mutuality of the church due to the fact that any of these devices of policy handbooks and periodic review are less personal and distend the relational spaces between leaders and members. While these artefacts serve to protect the pastors from reactionary malice and the potential fragmentation of the culture from a multitude of critics, and while it affirms a true place for the exercising of a leadership gift, it changes the mode of leadership away from one gift *among* many to one *over* many. Policy governance may address the inherent twin weakness of collaboration and cultivation culture of the competing interests of the individual's development and the need for cohesive use of the energy of the whole on the one hand, and the inefficiencies of structures that are always being modified as they reach toward an unrealised future, on the other. It cannot help but symbolize at an object relations level, to the member a depersonalisation of the pastor-people relationship; a shift in the model of the church away from 'family' model, a community in mission, to either an impersonal 'competency culture' or 'leader' model. The change has been facilitated by a trade off being accepted by the majority between the gains to them in being connected with the synergistic movement of the church as an agent of effective outreach, against the personalizing nature of the holding environment. The present member may

not feel as valued as the 'possibility' congregation of the future. This raises other questions as to the feasibility of being able to logistically handle the leadership of any large and missional church without compromising the identity of the church analogous to the image of 'God in relationship'. The New Testament notion of church is not an institution converting resources to measurable achievements, but is first of all a mode of being, with the key Trinitarian characteristic of 'interdependence'.

With these reservations, these stories from their period of decline to renewal coincide with the sorts of features that one would expect were the community undergoing a process of group 'sanctification' to one that bears the essential hallmarks of the liberating influence of the Holy Spirit. When on five essential domains, these churches have moved from a clearly deficient sense of calling, empowerment, power concentration, the means of cohesion and leadership collegiality, to one bearing the greater majority of the New Testament attributes of a godly people one, with a degree of confidence, would suggest that God has been able to inspire a palpable expression of his own eternal Triune life in the mundane world of recent historical expression. It is noticeable that the churches that have shown the transformational level of change, Ivy Street and Red Hill, not only registered a majority of features expected of the decline era but also the vast majority corresponding expected features one would associate with Spiritual renewal. Not only is the process of change therefore, from a system of relationships that is largely less Christ-like, regressive or impersonal, but the processes of change correspond to those one would expect if a source of renewal was the Grace of God. This is as close as one can get, for these purposes to demonstrate in an objective manner what really must be taken by faith and subjectively discerned: God has indeed drawn near.