The Kingdom of Communities:
An argument for Asset Based Community Development
in local communities as a practical expression of the
Kingdom’s advance

By
Andre Marinus Van Eymeren
GdipArts (Religion Studies), DipTh, DipYth&CommWrk (Christian)

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Abstract

This paper draws on the vision of the Prophet Isaiah to present an argument for the use of Asset Based Community Development. The author argues that in the Lord’s new creation, when God’s Kingdom comes in its fullness, there will be: celebration, the valuing of young and old, the provision of shelter and sustenance and people living lives full of meaning in reconciled relationships with God (Isa 65:17-25). This is a picture of the Hebrew concept of shalom. In the meantime, this paper will show, that as God’s people we are to be building for that image of shalom now. Jesus in his life and teaching becomes the model of God’s Kingdom with us now and the usher we are to follow in our work of building now for what is to come.

For our world to reflect this image, it needs to be transformed. To effectively engage in the work of transformation, we need to answer some fundamental questions: What is an understanding of God’s Kingdom that allows the Church active participation in its advancement now? What is the nature of this participation and the internal shape of the Church necessary for engagement with it? What is a methodology that the Church can use to engage with its community effectively? And in order to ensure relevance, the Church needs to ask, what is the cultural context in which it operates?

This paper answers those core questions through an argument for the use of Asset Based Community Development (ABCD) in local communities as a practical expression of the Kingdom’s advance. Drawing on key texts and an exploratory and descriptive methodology it argues for an understanding of the Kingdom that recognises God’s intentions for the world now, holding in tension God’s ultimate desire to bring heaven to earth. This understanding of the Kingdom prompts the Church to examine its internal shape as well as its engagement with the world. This paper demonstrates a universal understanding of the Church and a particular shape that it can embrace in order to be effective in the culture.
The Western Church is then placed in its cultural context and the paper finally outlines Asset Based Community Development as an appropriate methodology for the Church’s engagement with the world. It uses case studies to show the integrity and flexibility of this model across a diverse range of the Church.
Acknowledgements

This paper has had a long gestation and birthing process. However that seems appropriate for its content. It mirrors my journey into kingdom orientated community development. Throughout the process of writing this paper, it has been heartening to discover that there are academics and other practitioners who agree that God has a broad Kingdom agenda and longs to see his people participate in it, through a whole variety of means.

I would like to thank Dr Andrew Menzies for his work as my supervisor. I have valued his perspective and hours of reading and editing. More I have valued his belief in the topic and in me. At times I’m sure this has been tested.

I would like to thank those I have lived and worked with throughout the years in South Australia, Tasmania and most recently in Melbourne. I value my connection with you and have learnt things from each of you. Thank you for being a part of this journey, it has been richer for your presence.

I would also like to thank my family, who have travelled with me, not only through the writing of this paper, but all the years beforehand, being prepared to travel and to connect with new communities in our pursuit of God’s Kingdom dream. I thank you too for your belief in me. All of what’s written here is for you and for the dreams we share for a better world.

Most of all this work is God’s. I give it to him as a faltering gift, that I pray he can use to further the work of His Kingdom.
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Introduction

In Isaiah 58 and 65, the prophet outlines some of God’s desire for the world and the type of society or community God is involved in creating. Jesus through his life and teaching enfleshes these desires and as his people he sets an agenda for us to follow. My chapters outline a world where there will be societal renewal or transformation led by God’s people. Communities will take on a flavour of celebration, valuing the place and contribution of the individual. In this context each person will have shelter, sustenance and the opportunity to live a life full of meaning in a reconciled relationship with God.

Throughout my ministry I have been captured by this picture of community and have sought to partner with God and others in its outworking. The process has often been more intuitive than conscious, and this paper, whilst based on research is a culmination of my journey and learning as a missionary to the West and an attempt to ground practice in theology and provide a more conscious rationale and methodology for the Church to partner with God in his Kingdom endeavour.

This paper will show that Asset Based Community Development (ABCD) is a valid methodology, grounded in Kingdom theology, that Churches can adopt as a framework for their engagement with local communities. In order to demonstrate this I will explore in chapter one the nature of the Kingdom or the reign of God, its intended impact in the present and the means by which this impact is to be lived out. Tom Wright explores some of these themes as part of a broader rationale for hope. He sees the key reason for our hope is the bodily resurrection of Jesus, which has inaugurated the new creation. The beginnings of the coming of the Kingdom or of heaven coming to earth.¹ He sees this has implications both individually and as the body of Christ, particularly for the shape of the Church and its mission in the world. I will argue that God’s Kingdom

¹ Tom Wright, Surprised by Hope (London: SPCK, 2007), 217.
encompasses not only all of humanity but all of creation, giving to the Church as signpost and witness to the Kingdom, a broad agenda to fulfill with God.

In chapter two I will explore the question, If the Church is going to fulfill this broad agenda, how is it to see itself and what shape does it take? Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch show that pre 313AD the church was characterised by its persecuted, underground and minority nature. It was decentralised and didn’t have any buildings. It employed a five-fold functional leadership (Eph 4:11-12). The Church identified itself as missionary and was incarnate in its locality. Then throughout the era of Christendom, institutionalisation took place, with the development of a hierarchy and buildings becoming more central.² In this chapter I will unpack the concept that if the Church is to fulfill its Kingdom mandate, it needs to become re-sensitised to its liminal state and allow that to enable it to develop a Christ centred open communitas.

Neither the process of understanding God’s Kingdom or the outworking of its implications for the Church happens in a vacuum. Charles Taylor outlines the significant cultural shift that has happened over the last five hundred years which has seen western society shift from religious to secular.³ Leslie Newbigin shows how this process has left major credibility gaps for the Church as it seeks to relate to society.⁴ In the third chapter I will briefly survey this major cultural shift and provide a broad overview of current culture, which will set the context to show the relevancy of Asset Based Community Development (ABCD).

The fourth chapter is an explanation of ABCD, comparing its similarities to the principles of liberation theology. Using different language, Leonardo Boff and John Kretzman outline a similar rationale for social change and I will highlight the similarities and differences of their approaches.

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Finally in the fifth chapter I will validate ABCD as a legitimate methodology and important tool for a Church’s engagement with its local community, if it seeks to be engaged missionally. I will do this using three case studies of communities that employ the principles of ABCD whilst being grounded in Kingdom focus and principles.
Chapter 1 The Kingdom of God and its Impact in the World

Introduction

The Kingdom of God is a central theme in the life and teaching of Jesus. He understood that in his person, the Kingdom had come near. In Luke 4, Jesus sees himself as the fulfillment of the words in Isaiah 61, referring to key activities of the Kingdom. Isaiah also called the Kingdom the new heaven and the new earth.

This chapter will explore the biblical and historical nature of the Kingdom, as well as God’s intended impact, both in our present and eschatological reality. As the nature and impact of the Kingdom is understood, the means by which God desires to make this impact felt will become clearer. I will argue that the present expression of Kingdom is the ushering in of the new heaven and the new earth, with followers of the King (Jesus) seen as the inaugurated new creation. This will provide a foundation which I will further develop, exploring how followers of Jesus can be a demonstration (a sign and foretaste) of the Kingdom.

The nature of the Kingdom of God

The nature of the Kingdom of God is intrinsically linked with who God is, and his purposes for creation. The reign of God is over everything, and all things draw their origin and meaning from that reign. It is the source and the goal of the cosmos.5

Joachim, writing in the 12th Century, combines two eschatologies, arguing that the nature of God’s Kingdom is both eschatological and trinitarian.6 The first is accredited to Tyconius and developed by Augustine. They saw that God created the world in six days and inaugurated the seven ages of


seven ages of world history. Six were focused on work and one of rest, before the end of the world. Augustine believed that the end of the world would be the Kingdom of endless glory.\textsuperscript{7}

The other eschatology that influenced Joachim was taken from the Cappadocians. They believed the Father, the Son and the Spirit, each had a time of divine rule. The nature of the Kingdom would take on different characteristics corresponding to the unique nature of that member of the Trinity. The Kingdom of the Father is focused on the creation and preservation of the world. Joachim believed that this rule was determined by the law and the fear it evoked. The second period, the Kingdom of the Son was concerned with redemption, through the servitude of the son. It was understood that God would rule through the proclamation of the gospel and the sacraments of the Church. Through fellowship with the son, a believer moved from the standing of a slave before God, to being one of His children. The Kingdom of the Spirit was concerned with the rebirth of people. God would rule directly through revelation and knowledge, and believers would move from being God’s children to His friends.\textsuperscript{8} Joachim saw that each era of the Kingdom was pregnant with the next and pushes towards it and that it is a progression towards liberty. His work was influential in the interpretation of the enlightenment, which many writers saw as a significant step not only towards liberty, but also towards humankind’s efforts to shape the world in their own image. In chapter three I will specifically unpack the significance of the enlightenment and its impact on the mission of the Church in the world.

Throughout the Bible God reveals plans of blessing for all the nations, and that through this blessing the Godhead’s purpose would be fulfilled for the creation of the world including humankind. In the light of this, the Kingdom is not an escape for redeemed souls, but is the action of God bringing history to its true fulfillment. Ultimately expressed as a renewed earthly humanity

\textsuperscript{7} Ibid., 204.

\textsuperscript{8} Ibid., 205.
marked by peace, happiness, prosperity, wise and just government, not an other worldly bliss (Psalms 82, 144, Isaiah1:1-9).  

Joachim believed this would happen through four stages of the Kingdom played out in history. The first stage saw the work and attributes of the Father being predominant, another highlighting the work of the Son and a third stage for the presence of the Holy Spirit. The fourth stage, according to Joachim, was one of glory and final consummation. The orthodox protestant view saw only two historical stages and one of glory or consummation. Jurgen Moltmann wondered whether this meant that the Protestant view missed the Kingdom of the Spirit or linked it with Christ’s rule in the Kingdom of grace. Whichever view is more accurate it has created a dualism between the kingdoms of nature and grace.  

Tom Wright highlights Jurgen Moltmann’s concerns about the Protestant understanding of the Kingdom. Many modern Protestants see the work of the Kingdom, through the lens of a false eschatology, namely going to Heaven when they die. This relegates the main work of the church to saving souls for the future. Wright argues for a much broader approach based on the New Testament understanding that sees the Kingdom in terms of God’s promised new heaven and new earth and which gives an essential meaning to partnering with God, in his work of restoration to life before death.  

Moltmann, with a similar understanding to Wright, uses Joachim’s work to create a fuller understanding through a Trinitarian doctrine of the Kingdom. The Kingdom of the Father is where we see the creation of the world, which is open to the future. The goal of this creation is the glorification of the Triune God. This will be seen fully in the creation of the new heaven and new earth.  

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9 Newbigin, *Open Secret*, 34.  
10 Moltmann, *Trinity and the Kingdom*, 208.  
12 Ibid., 210-211.
Currently creation tries to shut itself off from God’s future, but through providence the future is kept open. Wright sees that it is kept open through the work of the new creation. In this we see the Kingdom of the Father as one of power, but also self limitation, self emptying and patience. These characteristics mark the whole government of God.\(^{14}\)

In the kingdom of the Son, Jesus aligns with the Father’s patience, by freeing men and women from their servitude, taking on the nature of a servant. Freedom is only available through vicarious suffering and the call to liberty.\(^{15}\) The Kingdom of the Son is directed towards the eschatological Kingdom of Glory. Through the Kingdom of the Spirit, that freedom is appropriated. Through the power of the Spirit the energies of the new creation are experienced. The Spirit and the new creation come into being, and all are equal and free. The Spirit gives life to all, empowering men and women to perform special service and receive special revelation.\(^{16}\) However, the eschatological indwelling of God’s glory continues to be anticipated.\(^{17}\) Moltmann argues that the Kingdom of Glory is the consummation of the Father’s creation and the universal establishment of the Son’s liberation and the fulfillment of the Spirit’s indwelling. The doctrine of the Kingdom sums up the work of the Trinity, which is creation, liberation and glorification.

Wright argues from Genesis 1 and 2, that as part of the intrinsic nature of the Kingdom, mankind was given the mandate to look after all of creation, and bring order to it. Mankind has fallen short of the intentions of this mandate, however it is an essential aspect of the partnership that we have with God. The Kingdom of God or Kingdom of Heaven is the sovereign rule of God that breaks into the present world.\(^{18}\) The gospels tell the story of this in breaking through the redemptive death and

\(^{13}\) Moltmann, *Trinity and the Kingdom*, 209.

\(^{14}\) Wright, *Surprised by Hope*, 210.

\(^{15}\) Moltmann, *Trinity and the Kingdom*, 210.

\(^{16}\) Newbigin, *Open Secret*, Chapter 3.

\(^{17}\) Moltmann, *Trinity and the Kingdom*, 211.

\(^{18}\) Wright, *Surprised by Hope*, 213.
resurrection of Jesus. His followers are then re-commissioned and equipped to continue in the original mandate of bringing order where there is chaos.

God’s supreme act of new creation, will be the answer to Jesus’ prayer in Matthew 6 your Kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is heaven, it will be the final coming together of heaven and earth. The prototype of this new creation was the first creation and the resurrection of Jesus. This is something that God alone can do. The role of Jesus’ followers as part of the new creation, is to be building for the Kingdom.19 1 Corinthians 15:58 says that everything we do for God is worthwhile. Anything that is Spirit led and in line with the character of Jesus will find its way into the new creation. We are to live out through proclamation and endurance or action, the faith that the Kingdom of God has drawn near.20

The Kingdom is Trinitarian in nature, each part of the Godhead, playing a unique role. It has broken into time and space, through the work of Jesus, who was the inauguration of the new creation, the followers of Jesus are also part of that new creation. What then is the impact of the Kingdom, both now and eschatologically and what is the role of the new creation, particularly in the context of transformation?

Impact of the Kingdom of God

The resurrection of Jesus signified the beginning of the creation of the new heaven and the new earth. A new age had dawned. The bodily resurrected Jesus then met with his followers, helping them to comprehend the meaning of the parousia and the resurrection. After forty days, Jesus ascended and the promised Holy Spirit was bestowed on the believers. The event is eschatological in nature, the coming of the Holy Spirit, the assurance to believers that what was promised for the consummation of all things has already occurred. The impact is that the believer has the power to

19 Ibid., 219.
20 Newbigin, Open Secret, 39.
proclaim the gospel as an act of deliverance for all humanity.\textsuperscript{21} The appearances of the resurrected Jesus to his followers, and the Pentecost event is also the beginning of the church. The formation of the community of believers is a partial aspect of the dawning of the Kingdom. The gathered fellowship was waiting for God’s future, the final consummation, which they saw as imminent.

However the twelve disciples were not to be a community for themselves. Firstly they were a symbolic eschatological action, showing the restoration of the tribes of Israel in the future of God’s reign. However, with Israel largely rejecting the Easter message, the disciples, not without a struggle, became the core for a new fellowship which transcended the bounds of the Jewish people.\textsuperscript{22} They became core building blocks of God’s work for His kingdom, in the world. Flowing on from the work of the disciples, the Church as we know it today is an eschatological community and an anticipatory sign of God’s coming rule.\textsuperscript{23} Chapter Two of this paper will more fully explore the outworking of this ontological reality, as it relates to the Kingdom in the world.

In his book \textit{Models of the Kingdom}, Howard Snyder explores a continuum of understanding about the Kingdom of God and its purposes in the world. He sees that the Kingdom is the primary metaphor through which Christians have understood what it means to believe in Christ and through him be related to God and the world.\textsuperscript{24} Snyder has delineated eight points along the continuum, from which to construct models. They include seeing the Kingdom as predominantly future hope, to an inner spiritual experience, to mystical communion, equating Kingdom and Church, to seeing the Kingdom as counter-system, as a political state, as Christianised culture and as earthly utopia. These models mainly relate to the nature and timing of the impact of the Kingdom.

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{21} Wolfhart Pannenberg, \textit{Systematic Theology: Volume 3}, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997), 28.
\item \textsuperscript{22} Ibid., 30.
\item \textsuperscript{23} Ibid., 32.
\item \textsuperscript{24} Howard Snyder, \textit{Models of the Kingdom}, (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1991), 22.
\end{itemize}
Through the work of Moltmann, Wright and Leslie Newbigin, I have shown the nature of the Kingdom is trinitarian, ultimately eschatological, however with Jesus’ death and resurrection, the eschatological has broken into the present, and as part of the new creation, the role of the followers of Jesus is to build for the Kingdom. Snyder’s work will help place this understanding within the continuum of beliefs about the Kingdom and its impact in the world.

Whilst in Joachim and Moltmann there are strong future hope elements, there is also the understanding of the current presence of the Kingdom. The future hope model focuses on cosmic reconciliation, and the millennial reign which precedes the ultimate summation. Its primary image is the new heaven and the new earth, but differs to Wright’s concept and has a general pessimism towards the present order seeing no hope of transformation before the second coming. The predominant task for the believer is to preach the gospel to the whole world then Jesus will come.25

The key proponent of the second point on the continuum is Teresa of Avila, who related to the Kingdom in terms of an inner spiritual experience. Salvation, to her, was participation in God and the focus was on an individual personal experience. This differs to the next model, mystical communion, by the degree shared with others in community. These models tend to be Platonic, focusing on the spirit over and above the body or the material. However, Kingdom as inner spiritual experience was a key understanding in the development of the monastic movement.26

The fourth model equates the kingdom and institutional church. It argues that God’s reign on earth is in and through the church and particularly through the structures of authority. The model sees church as sign, symbol and representative of God’s invisible reign over all things.27 This model has been predominant in times where the church has had significant influence in society. However, Wolfhart Pannenberg argues that the church is an eschatological community and therefore is an

25 Ibid., Chapter 2.
26 Ibid., Chapter 3 and 4.
27 Ibid., 68.
anticipatory sign of God’s coming rule. Pannenberg goes onto say that for a sign to be a sign, it has to be distinguished from that which it signifies. ‘If the Church fails to make this distinction clearly, then it arrogates to itself the finality and glory of the Kingdom, but by the poverty and all too human character of its own life it also makes the Christian hope incredible.’

The fifth model is Kingdom as counter system and its key elements include a prophetic character, a calling of society to justice and a reflection of Kingdom values. It is Christocentric, calling individuals to a life of discipleship and works for a peaceable kingdom, trusting God for victory. This is a model of a subversive kingdom. It is the opposite of model four which equates Kingdom and Church. The model sees Church as providing a counter system to the predominant culture, as a minority mission community within that culture. It is passive in terms of political influence. The model becomes predominant through times of persecution and recedes when the Church is prosperous. Church is seen as seed and sign of the Kingdom. The sixth model goes further, understanding the Kingdom as political state, believing that Jesus’ intention was to set up a theocratic rule of the saints and that the Kingdom offers values and methodology for the social, political and economic organising of society. The model is based on the morality of Old Testament law, which denotes God as judge. Through this understanding the model points to the rising influence of the Church in the world.

Pannenberg argues for a very clear distinction between the Church and the state. The Church, by its very existence is a challenge to every political and judicial order, to embody a form of social life that is in keeping with the ultimate future of humanity. This future is the final consummation of the Kingdom, in its coming to earth. The Church issues this challenge by being true to its nature as a sign of the Kingdom. It’s primary vehicle of challenge is through the centrality of the eucharist, a representation of our fellowship in the Kingdom. Despite this Pannenberg believes there is little

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28 Pannenberg, Systematic Theology, 32.

29 Snyder, Models of the Kingdom, Chapter 6 and 7.
actualisation of God’s Kingdom in secular human relations. Preferring to see that the actualization of the Kingdom is in God’s direct rule in human hearts. It is already available, but seen in the sacramental life of the Church, seen as a sign and in faith for the promised salvation.

The seventh model challenges Pannenberg’s view and describes the Kingdom as Christianised culture. Within the Kingdom there is the stimulus and the program for the transformation of society. The model understands that the Kingdom is not merely present as an inward experience of the believer, but is active and is a dynamic principle of social reconstruction, empowered by the Spirit. The Kingdom offers a set of values and principles that can be lived and applied. Through these values and principles, the Kingdom progressively illuminates human kind. This model shows a relevance and an optimism that the Kingdom has impact in greater society now. The model argues that this is a logical outworking of the gospel that wants to bring peace, harmony and justice. The Church is given a clear role in social reform. The model illustrates human action, co-operating with God’s action. Scripturally, the model points to the minor prophets and Isaiah’s call for justice. The encouragement from the model is to look not simply to Jesus’ statements about the Kingdom, but his life and the social ethics he taught. This model highlights a tension between evangelism and social justice or reform, as a central theme of the manifestation of the Kingdom.

The eighth model, presents the Kingdom as an earthly utopia. Most proponents of this view attempt to have the plan without the person on which it depends or recognition of the reality of God’s Kingdom. E. Stanley Jones points out that if we ignore the presence of the Kingdom it will lead to self frustration and self destruction. In this model Jesus is seen as irrelevant or the cosmic Christ of goodwill. Alternatively He may be held up as the paradigm of what is envisioned. It is model seven taken to an extreme, looking for a way to bring in the golden age and often sees the

30 Pannenberg, Systematic Theology, 52.
31 Snyder, Models of the Kingdom, Chapter 8
33 Ibid., 119.
present authorities as evil. The model understands that the locus of the Kingdom is earthly, with the Church perhaps being the ethical society that embodies the Kingdom values, or it may be seen as irrelevant as in the ideology of Communism. The final goal is a perfect, harmonious, balanced society on earth. The model is essentially humanistic and fails to recognise the internal depth of human self centredness and our need of God's grace. Obviously, this model is the furthest extreme from the first model (Kingdom as future hope) however the hoped for outcome is similar, although the methodology and actualisation vastly different.

**Assessing the Models**

Snyder points out that no one model is totally accurate, or encompasses all of the Kingdom. However, the most accurate models hold a number of elements in tension; present vs future nature of the Kingdom; individual vs social outworking of the Kingdom; Spiritual vs material; gradual vs climactic (this relates predominantly to pre and post millennial understandings of the coming of Christ); divine vs human action; nature of and relationship between Church and Kingdom. Summarised by Snyder, Jones sums up the tensions the best. He relates that the Kingdom is not the Church, however it maintains a key link to it. The Kingdom is the only source of redemption, and if there was a clash between the Church and the Kingdom, the ultimate loyalty has to be to the Kingdom. Agreeing with Pannenberg, Jones understands that any false loyalty to the Church, which would make it take the place of the Kingdom, is ultimately destructive to it. Agreeing with Wright, Jones saw that there was a place for both human and divine action, that there is a gradual revealing of the Kingdom as well as a cataclysmic coming. The Kingdom works in the life of the individual as well as corporate permeation.\(^\text{34}\)

If the Kingdom is trinitarian in nature, and Jesus resurrection inaugurated the new creation and that new creation has a role now in God’s plans and purposes, then model seven, with aspects of two and three, help us best unpack God’s intended impact for the Kingdom and the Church’s role within that.

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\(^\text{34}\) Ibid., 123.
Model seven supposes that God intended for the Kingdom to have a real impact in the present order. It argues that God has a model for communities and societies based on a universal set of values and principles, found in Scripture and outworked in various ways through history. God does not attempt to instill these values alone, seeking to work in cooperation with human action. Whilst ultimately only God can bring about the fullness of the new creation in the bringing of heaven to earth, we are to be like the son, living out and teaching the social ethics that can be found in the gospels. Baptist theologian Walter Rauschenbusch demonstrated that this understanding of the Kingdom brought about the split between the social gospel and fundamentalists. Many felt that the basic tenants of the faith were being down played and that the focus should be the salvation of the individual.\footnote{Ibid., 104-107.}

Wright picks this up, arguing that God’s intention from Genesis to Revelation is justice. A fundamentalism that says the world is in such a mess, that nothing can be done about it until Jesus returns is a form of dualism. Like the Saducees, many fundamentalists are threatened by the depiction of a Jesus, who brings the future into the present and calls his followers to work and pray for a greater realisation of that future.\footnote{Wright, \textit{Surprised by Hope}, 224-226.}

Model two and three, help us to balance this. Whilst God works broader than those who make up the Church, that is, he is present wherever his values are manifest, as an expression of ultimate reality, He predominantly works through those who have had a personal encounter with him. If this were not the case, then a predominant model of the Kingdom would be an earthly utopia. Model two talks of the Kingdom as inner spiritual experience. Taken to its extreme it sets up a dichotomy between spirit and matter. However an inner transformation is needed for a person to experience the reality of the Kingdom. Model three is mystical communion. Whilst not adopting the mystical aspects in their entirety, the model helps us to see that the experience of transformation does not
happen in isolation and that the Kingdom is a corporate reality. That church is a communion of the saints and there is an element of mystery around this.\textsuperscript{37}

The impact of the Kingdom, therefore is inner and personal in as much as a believer is transformed by the power of the Spirit, in Wright’s words, becomes part of the new creation. By the Spirit the new creation is drawn together into a community. That community is given a task of being agents of Kingdom focused transformation. Again in Wright’s words they are to build for the Kingdom and to look forward with hope, that what they are building will go into eternity, making up parts of the new heaven and the new earth, which will be revealed fully when the Kingdom comes in its final consummation.\textsuperscript{38}

**Role of the inaugurated New Creation**

Newbigin clearly states that our role as the new creation is to learn what God is already doing in a world that is His. To understand this fully, we need to relate God’s universality and His particularity. A correct understanding of the doctrine of election helps with this task. Newbigin sees that God could have revealed himself, his plans, the hope that can be found in Him to all, however he chose the one to be the bearer of his blessing for the many.\textsuperscript{39} This is shown in God choosing Abraham as a blessing to the nations, to Moses and the choosing of Israel to be priests for the whole world, to the disciples as fishers of men and so to the Church, chosen to declare the wonderful deeds of God. The particular is chosen for the sake of the universal. The biblical understanding of the person and our destiny is one of shared relationship in the context of a task. A task that in itself relates to the creative work of God in the natural world.\textsuperscript{40}

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{37} Snyder, *Models of the Kingdom*, Chapter 3 and 4.
\textsuperscript{38} Wright, *Surprised by Hope*, 219.
\textsuperscript{39} Newbigin, *Open Secret*, 68.
\textsuperscript{40} Ibid., 69-70.
\end{flushleft}
As humans the Bible invites us into a relationship of responsibility for the created world and to see God’s saving purpose in relation to this real world of real people. The gift of salvation then binds us together and restores us for true relationship with each other and nature. The invitation to salvation comes through the other and is dependent on our openness to the other (Rom.10:14).\(^\text{41}\) The new creation is chosen to bear a blessing that is intended for all. This blessing would be negated if not given in a way that binds us together.\(^\text{42}\)

Seeing the Kingdom as Trinitarian, through the work of Jesus and the power of the Spirit, we are equipped to reflect God’s wise, creative, loving presence and power in His world. We are not building God’s Kingdom by our own efforts. He alone is responsible for the coming together of heaven and earth. In the present we build for the Kingdom and our hope is in the fact that nothing we do that is spirit led and in the character of Jesus is wasted.\(^\text{43}\)

According to Wright, this work is characterised by justice, beauty and evangelism. In the prayer that Jesus taught his disciples, (Mat.6:9-13) the phrase that comes after your Kingdom come, your will be done... talks about bread and forgiveness. Two key themes of Kingdom justice is that people have what they need and that forgiveness for wrongs is sought and received. Themes, that if outworked in our world today, would dramatically change it. As mentioned before, there is tension between the arm of the church that focuses predominantly on God’s justice and its outworking; and the one that says the real work of the gospel is saving souls. Wright advocates for a rejection of both extremes. The tension needs to be negotiated, recognising that we live in a time of inaugurated eschatology, ours is the task of moving towards a radical transformation of the way we live.

\(^\text{41}\) Ibid., 71. Newbigin is using Romans 10:14 to show the connection between our shared humanity and salvation. This is emphasised in the following verses, where God choses to use the new creation to draw others to himself.

\(^\text{42}\) Ibid., 71.

\(^\text{43}\) Wright, *Surprised by Hope*, 218-219.
behave as societies around the world, knowing this won’t be complete until God brings the final consummation.\textsuperscript{44}

Working for beauty involves the understanding that, as part of the new creation, we are created in God’s image and as such are creative beings. Beauty matters almost as much as spirituality and justice, as all are works of the creator’s hands. Part of our call is to be stewards of the creation, restoring Adam’s role. Wright sees that genuine art, as well as philosophy and theology can show the world what it is meant to be. Romans Chapter 8 verse 19 tells us that the whole of creation groans as it waits for redemption. Beauty which art responds to, then is not just beauty it possesses in itself, but that which it possesses in light of what it is promised. When Jesus rose from death, he was the first generating power of the new creation. Interestingly it was the marks of the nails in his hands that identified Him. From this perspective, the role of art is to come to terms with both the wounds and the promise of resurrection, with the artists leading us in this new mission and understanding.\textsuperscript{45}

Wright understands that evangelism is a key responsibility for the new creation. Traditionally, evangelism has been linked with personal salvation. To accurately reflect God’s purpose for the new creation this definition needs to be expanded. Evangelism is the announcement of God’s Kingdom, Jesus' Lordship and the consequent new creation. The people of God then are not only the voice of this message but are called to live it as an alternate community, by being a sign, seeking justice locally and globally and celebrating God’s good creation. Through this they generate a new type of community and help the announcement of the whole gospel make sense.\textsuperscript{46} Seeing evangelism in the context of the new creation, helps to diminish a dualism that says, what happens on the spiritual plane is all that ultimately matters. It shows our actions and whether they mirror the character of Jesus, make a real difference in the world.

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{44} Ibid., 231-232.
\textsuperscript{45} Ibid., 233-235.
\textsuperscript{46} Ibid., 239.
\end{flushright}
Focusing on justice, beauty and evangelism helps us, as the new creation shape a holistic mission of hope. It will see us working for the whole local community, fostering programs that move the community towards God’s picture of a city. Projects that help people fulfill their purpose, enhance the beauty of their environment and lead to the announcement that the new creation has already begun. Ultimately bringing hope to places that lack it. Later in this paper ABCD will be introduced and explained as a method that provides for the outworking of this theological rationale.

**Conclusion**

Moltmann, with others, points to a Trinitarian understanding of the Kingdom. The Father is the one who creates and sustains creation, with the ultimate goal of glorification from creation for the God head. Despite human attempts to deny God’s future, through his patience the door remains open. Through the son’s servitude we have the opportunity to come into freedom, to become a part of the first fruits of the inaugurated new creation. The eschatological reality of this is confirmed to us through the out pouring of the Spirit.

The impact of the Kingdom is both a present and future reality. As the community of believers we are a partial aspect of the dawning of the Kingdom. We experience the inner reality of a life impacted by a relationship with God. Then as a Church, as the community of the new creation, drawn together by the centrality of the eucharist, we are to act as an anticipatory sign of God’s coming rule. Our role and God’s desired impact for the Kingdom now is an outworking of His model for communities and societies. This is a journey of Kingdom focused transformation, a building for eternity, and has its outworking in a commitment to justice, beauty and evangelism.

Building on from this understanding, in Chapter Two I will explore the nature of the central elements of the internal life of the Church, that will best position it to outwork God’s Kingdom agenda.
Chapter 2 The Church, Partnering With God

Introduction

There are numerous debates about the shape and purpose of the Church. These need to be interpreted through the lens of God’s Kingdom and His desired impact, both for the gathered community and for the world. In this chapter I will explore the central elements that hold the universal Church together, as well as the implications of these for a localised expression. I will also look at the impact of Christendom and the legacy it has left on the Church. I will then come to some conclusions about what a Kingdom focused community might look like and the form its mission to the world could take.

The Universal Church

I have already established that Pannenberg holds an inner and future view of the Kingdom of God and have demonstrated how my position differs, in terms of the Kingdom’s outworking in the world. However in terms of the Church, Pannenberg has a helpful contribution. He sees it is centrally held together by the sacrament of the eucharist. That in the Lord’s Supper there is fellowship with God and with each other as the body of Christ and that it represents the fulfilled form of our human destiny. Even in the Eucharist event, the Church is not the rule of God made manifest, it is merely an anticipatory sign of the future reign. The Church is not an alternate system, where there is the actualisation of God’s fulfilled justice. However because of its nature as a sign of the Kingdom, it is a challenge to every political and judicial system that man has derived.47

Pannenberg sees that the Church, through God being present in the lives of individual believers, can shine a light on secular society, but the ultimate consummation of human fellowship that will be found in the Kingdom has very little actualisation in our present time. He believes this makes us long for Jesus’ return.48 However where there is injustice, a lack of human rights or an improving of the established order needed, Christians and the Church should not be silent. At this point

47 Pannenberg, Systematic Theology, 51-53.
48 Ibid., 52.
Pannenberg and Wright differ significantly. Wright believes that whilst the Kingdom won’t come in its fullness, each act we do, as part of the new creation, towards the ideal of the Kingdom, will not be wasted by the final consummation, but will itself move into eternity.

In light of this, a central motif of the church is as a representation of God’s ultimate justice. Newbigin, expounds this theme also. There is no separation between believing and following. The outworking of the Church in the world can never separate the preaching of the gospel and action for God’s judgement. Many within my experience of missions have believed that the outworking of the Church is pure evangelism, however the logic of the gospel has drawn them into education, healing, social services, agricultural missions and general welfare. Throughout the period of European colonisation, this understanding led to a concern for justice and the compassionate desire of the colonisers, for the sharing of the good things in life, with those they ministered to.

This does not go far enough. Liberation theologians, such as Gustavo Gutierrez, go further with an understanding that the real role of the church was for liberation, worked out at three different levels; a political emphasis on oppressor and oppressed, a cultural aspect, where through human history there has been the assuming of more conscious responsibility for destiny, and lastly a spiritual liberation which comes through Christ and is a restoration to fellowship with God. Each of the parts are distinct, but together cover an all encompassing, salvific process, which can be determined at different levels. Gutierrez goes further saying this process is actually the manifestation of the Kingdom which we can experience historically, and that without the presence of the Kingdom, which is a gift there would be no liberation.

The idea of liberation links back into the very nature of who God is and the mission he sets for his people. Like Kingdom, mission comes from the doctrine of the Trinity, out of the very essence of

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50 Ibid.

who God is. It is related to the Father sending the Son, the Father and the Son sending the Spirit, and the Father, Son and Spirit sending the Church into the world. This understanding of mission was first articulated clearly by Karl Barth. The 1952 Willingen Conference of the International Missionary Council, built on this with the image of mission, as participating in the sending of God. Mission has no life of its own and is only real in the hands of the sending God. This understanding of mission is the beginning of the development of the missio Dei concept and is linked very closely to the crucified Christ, thus avoiding a triumphalist approach to mission.

Whilst it is the eucharist that unites the Church to itself and to God, the Church is created for and shaped by mission, not the other way round. Mission is primarily an attribute of God. It is not that the Church has a mission of salvation, but that God does and it includes the Church. The Church is an instrument for God’s mission of love toward not only people, but all creation. As Abraham in Genesis 12 was blessed to be a blessing to the nations, so is the Church.

Evangelism and justice are two elements of mission, which embody mission as ‘participation in God’s existence in the world.’ In this light mission can be seen as God’s ‘yes’ to the world, and means that we need to engage in the realities of injustice, oppression, poverty, discrimination and violence. In this sense the pattern of the church is political. Engaging in this way provides continuity between the reign of God, the mission of the Church and God’s desire for justice, peace and wholeness in society. It shows that salvation has to do with what happens to people in this world. However it does not signify that God’s reign is now fulfilled or that the church should once again become linked with the state.

Reflecting on the nature of the universal church and participation in the existence of God in the world, means we need to balance the concerns of this world and the ultimate reality of the world’s

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need for salvation. To gain a fuller understanding of the shape of church needed to engage the world, it will be helpful to examine the legacy of Christendom and then explore the inner life of the church and finally the shape it needs to take to be effective in mission.

**The effects of Christendom**

The origins of Christendom began with Constantine and his modification of the relationship between church and state, which set in motion a symbiotic connection. Before Constantine the church was marginalised, subversive and persecuted. It was a minority movement that met secretly in houses and catacombs. In an instant everything changed, with the emperor going from chief persecutor to main sponsor of the church.\(^{55}\) There is scholarly debate around exactly when Constantine became a Christian and his motives for sanctioning Christianity, however in 311CE there was a declaration signed which led the way for the toleration of the Christian religion. Then in 313CE the Edict of Milan was signed,\(^ {56}\) by both Constantine who ruled in the West of the empire and Licinius who ruled in the East. Essentially it granted an indulgence for Christians to be able to pray and worship in safety.\(^ {57}\)

Between 313CE and the eleventh century the Roman Empire underwent significant transformation. The empire was divided into East and West. The Western sphere centred in Ravenna, whilst the Eastern centre moved to what became Constantinople (City of Constantine).\(^ {58}\) After constant attacks Constantinople finally fell in 476CE to the Germanic king Odoacer. Roman authority also


\(^{57}\) Earl E. Cairns, *Christianity Through The Centuries*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1978), 134-135. In the following years Constantine issued further edicts that; brought about the restoration of confiscated property; saw the subsidisation of the church by the state; exempted the clergy from public service; banned soothsaying; established Sunday as a day of rest and worship. By 325 Constantine had also assumed a position of theological leadership at the Council of Nicaea. All this despite the number of Christians being only a tenth of the population of the Roman Empire.

\(^{58}\) Bruce L. Shelley, *Church History in Plain Language*, (Dallas, TX: Word, 1995), 95. By 330CE Constantine had relocated to Byzantium and renamed it Constantinople. This was a strategic move which strengthened the Eastern part of the Empire against attacks as well as recognising the Eastern roots of Christianity.
completely collapsed in the West, and became a patchwork of Germanic kingdoms, however, the city of Rome under the guidance of the Catholic Church became a centre of learning. Throughout the sixth century, the Eastern part of the old empire was in constant conflict, firstly with the Persians and then the rise of Islamic Caliphate. In the West, because of the vacuum left by the Empire’s collapse, the beginnings of the feudal system emerged, in the form of localised hierarchies. These were based on the bond of the common people to the land on which they worked. Through this system new princes and kings arose of which the greatest was the Frank ruler Charlemagne. In 800 he was crowned Emperor of the Romans. This saw the beginning of the Germanic Roman Empire, also known as the Holy Roman Empire or See.

By the eleventh century Christianity was fully grown and in control of the culture. By The Middle Ages there was institutional interdependence between the pope and the ruler of the Holy Roman See. Even when there were disputes between the two rulers, they operated within the framework of Christendom or the corpus Christianum. During this period there was the rise of nation states within Western Europe, including the Vikings settling in Britain, Ireland and France; the Kingdom of

After various military marks and marches, Charlemagne’s territory extended in the East from the Baltic Seas to the head of the Adriatic, in the South to Croatia and Pannonia and the North to Moravia and Bohemia.

60 Shelley, Church History in Plain Language, p173-174.
Through a military relationship with the Papacy, forged by his grandfather and father, Charlemagne protected Pope Leo III from being mutinied. The Pope had been accused amongst other things of perjury and adultery. By way of peace making Charlemagne presided over a large assembly of bishops, nobles, diplomats and rebels. At the end of the assembly Pope Leo III took an oath purging himself of these accusations. In return a couple of days later the Pope crowned Charlemagne emperor, restoring the Christian Roman Empire. In this way the Christian concept of a universal, Catholic Church was grafted onto the traditional Roman view of Empire and Christendom was created.


Hungary; and the Normans in Southern Italy. As each of these states were under the influence of the Church.

As the reformation surfaced, it dealt a severe blow to this symbiotic relationship. The Church in the West was no longer one, however the idea of Christendom remained in tact. That is, the Church was enmeshed with the state in the distribution of power. In each European country the Church developed into a State Church. At this point in time it was difficult to differentiate between political, cultural and religious elements and activities.

To understand the effect of this period of history on the Church we need to make brief comparisons with what went before. Hirsch and Frost argue that the Church pre 313CE was characterised by its persecuted and underground nature. It was de-centralised and didn’t have any buildings. The leadership was holistic and employed the gifts of apostle, prophet, evangelist, pastor and teacher. A central feature of the gathered community was communion in the form of a sacralised community meal. The Church identified itself as missionary in nature and incarnational in relationship.

After the Edict of Milan and the eventual marrying of Church and state, buildings became central to the understanding and experience of Church. There was a very definite structural hierarchy. The pastor / teacher became the predominant gift mix of the leadership of the Church. Grace was seen to be determined by and delivered through the institutionalised sacraments.

Through the enlightenment period, (which we will explore in the next chapter as we look at the development of culture), society began to be less influenced by the Church. Today we live in a

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64 Shelley, Church History in Plain Language, p184.

65 Bosch, Transforming Mission, 275.

largely non Christian, post Christendom society, however the western Church largely views the world through a Christendom mindset. This has led to the propagation of similar shaped Churches, a failure to accurately contextualise the gospel and an ineffectiveness of missional engagement.

The Church still wears the legacy of a Christendom mindset, however for effective missional engagement this needs to be overcome.

**Inner Shape of the Gathered Community**

As a gathered community the Church is to reflect the Trinitarian nature of the Kingdom as well as its eschatological ontology, both in the present and ultimately in the future. As the Church seeks to do this effectively there is a tension between the inner workings of any local congregation and the outworking of mission in the world. In many Churches today there is a dichotomy between the two tensions, however an holistic community of the faithful, recognises that both are essential to the effective outworking of the gospel. There are a number of essential elements to the inner working of the community. A central ingredient and the connection between the inner and outworking of the Church is found in John 13:35. Jesus clearly states that they will know you by the love that you have for each other. On a horizontal level, by the guidance of the Holy Spirit it is the community of faith’s role to outwork this love in a real and visible way.

**Sacramental and Unifying Nature**

In *The Forgotten Ways*, Alan Hirsch states that we live under a Christologically redefined *shema*. The shema is the first time in biblical history that God makes a claim over his people. “Hear O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.” (Deut.6:4)

The passage goes on to exhort the people to have these words with them always, to tell them to their children, to live in the reality of them. The shema consists of two claims and a command. The first is that the Lord is to be the people’s God, and the second follows, that God is one. It is God
lifting his people above the polytheistic milieu towards a monotheistic understanding of his Lordship. The command to love, is a call to covenant loyalty, and a dethronement of all other gods.\(^{67}\)

Despite the New Testament showing that each person of the Godhead has a unique role, there is a strong unifying aspect that leaves the concept of the oneness of God intact. Early Christians continued their commitment to the shema and monotheism. Jesus’ call in Matthew 6:33, is God’s claim upon us and is the business end of practical monotheism. Because we define our relationship with God through Jesus we can understand our belief as Christocentric monotheism.\(^{68}\)

The shema, reinforced by Jesus (Mk.12:30-31) is a helpful starting point in discovering the Church’s shape in the world as God’s people. It is God’s covenant claim and is the unshakable centre of creed and confession. The Church’s commitment to the person of Christ, shapes not only our understanding of who we are, but our actions in the world as his body.

Because of the unique relationship between the gathered ecclesia and the one in whose name we gather, the inner working of the community is by nature sacramental. The gathering exhibits the incarnation of divine activity within human activity.\(^{69}\) As Paul points out in Ephesians there is one lord, one faith, one baptism (Eph.4:4-5). As the gathered community lives in the reality of this, we realise there is a fundamental commonality in ecclesial practices. In each culture the outworking of the practices may be different, however wherever baptism is practiced it is a gateway into God’s new creation, inaugurated in the resurrection of Jesus. As explored earlier the celebration of the eucharist is to remind us of our unity as the people who share in the suffering and victory of Christ.

\(^{67}\) Alan Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways: Reactivating the Missional Church*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos, 2006), 89.

\(^{68}\) Ibid., 93.

From an outward or missional perspective it also reminds us that we are to be communities of gratitude and generosity in solidarity with the hungry, dispossessed and marginalised.70

These elements of ecclesial life and those we are about to explore are universal because they are derived from the witness of Scripture, which is based in the life and ministry of Jesus. However each will need to be interpreted by the unique cultural settings that the community finds itself in.

**Buildings and Geography**

Wright points out that the Church shouldn’t stick slavishly to tradition for tradition’s sake or to the pursuits of fresh expressions for their own sake. However because of the commitment to the theology of new creation, geography and buildings still have a place in the missional expression of the church. If we do away with them totally, we fall prone to a dualism, that negates God’s investment of the future in the present. Buildings are the opportunity to create what the Celtics call thin space, where the curtain separating heaven and earth is almost transparent.71 This can help create a bridgehead into the world. Worshippers are able to go straight from the sanctuary into their various places and spaces, in the world. With a correct theology of space, there is a diminishing of the gap between ‘Sunday Church’ and the rest of life. Claiming space for prayer and worship, whether a traditional building, a pub or cafe, or a lounge room is essential for the effective functioning of the body. If the church is to be renewed for its missional purpose to a world of space, time and matter, it can’t ignore or marginalise that same world. Wright sees that space, time and matter are to be redeemed, not rejected.72 In this way our mission can be seen as an anticipatory eschatology, and the task is to rediscover forms of church that embody that anticipation.

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70 Ibid., 181-182.
72 Ibid., 276.
Prayer

Another key aspect of the church’s life is prayer. It is the beginning of the recognition that there is a power and person beyond us. Wright picks up on the essential elements of prayer, blending them to come up with a holistic understanding. The first element is a type of mysticism, where we are open to the beauty of the world and the profound wholeness that comes in the giving of the self away. The second element of prayer, found also in ancient pagan communities, is the petitioning of deities for favours and protection. However this didn’t really resolve fear, as someone may have sacrificed more so the blessing of the god would pass to them.\(^{73}\)

Wright sees that the right model of prayer is evident in Israel’s spiritual life. They had aspects of both mysticism and petition, yet went further than both. They became caught up in the wonder of creation, marveling at its beauty and at the same time being drawn into intimate relationship with the creator. They petitioned the creator, however even when he seemed distant they persisted, reminding him of his personal promises. Coming at times to the sorrowful necessity of having to leave their petitions at God’s door.\(^{74}\) The roots of biblical prayer are therefore transcendence, intimacy, celebration and covenant. To be effective in the world the Church needs to embody these elements of spirituality.

Scripture

The telling of the story of Scripture has to be central to the shaping of our gathered expression as well as determinative for our action in the world. It is the story of creation and new creation and within that covenant and new covenant. Wright’s encouragement is to read Scripture in the light of this overall narrative. The danger is that the Church in the West is susceptible to being pulled into the dualism of the predominant culture. This highlights the importance of being immersed in the story and the understanding of Jesus establishing the Kingdom. We need to allow the reality of the inbreaking of the future, through the new creation to shape us as individuals, groups and whole

\(^{73}\) Ibid., 289-290.

\(^{74}\) Ibid., 290.
gatherings. The bible is part of the continuing work of the Spirit, who inspired it and is an instrument of new creation for individuals and throughout whole communities.\textsuperscript{75}

I have explored the key ontological elements of gathered church, I now wish to explore the visible form that that these elements point to.

\textbf{Authenticity}

One of the core criticisms leveled at the church is hypocrisy.

Keith Miller says;

Our modern church is filled with many people who look pure, sound pure, and are inwardly sick of themselves, their weaknesses, their frustration and the lack of reality around them in the Church. Our non-Christian friends feel either ‘that bunch of nice untroubled people would never understand my problems’; or the more perceptive pagans who know us socially or professionally feel that we Christians are either grossly protected and ignorant about the human situation or are out and out hypocrites who will not confess the sins and weaknesses (they know intuitively) to be universal.\textsuperscript{76}

Many in the church have been conditioned to believe that they need to be inauthentic,\textsuperscript{77} that the fellowship of the believers is not a safe place to be truthful and vulnerable. Wright states that we are called to be holy,\textsuperscript{78} however in the pursuit of holiness, the gathered believers have often become spaces of unreality.

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{75} Ibid., 296. \\
\textsuperscript{76} Kieth Miller cite in Michael Frost, \textit{Exiles: Living Missionally in a Post-Christian Culture}, (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2006), 97-98. \\
\textsuperscript{77} Frost, \textit{Exiles}, 93. \\
\textsuperscript{78} Wright, \textit{Surprised by Hope}, 296. 
\end{flushright}
Michael Frost argues that if we are to be effective in our witness to the world we need to reverse this trend. The Scriptures are full of examples of real people, with real struggles and real honesty before God as they pursue his purposes in the world. The effect of not becoming authentic is alienation. The perception church often leaves is that Christians are shiny and perpetually happy. If for an individual believer this is not the case, it becomes hard to act with any sense of integrity. Over time it is easy for that person to see God blessing everyone else and not them. Walter Brueggeman suggests that this leaves a numbness and an ache, a yearning for something richer and more real and if not dealt with can lead to silent, unspoken rage.

The antidote is to fashion communities of honesty, openness, hospitality and genuine love. Frost sees that to be effective these communities will hold to six values: spiritual growth that values inward transformation over external appearances; spirituality that doesn’t limit creativity or individuality and values diversity and difference over conformity and uniformity; relationships marked by honest dialogues; a striving to be completely honest with God and appropriately transparent with others, over our failings, transgressions and struggles as well as our hopes, dreams and emotions; an embracing of mystery and paradox, living with questions that don’t have easy answers; a working to recalibrate our lifestyle holistically to reflect our hope for a more just, equitable and merciful society.

Love

Above anything else, love is to be the central characteristic that the community of God is to be known by. The exhortation to love from the poem in 1 Corinthians 13, is not to be seen as another goal in the struggle for obedience, rather it is to be understood as the destiny for the church. Seen in this light, we live in the present as people who are completed in the future. Even in our incompleteness we are to live out love towards one another as the bridgehead from our present

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81 Ibid., 100-101.
reality into our future reality,\textsuperscript{82} as well as the pathway others will follow to the community of faith. The resurrection is the lynch pin enabling the Church to truly hope for the future and therefore to be enabled to love in a new way. The faculty that enables the Church to love in this way, is linked to our capacity to give and receive forgiveness. If unforgiveness is held, then the ability to not only receive our own forgiveness but also to experience real joy and real grief is shut down.

Paul’s letters are full of exhortations to live out this love (Ro.12:5,10,16; 1Thess.5:11; Galat.5:13; 6:2). The body is empowered to do this through the unifying work of the Holy Spirit, the fruit of which can only be evidenced in the social practice of Christian togetherness. Even in this intimate setting if the fellowship is truly connected with God, it can never just be an in-house experience. Such love is designed to be contagious and overflowing.\textsuperscript{83} As well as being the determinative inner shape of the community, love is to be its proclamation and witness to God’s will for the world. The community in its corporate life, is to embody an alternative social order that stands as a sign of God’s redemptive purposes in the world: this is the concrete social manifestation of the righteousness of God.\textsuperscript{84}

Hospitality

Henri Nouwen describes three movements of an authentic follower of Jesus; loneliness to solitude, hostility to hospitality and illusion to prayer. Taking the movement of hostility to hospitality, he sees that hospitality is not only to do with the spirituality of food, but our whole approach to the other. If we are being hospitable we will treat the stranger, not as someone to be feared, but someone to be embraced. We will be open and accepting of the chaos of the other, accepting them without trying to change them, or make them see our way.\textsuperscript{85}

\textsuperscript{82} Wright, \textit{Surprised by Hope}, 299-301.

\textsuperscript{83} Guder, ed., \textit{Missional Church}, 149.

\textsuperscript{84} Richard Hays cited in Ibid.

Hospitality is the heart attitude of compassion put into practice. For the church to be an authentic witness in the world, this attitude of hospitality needs to first extend within the fellowship, welcoming those who are different, without the expectation of conformity. Ronald Sider, Philip Olson and Heidi Unruh see a worthwhile goal echoed in Deuteronomy 15:4, simply stated there will be no one in need among you. They go on to point out that if members of a faith community feel insecure and not cared for, they are not likely to invest in the mission or witness of the community. 

The first Christian community in Acts demonstrated this principle (Acts 2:44-45; 4:34) as they cared for each other, making sure no one was in need, and their number increased dramatically. If the church is to be an authentic witness to the benevolence of God's Kingdom, then the sharing of finances, goods, services and time needs to become a routine way of life.

This witness is also seen powerfully in the sharing of food. Michael Frost uses the examples of Joseph, Daniel and Paul to show how the creative use of food can become counter cultural. Joseph shows how an empire can be fashioned to distribute food wisely and justly. Daniel exhorts us as followers to eat in such a way that we are as healthy and vital as possible. Paul shows that we are to share food with those who don't yet know Jesus. In these ways we can use food as an outworking of the inner hospitality of the body.

So far I have shown that the Church needs to recognise its sacramental and unifying nature as the eschatological people of God. This has its outworking through physical space in the world and prayer. The Church is to be shaped by Scripture which is outworked in authenticity, love and hospitality. These factors point us towards a missional shape, which reflects God's heart. A useful way to explore this shape is to unpack the concept of communitas.

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87 Ibid., 180.

Communitas - Shaping for Mission

Alan Roxburgh uses a term developed by anthropologist Victor Turner, to bring together the church’s response to the world, in both its inner shape and its outworking. Liminality applies to the situation where people (as individuals or a collective) find themselves in a transitional or marginal state in relation to the surrounding community or society. They are in that state as a result of their conscious awareness, that their status, role and place within society has been radically changed to the point that the group has now become largely invisible to that society in terms of these previously held understandings. This space could involve significant danger or disorientation, but this is not essential for liminality. Victor Turner uses the example of the rite of passage for tribal boys on their way to manhood. This is a time where they are removed from the society of the tribe and are thrust into a situation where they have to fend for themselves, sometimes for a period of up to six months.  

Liminality is a causal effect for communitas. With a heightened sense of danger and urgency, the boys transitioning through the rite of passage, emerged from being disorientated and individualistic to developing deep bonds of comradeship. Other examples of communitas are evident in times of war and disaster. Extreme situations where people are thrust together and they need each other to survive. Biblical history shows this is the norm for God’s people from Abraham’s call to journey into the unknown, through to the extreme experiences of Paul. God’s people have banded together and flourished through adversity.

Communitas then, happens in situations where individuals are driven to find each other through a common experience of ordeal, humbling, transition and marginalisation. It involves intense feelings of social togetherness and belonging brought about by having to rely on each other in order to survive.

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90 Liminality can occur across in any group that experiences significant transition.

91 Ibid., 221.
Bosch, drawing on Hendrik Kraemer’s work for the 1947 International Missionary Council, helps to emphasize the centrality of the sense of danger and marginalisation to the effectiveness of the Church in the world. Kraemer sees that the Church is always in a state of crisis, unfortunately and particularly in modern history it has only been occasionally aware of it. The crisis comes in the tension I was alluding to earlier between the essential nature of the Church and its current condition. Kraemer argues that we have seldom been aware of this tension and the need of the Church for failure and suffering to become fully alive to its real nature and mission. For many centuries the Church has suffered very little and has been led to believe that it is a success.92

Obviously this sense of success has been a hindrance to experiencing liminality and the formulation of communitas. It has also been a block to the Church re-discovering its true missional DNA or apostolic nature as signposts of God’s new creation on the margins as the world transitions to God’s future.

**Conclusion**

The universal Church, as the signpost of God’s new creation in the world, is united through the event of the eucharist. The event represents the fulfilled form of our human destiny. Even in this the Church is not to see itself as an alternate social system, but nevertheless is a challenge to every political and judicial system. As the new creation, the acts the Church does now that are spirit led in the character of Jesus will move into eternity. It is tempting to think that these acts need to centre around evangelism, however the logic of the gospel has compelled missionaries to be equally involved in education, medical work, welfare, agriculture, work for justice and many other spheres of life. Mission is from the very hand of God and is to be seen as trinitarian. Viewed holistically, the Church is to be seen as a vehicle for liberation - economically, culturally and in a salvific sense.

Christendom has dramatically shaped the psyche and visible form of the Western Church. The era of the state Church started in 311 / 313CE and even with the breakdown of the Roman Empire and the birth of the enlightenment, continued largely unfettered until recent times. Pre-Christendom the Church had a strong internal community and missional impulse, with an emphasis on the five fold gifts. During Christendom the focus shifted to buildings, hierarchy and the predominance of the pastor / teacher. Grace was seen to be conveyed in the institutional sacraments.

There is a need for the Church today to rediscover its pre-christendom DNA. Realising that to effectively continue God’s work in the world a strong internal community and missional impulse, coming from the heart of God are both necessary. The internal community needs to be shaped by love, firstly towards God in the form of a commitment to a Christological Shema and a recognition of the gathering of the believers as sacramental, no matter what form that takes. Prayer and a holistic view of scripture that takes into account creation and recreation is also central. The Church’s flavour needs to be one of pursuing holiness with authenticity, and an outworking of love in the form of hospitality. This needs to be tied together through a realisation of our liminal state, which leads to communitas.

Through the last two chapters I have explored an understanding of the Kingdom that sees God’s purposes at work in the world now, pointing to a greater future presence, and an understanding and shape of Church, that reflects its universal nature as well as its role in the Kingdom now. The next chapter will focus on the development of Western culture and the Church’s response to it as a way of exploring the context into which ABCD can be seen as valid missional engagement.
Chapter 3 - Understanding the Context and its History

Introduction

Society is changing and developing at a rapid rate. In order to understand and discover how to connect meaningfully with our culture, the Church needs to comprehend and track the core significant cultural changes and the influences that have led to them. Charles Taylor outlines the transition of Western culture from a Christian era to a secular one, over a span of five hundred years. He relates this as a journey from the understanding and experience of people as being porous, that is open to the direct influence of the world around them and their beliefs about that world. He then traces their development to the modern concept of the self as buffered against those forces and the experience of a plethora of belief options.\(^{93}\)

This core change has major implications for epistemology. Newbigin points out, it is in this context that the debate between rationalism and tradition takes place. This chapter will survey the background to our current cultural context as well as the challenges and opportunities there are for the Church in connecting with the culture and seeking to be true to its identity and mission.

Late Medieval Culture

In Medieval times the cosmology was set and unquestioned, with the hierarchical order being God; Church; King and Nobles; People; Animals, Plants and Objects. This was not tampered with and individuals and communities had to keep their proper place in relation to their God, the church and the ruling class.\(^{94}\) The world was seen as enchanted, with the existence of spirits, both good and bad. Natural events were viewed as acts of God. The mere existence of society, was recognition of God’s hand, and so it was almost impossible not to believe that there was a God.\(^{95}\) The popular belief was that good and evil acted on the mind, that either one could possess and take over. Feelings were essentially determined by outside events. In this way individuals were porous, they

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\(^{93}\) Taylor, A Secular Age. This is a summary of the intent of the book.

\(^{94}\) Bosch, Transforming Mission, 263.

\(^{95}\) Taylor, A Secular Age, 25.
absorbed the world around them. God was seen as the ultimate good in an enchanted world. The option of living without God was simply not there.\(^{96}\)

With God as the foundation of society, a key building block was conformity. Because of the porous nature of the medieval mind, the individual could not break away from the responsibilities and benefits of being a part of that society. This was partly manifested through their understanding of good and bad magic, God being the ultimate good. There was a sense of the common good being bound up in collective rites, devotions and allegiances. If one stood outside those things, then the whole structure of society was brought into question. God was seen to have an existentially foundational role in society and it was impossible to conceive the thought that society could exist if it were not grounded in common religious belief.\(^{97}\)

These beliefs led to a tension between two goals within medieval society, transcendence and human flourishing. The Christian faith pointed towards a self transcendence, a life beyond human flourishing, and yet the institutions of society were at least partly attuned to foster human flourishing. Looking at the society critically, it is easy to see the struggle between the two tensions. Erasmus pointed out that even in seeking piety many were looking to their own benefit. People were even following special religious rites in a superstitious way hoping to fend off evil spirits or receive some kind of blessing,\(^{98}\) and Erasmus saw this as idolatry.

The tension between transcendence and human flourishing is also linked to the hierarchical complementarity of the structure of society at that time. Not all experienced the same dignity with various positions or functions expected to serve others. The celibate professions were seen to be near the top of the hierarchy. *The clergy pray for all, the lords defend all, the peasants labour for*

\(^{96}\) Ibid., 32-41.

\(^{97}\) Ibid., 43.

\(^{98}\) Erasmus cited in Ibid, 45.
all is a formula that highlights these complementary functions. Taylor argues that therefore in medieval society there was a place for something less than the highest vocation and aspirations, which led to the creation of an equilibrium.

From time to time this tight structured medieval equilibrium needed to let chaos reign. Chaos was seen as the enemy as well as the energy behind the organisation of the community. Victor Turner, borrowing from Thomas Merton, observes that every so often the patterned arrangements of role sets, status sets and status sequences needed to be suspended. If this was not the case, the fight against chaos would so weaken order as to leave it ineffectual. In medieval culture the safety valve was the carnival or festival. These times of celebration created communitas, the underlying sense that despite the formality of very structured and coded relationships, fundamentally people were essentially human and equal.

A great leveler in medieval society was time and how it related to eternity. There were two concepts of eternity. One based on Plato’s understanding, in which God gathers everyone in an instant and so there was a rising out of our time. Medieval thought saw this to be a rising to the time of the gods. There was also the understanding that time ran horizontally and vertically. One could experience a time close to that of God’s eternal paradigm or be further away. Those times that were further away were characterised by chaos, those closer were more gathered and ordered.

The Process of Disenchantment

The Enchanted Mind

The key factor that shaped Medieval psyche was the hierarchical order of society, which led to an assumption of the existence of God being foundational to life. God was seen as the ultimate good,

99 Ibid.
100 Thomas Merton, used by Victor Turner cited in Taylor, A Secular Age, 47.
101 Ibid., 58-59.
in what was essentially a society fraught with all kinds of fear and bad magic. So equilibrium was important and to stand outside of the social order was seen to bring the whole of society into question. In the midst of this the individual was porous, being acted upon by the forces of the world. Within all this pressure there needed to be a release valve, which was the medieval festival or carnival. For a time the carnival let chaos reign, thus ultimately keeping the tumult in check. It was an enchanted world, with an understanding of time that pointed to God’s activity in the world.

However, whilst the roots of contemporary thinking are evident in late medieval thought and psyche there are profound differences in our society’s structure and understandings of the world in which context it is placed. Individuals are now buffered, believing that they are not so much acted upon as being able to choose responses to the forces around them. Even these forces have been reinterpreted. In order to understand the impact of the Kingdom and its subsequent shaping of the internal life of the Church and its external mission one needs to understand this journey of cultural transformation.

Road to disenchantment

During late medieval Europe there were many reform movements, Taylor describes it as a ‘rage for order.’ There was a desire to see society lifted up to a higher way of being and functioning. Latin Christendom was no exception and through its own reforms led the way to the partly secularised ideal of civilisation. As civilisation dawned through the late medieval and early modern period, Christendom’s components were crucial to the disenchantment of the world and the rise of exclusive humanism. One key factor was the development of doctrine and the internalising of faith. Previously faith was based on simple understandings and actions. This shifted to more complex reasoning around the nature of God and his action in the world. At the same time prayer became an inner reality and meditative practices evolved. From around the year 1000CE people’s faith became more focused on Christ. In 1215CE, coming out of the Lateran Council, priests were

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102 Ibid., 63.
103 Ibid., 63.
equipped to better train the laity. There were also itinerant friars, who were often better educated than parish priests, who were able to propagate new teachings and practices.\textsuperscript{104}

A doctrine formative to Christianisation, individuation and the forming of a new understanding of civilisation was the teaching on death. Medieval culture saw death as a continuation of life, a lesser stage, but still with a continuity to the previous stage. They believed that the deceased were close by and were jealous of the living and could come back and haunt them. Because of this closeness, whilst not welcomed, there was no real reason to fear death. The Christian understanding showed that there was something beyond human flourishing after death, and that there was a judgement before one could enter into this beyond. Once the teaching became popular a fear of death was mediated into the medieval world with a sense that one may not measure up. It also pointed to the individual’s responsibility for their response to the Christian call, judgement and transformation.\textsuperscript{105}

At the same time that this belief was permeating civilisation, life was changing. Peasants were leaving villages to live in towns and take up work in newly forming industries such as commerce, law and administration. As traditional cadres broke down, the insular village mentality of people was beginning to broaden. Taylor argues that this led to an individuation, and a reinterpreting of understandings on issues such as death. The disenchantment process is very complicated, and holds many dichotomies, which cannot be explored in their entirety through this paper. However, as people began to work out their own destiny and strive for their own riches, an increasingly wide gulf formed between human flourishing and the teachings of the church.

The church in its efforts towards a purer form of faith, brought into question many of its beliefs and practices. The new clergy saw themselves as boundary police, holding the tension between the illicit and licit uses of ritual. They argued it wasn’t enough to light a candle to a saint, but that to

\textsuperscript{104} Ibid., 65.

\textsuperscript{105} Ibid., 67.
worship them, one needed to follow in their footsteps. Over time church magic became illegitimate, God was seen to have the naked power over all magic. This naked power was evident in the Judaism of the Old Testament and so in the late medieval period people’s fear transferred from bad magic to fear of God. Through this process the fear of bad magic and the fear of the hierarchy of the Church were reversed together. This began to change the nature of mass piety. The sacraments became truly symbolic, authority moved from the hierarchy back to Scripture and the visible church became distinguished from the true community of the saved. Through these dual sociological and ecclesiological processes society to a large degree lost its enchantment and the Church was ripe for reform.

The Effect of Science and Rationalism on Western Culture

It is not the purpose of this paper to map changes in the Church, except for when they impact on society. Having said that, it needs to be noted that the reformation destroyed the unity and power of the Western Church and started a process which saw it lose its validating right over the structure of society. This validation right moved directly to the king and through the king to the people. The early stirrings of democracy were evident, with people being able to relate directly to God. In addition, with the dawn of the scientific age people discovered that they could ignore God and nothing bad happened. Through this a significant shift occurred, people began to look for the meaning of their existence in the natural order: from below, not from above.

Two ways of thinking characterised the enlightenment period, the Empiricism of Bacon and the Rationalism of Descartes. Neither thinker saw their thought as jeopardising the Christian worldview, however in the period following their work, science took on more of an opposing stance when it came to faith. Bosch points out that human reason was seen as part of the natural order and became less tied to the tradition and presuppositions of the past.  

106 Ibid., 72.  
107 Bosch. Transforming Mission, 263.  
108 Ibid., 264.
Enlightenment thinking also operated within a subject-object scheme. People were separated from their environment which enabled them to explore it more objectively. This is the forming of the buffered self, highlighted by Taylor.\textsuperscript{109} Importantly creation became the subject of analysis, broken down into parts and ceasing to be a teacher. Even humanity was broken down into different components, with the emergence of various disciplines such as philosophy, sociology, anthropology and various forms of physical sciences. There seemed no limit to what the human mind could comprehend. A new age was dawning, with the discovery of new continents, it felt like the earth could be subdued. Humanity took on a new confidence, with the perception that what was real was only now beginning to manifest.\textsuperscript{110}

A third characteristic of the enlightenment was that purpose was taken from science. This started a trend that saw teleology removed from much of public life. In the scientific world, focus shifted to causality. Ancient Greek and medieval science saw teleology as a vital category in their understanding of what they termed, animated causality. However with the onset of modern thought, science ceased to ask questions relating to purpose, instead favouring cause and effect. In general, science believes in set and mathematically stable laws that guarantee a desired outcome. In this way science became mechanistic and associated with reason.

Newbigin argues that the association of science as the only source of reason has been a misnomer and that the greatest advances in science have come through intuition and imagination, or believing in the possibilities. Scientists will argue, based on modern thought that scientific discovery comes through observing the facts, arriving at a hypothesis, and from this deducing, consequences which can be further observed.\textsuperscript{111} Newbigin rightly asserts that discovery in this way is really a matter of faith, or believing in what yet can’t be seen.

\textsuperscript{109} Taylor. \textit{A Secular Age}, 131

\textsuperscript{110} Ibid., 264.

However, because of the scientific belief that reason is only determined through a set of facts a divide opened up between science and religion. Over time science and scientific thinking became pervasive in society. With the rise of modernism, the cycle of life so central to medieval thought became lessened to a biological and sociological process.\textsuperscript{112} Science was also seen as factual, value free and neutral. Facts were seen as objectively true, outside of the mind of the believer. Facts determined whether a belief was true or not. Values on the other hand were seen to be opinion and a preference of choice, and so religion moved from the place of undisputed fact to the realm of belief and value, as it could not be proven. It was moved to the private world of the individual and no longer held its place of privilege in the public sphere. This space was left to science and the world of fact.\textsuperscript{113}

Taylor further examines this inward move of faith, recognising that whilst science was moving people to ‘rational fact’ religion itself was also going through the process of privatisation. Within the Church there was a move towards more inward and intense personal devotion, a growing uneasiness with the ‘magic’ element of the sacraments and an embracing of Martin Luther’s notion of ‘salvation by faith.’ Coupled with the advances in science this led to a reversal of the concept of an enchanted cosmos and opened the door to a humanist alternative.\textsuperscript{114}

Humanism became manifest in the confidence of modern society leading to many discoveries and the era of colonisation. People believed they had the ability and the will to remake the world in their own image. This saw the western technological development model, based on the ideal of modernisation imposed on developing countries. In effect this meant the focus was on material possession, consumerism and economic advance. The belief was that these things would trickle down to the poorest of the poor and each would get their fair share of the wealth being generated. Through this the message given to the developing countries was that they were backward,

\textsuperscript{112} Bosch, \textit{Transforming Mission}, 265.

\textsuperscript{113} Ibid., 266.

\textsuperscript{114} Taylor, \textit{A Secular Age}, 76-77.
undeveloped peoples and this should be overcome and left behind.\textsuperscript{115} Whilst the intentions of modern economics might have been good, the outworking was not positive, with selfishness and a lust for power becoming the predominant motif of the Western colonisers.

Despite this, the new confidence in humanity led to a positivism which held, in principle, that all problems were solvable. The yet unsolved problems simply meant that all the relevant facts had not been mastered and it was only a matter of time until the freed and inquisitive human mind brought those too under control. In this way science was seen as the sum of all human existence. It’s influence continued to increase in proportion with the available observational data. Through scientific understanding the rate of new inventions and discoveries rapidly increased in comparison to previous epochs. These advances finally meant that the external forces of nature were succumbing to human planning and reason.

Through science, humans were able to remake the world in their own image and had clearly moved from being porous, (being acted upon), to being buffered, in control of their environment and acting volitionally. The individual was seen as emancipated and autonomous, in contrast to the middle ages where the community took priority over the individual.\textsuperscript{116} Central to the enlightenment, human progress was assured because of the competition of individuals pursuing their own happiness. Each human being was seen as perfectible and needed to be allowed to grow in line with his or her own choice. The desire for individualism and freedom had almost become an expected right in every Western democracy, and was valued over social responsibility. These beliefs and their outworking were a forerunner to post modern relativism.

In this environment the believer faced many difficulties as they tried to live a life based on absolutes, in a space liberated from the tutelage of God and church. Also in this environment there was no privilege or legitimization for certain titles, all were considered equal, deriving their rights

\textsuperscript{115} Bosch, \textit{Transforming Mission}, 265-266.

\textsuperscript{116} Ibid., 267.
from nature and not religion. There was a dichotomy of understanding, people believed that they were more important than God, yet not fundamentally different to animals and plants. Thus they became open to being degraded to the status of machines that could be manipulated and exploited by others.117

Through the disenchantment process and the rise of science and rationalism, Western society gradually moved from Christendom to a secular ideal of civilisation. This process led to an internalising of faith and the development of a new fear of death. Urbanisation led to an individuation of people, and a break down of community structures which saw simultaneously the fear of hierarchy and the fear of bad magic diminish. This fear was placed on to God who had the power to deny transcendence beyond death. However over time, the validation of life, previously attributed to God, moved to the King and then to the people. Humanity realised they could ignore God and nothing bad would happen. The rise of science meant people and the world became objects to be studied, things were broken down into their components and science removed the question of meaning from its frame of reference. In society generally confidence increased and there was a positivism that saw all problems as solvable. Humans were emancipated and free to travel their own path.

The Journey Continues - Post Modern Culture

All of this is a backdrop to the current culture that the church finds itself in, one defined by postmodernity. Just as enlightenment and modernist thinking led to a dis-enchantment, writers such as Zygmunt Bauman argue that postmodernity is a re-enchantment of the world, with its focus on representation.118 As such the movement began in the avant-garde artistic and literary circles of the late 1950’s and early 1960’s. It was a reaction to modern thought and art, as well as disillusionment with a modernity that promised to create a better world. It sought to recapture narrative and representational practices, installing them back into human sciences. It was based

117 Ibid.

on a new aesthetic, starting in the arts and moving to the cognitive and rational sciences in the
1970’s to 1980’s and finally to economics and politics in the 1990’s.\textsuperscript{119}

The enlightenment understanding of reason and rationality was beginning to crumble and was not
seen as an adequate cornerstone upon which to build life. The objectivist framework that had
guided rationality resulted in a massive reductionism that quenched the human spirit. In the
expanding of rationality, language and the use of metaphor, myth and analogy had been
rediscovered. Along with this was the realisation that science and theology were to probe, not
prove the way the universe works.\textsuperscript{120} There was the dawning of the understanding that rationality
could be found in narrative and that in fact it was a better way to invoke the human spirit to action.

Narrative storytelling is a key component in post-modern culture, however the narrative is always
sourced from a number of different components. Because of this and its aesthetic roots much of its
philosophy is espoused through movies and other forms of art. An archetypical movie is *The
Matrix*, whose philosophical underpinnings include Plato, Descartes, Friedrich Nietzsche, Jean
Lyotard and Jean Baudrillard.\textsuperscript{121}

Postmodern thought draws on the work of key philosophers such as Friedrich Nietzsche, Michel
Foucault and Jean Lyotard who argue that there is no fundamental belief that underpins all of
humanity or any particular facet of it. In their thinking science does not have a metanarrative and
so is simply a series of pragmatic disciplines devoid of epistemological foundations and so
becomes based on performance.\textsuperscript{122} Linking closely with this thinking is the rise of consumerism.
The consumer culture favours the aestheticisation of life, assuming that the aesthetic life is the
ethically good life and that this is the ideal to be sought after, instead of some greater purpose.\textsuperscript{123}

\begin{footnotes}
\item[119] Ibid., 25-26.
\item[120] Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 353.
\item[122] Ibid., 36.
\end{footnotes}
Almost without society noticing, commodities ceased being items of utility, transcended being items of luxury and became associated with fashionable brand identities. They have become fetishes associated with lifestyle, individual and group identities, technological innovations and they even support subversive elements that resist the status quo. Western society has been so enveloped by the ideology of consumerism that it has become our frame of reference. Jean Baudrillard believes that consumerism has moved through a number of crucial stages and is now a sophisticated and coded system of meaning, dominated by what the product represents. In this way consumerism plays with aspirations and clouds the boundaries between reality and fantasy. Jean Baudrillard argues that the media has become the new power broker in the world of the hyper real and with its influence, the boundary between commodity and its sign value has imploded entirely. Sigmund Freud’s understanding of the energies of the libido makes sense in this context as the consumer is aroused through visceral and iconic means that penetrate to a subliminal level and effect desire and motivation.

In light of the postmodern landscape, the core question for philosophers is; how do we know what we know is true? The foundations upon which true knowledge was based have been discarded or re-interpreted and largely sensation and experience have taken the place of the search for truth and right. A brief exploration of the thought of Richard Rorty, Jean Lyotard and Jean Baudrillard will give a picture of the postmodern understanding of knowledge and truth.

Richard Rorty reflects a laid back American pragmatism, claiming that the epistemology of modernity led to the unsubstantiated notion that the mind could actually mirror reality. He saw the enlightenment thinkers using knowledge to manipulate the world for their own purposes. Agreeing with Friedrich Neitzsche, he believed this was a particular society or culture’s will to power. Rather, what is needed is the pragmatic ability to accept that each society or community utilises

\[\text{124 Jean Baudrillard cited in Greene and Robertson, } \textit{Metavista, 29.}\]

\[\text{125 Ibid., 31.}\]

\[\text{126 Ibid., 33.}\]
epistemological procedures and language games to remain true to its own institutions and cultural practices. There are no epistemological or moral certainties to uncover.\(^{127}\)

Jean Lyotard holds an incredulity towards meta-narratives. Like Richard Rorty, he objected to thinkers and scientists that claimed objective scientific rationality that supposedly led to an account of how things really are. In his work he exposed science to be based upon meta-narratives of legitimisation. These include the doctrine of human progress, the more we know about the world the freer humanity will be. Secondly, the philosophical story that sees the search for knowledge as a feature of the divine Spirit’s attempt to find itself in the other. The other in this case is the whole history of humanity and the pursuit of knowledge in and for its own sake. In this way science is the realisation of the divine reason and therefore based on the principle of universal knowledge. He saw that consensus was not only impossible, but not desireable, that knowledge and truth was in dissensus which allowed for an ever increasing awareness of the contingent and localised.\(^{128}\)

Jean Baurillard as alluded to earlier, focuses on the destructive power of hyper-reality. He sees that the media has destroyed both public and private space, bombarding those with information that inhibits communication. He sees that through advertising, marketing, television and the internet, the real is simulated, thus creating the hyper-real, which in turn collapses all distinctions between the real and the simulated. In the contemporary world, society is enticed to live in the hyper-real, responding to various stimuli that have the appearance of reality.\(^{129}\)

**State of Western Society and the Role of the Church**

Whilst institutions such as academia, politics, economics and the sciences recognise that society has moved from a modernist world view with its humanistic positivism to a post modern mindset

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that questions anything that claims to have truth or ultimate knowledge, the average member of society is positioned somewhere in the middle.

Contemporary western society is largely characterised by a blending of modern and post modern thought and action. Through my work in local communities I have witnessed the destructive effect of hyper-reality processed through the subject - object framework of modern rationalistic thinking. It has led to a black and whiteness that has completely justified a lifestyle that puts the pursuit of perceived affluence and the aesthetic over family and community. The generational poor in the South Eastern suburbs of Melbourne have also been affected by this blending of major epistemologies. From a place where the poor are essentially devoid of hope, social services often expect them to achieve goals that appear rational, yet are based on empiricism, ascribe to modernist goals of self determination, yet expect people to respond from a narrow framework of what is true for them, totally unconnected to any enduring story.

How Does the Church Engage Effectively in this Cultural Context?

Newbigin highlights work by Peter Berger who identifies what he calls plausibility structures. They are patterns of belief and practice that have been accepted within a given society. These structures determine what beliefs and actions make sense within a given community at a given time.\(^{130}\) Coming from a Christian tradition, some of the plausibility structures of the church are different to those in the general community. The task in front of the church is to truly understand those structures of epistemology within a community or a society and use rational thought\(^{131}\), as Newbigin sees it to translate an understanding of the faith in such a way as it makes sense within those structures. Newbigin argues for an holistic approach that encompasses social action and conversion, as necessary parts of the church’s response.

\(^{130}\) Peter Berger Cited in Newbigin, *Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, 8.

\(^{131}\) Newbigin argues that rational thought does not solely belong to the scientific world, that thought within a tradition, such as Christianity is also rational. He argues this on the basis of plausibility structures.
The church also has to examine its plausibility structures, looking to expand its paradigms of what is valid action in the community. Again through my work in communities, I have witnessed the church being passionate about individual conversion, yet silent on systemic poverty, social imbalance and political injustice. This has left many mystified about the role of the church and its place in society. In the desire to see people take hold of the church’s plausibility structures, and accept faith as a valid proposition, there needs to be a broadening of approach that recognises a fuller Kingdom mandate as outlined in the previous two chapters.

If the church was to accept the Kingdom goals of justice, beauty and evangelism, and worked in harmony with Kingdom values such as generosity, hospitality, intrinsic worth, forgiveness and freedom, it would begin to naturally embrace community development as a strategy for the expansion of the Kingdom, or put another way the creation of a just society. From the community’s point of view it would be seen in reverse. They would see a proactive church, working within a mutually understood plausibility structure, inviting others to partner in developing a just society using community development principles and practices. In turn these actions would point to God’s Kingdom and faith would be validated as a viable option within the community’s own plausibility structure.

The next chapter will unpack the theory and implications of a community development approach to mission.
Chapter 4 Constructing a Missional Approach to Community Development

Introduction

In passages such as Isaiah 58, 65 and Luke 4, the bible shows a clear picture of God’s desire for the world. Wright, as outlined previously in this paper, shows that God’s desire is not only for a future reality, but one that has broken into our present. God’s dream for the world was embodied by Jesus and is most clearly revealed in the passages where Jesus focuses on the Kingdom. Jesus calls us to pray for God’s dream to become a reality now (Mat.6:10) and to seek its manifestation above everything else (Mat.6:33).

This paper has already shown that God invites His people into active participation towards the reality of His Kingdom come. Through being part of the new creation, we are the first fruits, participants in and sign posts to God’s ultimate future. As such, we are given the task of building for the Kingdom. How are we to understand this task? What does it mean for the Church’s engagement with the world? In the previous chapter I described Berger’s concept of plausibility structures, these apply both in the Church and in broader society. Using this language, to help society see Christian faith as a plausible alternative, the Church needs to embrace a broad approach to community transformation. This is compatible with ABCD, the principles of which are expressed well in Liberation Theology.

This chapter will explore links between Liberation Theology and ABCD, supplying a rationale for the Church to engage with this methodology as it connects with society.

Liberation Theology

Originating as part of the Catholic Church’s response to the struggles of the poor and oppressed in Latin America, Liberation Theology provides a helpful bridge between the Church and Kingdom orientated community transformation. Starting in praxis, it understands the need to live faith authentically and contextually. Leonardo Boff and Clodovis Boff provide a helpful overview of the
process and principles of liberation theology. The process that the follower of Jesus embarks on as they take Liberation Theology seriously, is a similar process as for the Church wishing to use ABCD.

Theology in Praxis

The starting place for liberation theology is a commitment to the poor. This commitment needs to be lived out with the people in their struggle for freedom from oppression. The theological practitioner actually participates in the process of liberation. Liberation theologians see this as a living link between theory or faith and practice or love.

The theologian then goes through three mediations in the development of a relevant theology grounded in orthopraxis;

The first mediation is social. This is akin to community research and explores the social and historical context of the oppressed, essentially asking, why are they oppressed? There are three broad answers, which lead to different responses. These responses can be seen in various arms of the Church, particularly those that offer welfare, without an understanding of context. If one believes that the cause of poverty is empirical, that is it’s seen as vice, laziness, ignorance or sin, then the poor are to be pitied and aid is the answer. If the cause of poverty is seen as functional, the poor are considered backward and the process of bringing economic and social development, or progressive betterment of the current system, will bring progress and things like hunger will disappear. If, however the cause of poverty is seen as dialectical, that poverty is oppression and is the product of the economic organisation of society, then poverty is seen as a collective and conflictive phenomenon. This phenomenon can only be overcome by replacing the present social system with an alternative one.132

that in Western society community has effectively broken down to the point where it is not a significant element of contemporary life. This has meant that the poor and marginalised have been cared for by human services, within a welfare model and not empowered through the context of community, which has previously been the case for centuries in traditional communities. Like the liberation theologian, Jim Ife believes that this system and indeed society needs to be transformed, and in fact he sees it necessary for our survival in the west.133

The second mediation is hermeneutical. In this mediation the liberation theologian looks at the whole problem through the lens of Scripture. Firstly recognising the poor as the disfigured son of God. The theologian bears the weight of the sorrow and hopes of the poor, seeking to bring light and inspiration from the Scripture. The process becomes informed by Scripture, reminding the searcher that God is the father of life and advocate of the poor. The witness of Scripture tells of the prophecy of the new world, that the Kingdom is given to the poor, and the Church as sign and vehicle is to be a sharing Church. Through the hermeneutic of the poor an interpretation is arrived at that leads to inner change (conversion) and change in history (revolution).134 Liberation theology has a particular focus on contextualisation, the answering of new questions posed by those contexts and essentially a new codification of the Christian mystery.

The focus on God’s work in the world as contextual and transformational is echoed by Wright. He understands that God is working and invites us to work with him towards a better future for the poor and marginalised in this world and sees this as central to God’s mission.135

The third mediation is practical, and completes the circle, with a back to action focus. This action is seen as the work of love and manifests itself in a striving for justice. It works for the renewal of the Church and the transformation of society. The strategies and tactics favour non violent methods,

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135 Wright, *Surprised by Hope*, 204.
dialogue, persuasion, moral pressure and passive resistance, being true to the ethic of the
gospel. These are played out in micro actions on the macro system and lead to the design of a
program for action.

Key Themes
It is the aim of this chapter to link Liberation Theology with ABCD methodology, showing that it is
ture to the gospel and God’s Kingdom agenda. Because of this it is important to understand the
key motifs of Liberation Theology. According to Boff and Boff there are nine key themes.

1. Living and true faith includes the practice of liberation - Liberation Theology sees
that the divine reality penetrates every level of history. Our faith helps us determine,
where in that history God was present and absent. In the light of faith, orthodoxy is not
enough, and needs to be made true in love, solidarity, hunger for justice, ultimately in
orthopraxis. Without this faith is not authentic (Mat 25:35 and Jam 2:20-21).

2. The Living God sides with the oppressed against the pharaohs of this world
Liberation theology seeks to bring out the characteristics of God that directly address the
practice of liberation. God is beyond our understanding yet is not terrifying, but full of
tenderness, particularly towards the oppressed (Ex 3:7-8). God is glorified in life
sustaining activities and is worshipped through the doing of justice. This reflects his own
nature as go’el - doer of justice to the weak, comforter of orphans and widows. God is a
social being and in this way, the trinity is a model relationship of absolute equality and
reciprocity. It is a prototype of what society should be. Affirming and respecting
individuality, enabling persons to live in deep communion with each other. Our society is

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137 Ibid., 49-50.
largely individualistic, and so does not reflect the mystery of the holy trinity. If it is to bear
the image and likeness of the trinity it needs to be transformed.\textsuperscript{138}

1. **The Kingdom is God’s project in history and eternity** - By revealing the Kingdom,
   Liberation Theologians understand that Jesus revealed God’s divine plan. This is to be
   worked out through the course of history and constitutes God’s future in eternity. When
   the Kingdom comes in its fullness there will be total liberation of all creation, a purification
   from all oppressors. The Kingdom embraces all things, sacred and secular history,
   individuals and the cosmos. In different ways the Kingdom is present where people bring
   about justice, seek comradeship, forgive each other and promote life. This has particular
   expression in the Church which is the perceptible sign, privileged instrument, initial
   budding forth, core principle, liver of the gospel and the body  of Christ. As a universal
   project the Kingdom is the link between these different factors, it encompasses creation,
   redemption, time and eternity.\textsuperscript{139} As has been shown in this paper both Wright and
   Newbigin echo these beliefs in their understanding of Kingdom and God’s work in the
   world.

2. **Jesus Son of God took on oppression in order to set us free** - Jesus is God in
   human form. As such he lived his life in a time in history, with all the cultural mores
   attached to that. His human life was marked by the contradictions left by sin, and of
   course he was incarnated for the work of redemption. Jesus became a servant (Phil.
   2:6-11), his focus was the Kingdom and he taught that it was at hand. His first public word
   in Luke 4:16-21 laid out his program for social reform. He took on the hopes of the
   oppressed, recognising that ultimately the Kingdom speaks of liberation from sin. This
   liberating presence is a present reality offered to all. The process of conversion,
   therefore, leads to a change of attitude that transforms all our interactions. This

\textsuperscript{138} Ibid., 50-52.

\textsuperscript{139} Ibid., 52-53.
transformation is informed and guided by the beatitudes (Mat.5:2-12). Because of people's refusal to convert the only way for Jesus to stay faithful to his own teaching and to the father was martyrdom. The cross is the expression of the human rejection of Jesus and acceptance by the Father, through sacrificing His son. The resurrection uncovers the meaning of the Kingdom, that life would be victorious and universal peace would be the fruit of divine justice. The resurrection showed full liberation from obstacles that stand in the way of the Lordship of God, and the full realisation of all dynamic forces for life and glory placed by God in humans and the whole of creation. The resurrection also reveals the meaning of the death of the innocent, rejected for having proclaimed a greater justice. Those unjustly put to death for a good cause share in Jesus’ resurrection. Following Jesus means taking up His cause, and bearing the persecution it brings, in the hope of inheriting full liberation.  

1. **The Holy Spirit, Father of the poor, is present in the struggle of the oppressed** - The Spirit was sent into the world to further and complete the work of redemption and liberation. The Spirit is present in everything that implies movement, transformation and growth. No one is beyond the reach of the Spirit. He fills people with enthusiasm and special charisms to change religion and society, breaking open rigid institutions and making things new. The Spirit prevents us from forgetting eternity or succumbing to appeals of the flesh and empowers the poor to live and struggle, providing hope that united, the people will set themselves free. The Spirit is evidenced amongst the oppressed by piety, sense of God, solidarity, hospitality, fortitude, native wisdom, love for children, celebration, joy and serenity in the face of suffering. Because of the Holy Spirit the ideals of equality, fellowship, and hope for a world where it is easier to love and see God in the other, become closer to tangible reality.  

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140 Ibid., 53-55.

141 Ibid., 55-56.
1. **Mary is the prophetic and liberating woman of the people** - Originating in the Catholic world, Liberation Theology has a place for Mary. They see her as the Mother of God, holding her in greatness, because of her lowliness. Mary is the perfect example of faith and being available for God’s purpose. She thinks of others. Like Mary it is only possible to be liberators if we free ourselves from our own preoccupation and place our lives at the service of others. Mary also knew poverty, suffering, flight and exile. (Mat.2:13-23).\(^{142}\)

2. **The Church is the sign and instrument of liberation** - The Church is the inheritor of the mystery of Christ and His spirit, and is the organised human response to God’s gift. In Liberation Theology the best mission is allowing the poor to become the Church, and allowing the Church to become a truly poor church and a Church of the poor. Communion is the structural and structuring theological value of the Church. Rather than the Church being an institutional hierarchy, the structured Church needs to reflect the community of the faithful living in relationships of sharing, love and service. It is the embodiment of the meeting between faith and life, gospel and the signs of the time. The Church needs to have a sense of pilgrimage. If it is to be the people of God it first has to become a people, a network of living communities, working out understandings, planning action, organising itself. In this way communities as a whole take on the task of evangelisation. A Church born of the faith of the people, shows itself as a sign of integral liberation and an instrument for its implementation.\(^{143}\)

3. **The rights of the poor are God’s rights** - Theological reflection on the primacy of the dignity of the poor heightened part of the Catholic Church’s concern for and defense of human rights. Individualism has seen a lessening of human rights, over and against the benefiting of society and solidarity. Liberation Theology brings a corrective, using biblical sources to show God’s heart for the poor. There is a developed hierarchy of rights,

\(^{142}\) Ibid., 56-58.

\(^{143}\) Ibid., 59-60.
forming a mode of operandi - 1. life and the means to sustain it, that is, food, work, basic health care, housing, literacy; 2. the freedom of expression, conscience, movement and religion.\textsuperscript{144}

1. **Liberated human potential becomes liberative** - Liberation Theologians believe sin festers in the institutions and structures that act contrary to God’s purposes. They understand structures to be forms of relatedness between things and the people caught up in them. Overcoming social sin requires the will to transform structures, allowing for more justice and participation. Social sin is to be overcome by social grace, the fruit of God’s gift and human endeavour, which is inspired by God. Love is seen as collaboration in the forming of new structures, supporting those campaigning for a better quality of life, essentially a political commitment to the poor. Those that do not support Jesus’ ethic need to be opposed. Unequal and unjust relationships need to be tackled, however in that opposition the challenge is to respect different opinions, to love, not to be deceived by emotions, and to safeguard the unity of the community. In this way persecution and martyrdom is to be expected. The follower can only sustain this intense involvement with the life of the poor by being truly free, a member of the Kingdom of God. This reflects the death and resurrection of Christ. Liberative Christians unite heaven and earth, building the human city with the eschatological city of God. The task is to do everything towards full liberation and when the Lord comes, he will bring it to completion.\textsuperscript{145}

**Reflections and Connections**

Liberation Theology has been opposed both within sections of the Catholic and Protestant Churches. The Vatican saw that it used Marxist concepts\textsuperscript{146} and associated the hierarchy of the

\textsuperscript{144} Ibid., 60-61.

\textsuperscript{145} Ibid., 61-63.

Catholic Church in South America with the oppressors of the people.\textsuperscript{147} Other opposition included its focus on systemic sin almost to the exclusion of individual offenders. Newbigin also challenged the theology’s focus on the overthrowing of the oppressor, believing that in human nature, as a new group rises to power they too will become oppressors.\textsuperscript{148}

As a Christian community activist this theology is authentic and provides a clear link between theory and action. Whilst not adopting all the Catholic nuances, it essentially maintains an orthodox understanding of the role of Christ, the trinity, the special place of the poor in God’s heart, the Kingdom as God’s project and the place of the Church, of course with a higher focus on its role as liberator. The points of difference hone this theology towards orthopraxis, right action, and not just right thinking. Liberation Theology sees that faith has to be lived out for it to be authentic, most notably in the liberation of the poor.

Liberation Theology can have a tendency to feel combative, with the focus of the ending of oppression, rather than the empowerment of community, as would be true for a community development focus. The Holy Spirit, however, is the forerunner of this liberation, motivating and shaping it to reflect Jesus’ ethic. The theology points to God’s heart for and defense of the poor, going as far as to say this is his primary concern. Another point of difference between mainstream and Liberation Theology and a clear connector with community development is the understanding of social grace and social sin. Community Development would not understand society in these terms, however it works to empower whole marginalised communities to overcome issues and structures that are in effect disempowering. Community Development, with Liberation Theology longs for a world where people have their basic needs met and the individual can live out their life and purpose mindful of and in the context of community.


\textsuperscript{148} Newbigin, \textit{The Gospel in a Pluralist Society}, 151.
**Asset Based Community Development (ABCD)**

Put simply ABCD is a process for the empowerment of whole communities through the utilising of strengths within that community.\(^{149}\) The founders of the methodology, John Kretzman and John McKnight see this as a means of sustainable development.\(^{150}\) Community development in a Western context is a relatively new concept. Traditionally community development has been associated with communities in the developing world, however with the lessening of social capital within communities, the rise of individualism, increased personal mobility, longer work hours and the increasing divide between the rich and poor, even within the same local area, there is an increasing need to focus on the restructuring and rebuilding of community, in our Western context.

ABCD recognises and values the contribution of three levels within community. Firstly the gift of individuals. Kretzman and McKnight emphasise that everyone within a community has something to offer to build it up. They especially include the physically and mentally handicapped and those marginalised in other ways. They advocate for an intensive mapping exercise that includes the interviewing of individuals and the creation of a skills registry, indicating what people are willing to offer into the community.\(^{151}\) The next level of contribution in the United States is called citizen associations, these include Churches, clubs, cultural groups, essentially where people come together around a particular purpose, sport or hobby. In Australia this would include many smaller not for profit organisations. Kretzman and McKnight believe that the associational life within any community is usually underestimated. Quite often these groups can be stretched past their original purpose to become full contributors to the development process.\(^{152}\)

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\(^{151}\) Kretzman and McKnight, *Building Communities from the Inside Out*, 6-7.

\(^{152}\) Ibid. 6.

The author of this paper, believes that the statement needs to be tested in an Australian context, and in fact might be found to be more true in disadvantaged communities.
The third level of community are formal institutions. These include businesses, schools, libraries, hospitals and various social service organisations. These institutions make up the most visible aspects of the community's fabric. Enlisting them in the community development process is essential to its success. Whilst it is relatively simple to list what they bring to the community, engendering in them a sense of responsibility for the health and well-being of the community can be a lot more problematic. Perhaps even more difficult is encouraging those institutions to let the community control some aspects of the institution’s relationships with its local neighbourhood.\footnote{Ibid., 8.}

**Five Steps Toward Whole Community Mobilisation**

Kretzman and McKnight have developed a five step process that outlines how a whole community can be mobilised to better meet its own needs. This is the type of process that a church, with a robust Kingdom theology and a shape that allows it to engage in mission as an open generous association, could lead.

**Step One:** Applying the process outlined above, a church is positioned well, with a potential team of volunteers, to discover and document the complete assets of a geographically defined community. Once established this inventory must be continually updated. As completion of the register nears, the community can then ask the question, what resources do we have to solve this problem ourselves?\footnote{Ibid., 346.}

**Step Two:** Building Relationships. The relational web within many communities is very weak or non-existent. It is the role of the community builder, in this case the Church to foster the creation of new, purposeful relationships. It is commonly known that crime goes down in an area where people know each other's name, this principle can be extrapolated to say that every time a community member is linked with others for problem solving purposes, or an association links with an institution the community is strengthened and becomes more self-reliant. This is particularly true
when a marginalised person or ‘stranger’ is connected into the process. Kretzman and McKnight have found that as communities engage in relationship building in this way, people more readily come to believe they are capable of acting as effective problem solvers. They slowly begin to look to internal capacities, before looking to outside help.\textsuperscript{155}

**Step Three:** Mobilising for economic development and information sharing. Many communities are depressed economically, for reasons such as high unemployment, local skills not matching industry needs and local economic assets not being mobilised. As part of an assets registry, skills of local residents that can be used for economic development purposes are listed. As well, local associations and institutions need to be urged to contribute to the local economy, particularly sourcing as much as they can locally. Within Melbourne there is a growing emphasis on buying local. Overall the aim is to help communities decrease imports, become more self sustaining and increase the export of local products.\textsuperscript{156} Communication is also key to successful community building. When people lived in a village, the village well was a key hub of the community. It was the place people gathered and shared information. A community developer will want to have a clear understanding of the modes of communication, including the ‘grapevine’ within a community and what is being communicated. Many communities produce their own newspaper or use community radio to share information, it is essential that the community developer plays an active part in these modes of communication.\textsuperscript{157}

**Step Four:** Convening the community to develop a vision and a plan. Once the energies in a local community have been harnessed, they need to be directed. Identity, values and vision need to be shared. Without a common understanding of these things, the work of regeneration is very difficult to sustain. Community planning can be used to set the tone for the entire regeneration process, working to mobilise local assets and capacity. Beginning with the recognisable assets, it is

\textsuperscript{155} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{156} Jane Jacobs cited in Kretzman and McKnight, *Building Communities from the Inside Out*, 350.

\textsuperscript{157} Ibid., 351.
important to invite those to the table that are not normally seen as community leaders. It is also important to include people representing associations and institutions. With a rich and diverse planning table, it is easier to see the wealth of local resources, that can be used to creatively solve local community issues from within. The effective planning process is tied to problem solving, helping it to be grounded and not too future orientated.\textsuperscript{158}

\textbf{Step Five:} Leveraging outside resources to support locally driven development. It is essential that this is the last step in the process. All the capacities of the community need to be explored, inventoried and active, first. The mode changes from accepting charity to fulfill need, to seeking investors to partner with the developing community. Kretzman and McKinight want to stress, it is still important to do this, particularly for lower socio economic communities, however with a very different perception of interior assets the nature of relationship with outside help is vastly changed.\textsuperscript{159}

\textbf{Is this Actually Possible?}

This chapter started with a focus on Isaiah 58 and 65, which both paint a picture of the world God longs to see. A way towards this is outlined above, however some would argue that this vision is utopian and not achievable. Ultimately it will only be fulfilled when God brings heaven to earth, however it is the promise of this fulfillment and the beginning of its actualisation in the here and now that motivates the Christian community development worker. Jim Ife sees the utopian vision as essential for inspiration as well as providing a framework for the development of medium to longterm goals. It also allows room for problem solving that is beyond reaction and outside of the usual paradigm.\textsuperscript{160}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{158} Ibid., 352.
\item \textsuperscript{159} Ibid., 354.
\item \textsuperscript{160} Ife, \textit{Community Development}, 98.
\end{itemize}
Jim Ife argues that any community initiative, that would emerge from a process like what is described above, needs to be run through a framework that embraces ecological sustainability and social justice. Whilst both disciplines have the desire to build the community, they have traditionally come from what could be seen as competing agenda. In the 1980's and 1990's social justice proponents wanted to see the community grown through job creation, but were not too concerned about the ecological impact. As too for those focused on ecology, they were concerned for long term eco-sustainability, but not so concerned about the impact on the economy. Jim Ife sees the integration of these two important foci, will ensure equitable and sustainable futures for communities. Each perspective is seeking a better world and encompasses a critique of the dominant social and political order. Both perspectives draw on the same intellectual traditions such as feminism, socialism and anarchism. Added to this, proponents of each position largely agree with the premise of the other, even if only superficially. This leaves space for effective collaboration, and integrated change strategies.\(^{161}\)

An example of this concept is social sustainability. Coming from a green perspective it asks if a particular solution to a community or systemic issue is sustainable. It asks this question in terms of its impact on the social aspect of the community, as well as on the local economy, impact on families and on the environment. This way of thinking is a step towards holism. The Church has not been good at embracing this concept, despite being part of a Kingdom that embraces all of life. Holism requires the breaking down of dualisms including, mind / body, knowledge / action (reflective of the thinking coming from Liberation Theology), fact / value (echoes of Newbigin’s work, highlighting that the advances in science have been as big a faith leap as faith in Christ. Newbigin also focused on plausibility structures which reflect the values of society), and physical / social.\(^{162}\) This approach requires a broadening of the knowledge base and would require the Church to integrate theology with a range of other disciplines such as sociology, ecology and economics.

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\(^{161}\) Ibid., 83.

\(^{162}\) Ibid., 85. Brackets author’s addition.
This is the work of making connections, so key to successful community development. Jim Ife understands that our society is very linear and not good at making connections, which in part has been a contributing factor to the break down of community and the failing of various social policies. The task of community development is to provide a framework for these connections and to help in the bringing of a new order. Again this understanding links directly with the work of Liberation Theology.

Conclusion

Liberation Theology is a theology of praxis. At its core is the belief that for faith to be faith it needs to be lived out in authentic action and be true to its context. It outlines a helpful, holistic approach that needs to be adopted by the Christian community development worker. It starts by the theologian immersing themselves in the world of the oppressed and then follows another three mediations. The social mediation exploring what is going on in the community, something akin to community research. It takes the understanding that the cause of poverty is dialectical, the solution being radical change in society. The second mediation is hermeneutic, the situation of the poor and the solution are seen through the eyes of Scripture, which leads to the third mediation of action following the ethic of Jesus.

This action is informed by key biblical themes: true faith includes action for liberation; God is on the side of the oppressed; God is working on his dream of the Kingdom both now and into eternity; Jesus sets us free by taking on our oppression caused by sin; the Holy Spirit as sign of the Kingdom is present in the struggle against oppression; Mary in her humility is the example of how we should be; the church symbolises and works toward liberation; God sees the rights of the poor as his own; liberated humans need to strive to overcome social and systemic sin.

There are many connections between this theology and holistic community development. The main connecting points are a vision of a world where people’s basic needs are met and the individual

\[ 163 \text{ Ibid.} \]
can live out their life and purpose in the context of community, contributing to it as a valued member. A methodology towards this is known as ABCD. It consists of five key steps;

**Step 1:** The development of an asset map that recognises and values the skills and contributions of individuals, associations and institutions within a geographic community.

**Step 2:** Relationship building between assets, particularly including strangers, or the marginalised within a community.

**Step 3:** Creative approaches to using skills to stimulate the local economy, with a focus on helping the community become self reliant. Step 3 also includes being aware of and informing the information flow within a community.

**Step 4:** A process of community vision and planning, where there is basic consensus on solutions to community issues.

**Step 5:** The use of outside expertise, in the context of the development of genuine partnerships with that expertise, as opposed to being passive recipients.

Within local communities, the Church has a unique opportunity, based on its understanding of God and his priorities, to lead the process of holistic community development. Keeping Christ as liberator at the centre, opens the way for the Church to go broad and integrate theology with other disciplines, and create an inclusive, whole of community approach. The Church also has the ability to model the characteristics of Jesus and design action that reflects the dream of His Kingdom.
Chapter 5 Connections and Case Studies

This chapter brings together my argument for the use of ABCD as a methodology of Kingdom focused holistic mission, a methodology that Churches can lead and invite others into. Whilst the methodology is a recent phenomenon, the principles of ABCD are not. The core principle talks of the development of the whole community, through utilising the strengths within that community. The principle actively reflects God's intention for his creation and the intrinsic worth of the individual in the context of community. Within this context, ABCD allows room for both environmental and social agendas to be met.

Coming from a holistic perspective, this paper has shown that the Kingdom is concerned with all of creation. This is reflected in God's ultimate plan of bringing heaven to earth, where all things will be renewed, including an earthly humanity. This goal is directly reflected in ABCD, which desires to see individuals and whole communities reach their potential. Wright affirms that the Kingdom is not only a future reality but is visible through the in-breaking of God’s eternal plan, firstly in Christ who inaugurated the new creation and then predominantly through the Church who live as the new creation, an active signpost towards God’s future.

This understanding of the Kingdom picks up the trinitarian themes of creation, liberation and glorification. Focusing on liberation, ABCD aims to release the human potential, in the construct of communities, from the limitations of social, economic and personal oppression. Borrowing the language of liberation theology, ABCD sees the need for a new social grace or order that redeems social structures from sin and oppression.

As shown in Chapter one of this paper, understanding God's work in this way clearly links to Snyder’s description of the Kingdom as Christianised culture (model seven). This model provides the Church with a set of values and principles that enables it to build for the Kingdom now. It holds in tension the need for both divine and human action, gradual revealing of the Kingdom as well as a cataclysmic coming and that the Kingdom works in the individual as well as the community.
Wright says that wherever the values of the Kingdom are present, the Kingdom is manifest. This understanding allows the Church to take on a broad agenda of social change.

This agenda covers evangelism, justice and beauty. (Where evangelism is the announcement of God’s Kingdom, Jesus’ Lordship and the consequent new creation.) Through this the Church is drawn into living as an alternate community, that seeks justice locally and globally and celebrates God’s good creation. Focusing on these aspects, invites the church into a holistic mission of hope and into collaboration with others fostering programs and processes that move the community towards God’s picture of the city.

As shown in Chapter 2, recognising its universality and the centrality of communion, the Church not only builds for the Kingdom, but is a sign of its future reality and is a challenge to every political and judicial system. When operating well, the Church has embodied the above principles and has had a transformative effect in society. The Church needs to be functional in the wider community, (detailed in Chapter 1), and Newbigin affirms a tenant of Liberation Theology, that for the church there can be no separation between believing and following. Within my experience many missionaries have thought the role of the Church was evangelism, only to find that the logic of the gospel involved them in social development and reform. The church has been blessed to be a blessing.

Internally, the Church recognises that it has a redeeming influence on space, time and matter. Prayer and Scripture are central to its internal life, guiding it through the hazardous waters of the culture, so it can stay pure of a Christianised dualism and continue to act as an agent of transformation. The Church needs to be a community of authenticity reflected in honesty, openness, hospitality and genuine love. It needs to be a model of an alternative social order as it negotiates the liminality of its marginalised state, forming communitas.
A model of church that exemplifies much of this understanding and integration is the Base Ecclesial Communities of Latin America.

**Case Study One: Base Ecclesial Communities (BEC)**

Originating from the Catholic Church in Latin America during the 1950’s, The BEC are characterised by small groups, where people know each other and where individuality is expressed. They were a specific response to a prevailing historical conjuncture, namely a hierarchy with passive congregants.\(^{164}\) The core question for the BEC was: How may the community experience of the apostolic faith be embedded and structured in the conditions of a people who are both religious and oppressed?\(^{165}\) Even though most of the original communities were started by a priest or someone from a religious order, the BEC are essentially a lay movement, with the laity involved in every level of decision making.

The BEC were initially started in response to an old lady who noticed the protestant Churches in her community celebrating Christmas, whilst for lack of a priest, the Catholic church was silent. A local bishop then trained lay people to do everything that they could do within the bounds of current ecclesiastical discipline. Through this the internal life of the Catholic Church flourished and meeting halls, instead of chapels, were built and used for other endeavours such as education, sewing lessons and meetings to solve community problems.\(^{166}\)

The absence of alienating structures as well as the positive contribution of direct relationships, reciprocity, deep communion, mutual assistance, gospel ideals and equality among members saw the BEC being a living church. Central to their belief and practice was the building of the Kingdom of God, with individual and corporate liberation being a key theme.

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\(^{165}\) Ibid., 37.

\(^{166}\) Ibid., 3.
Leonardo Boff, advocate for the BEC, believes they can be a useful counterpoint to the church as institution. Provided they don’t see themselves as the only expression of community and church. Instead they can point to the need for evangelical authenticity and help the institution move closer to the ideal of community. Within the Catholic Church of the mid twentieth century there were differing opinions, some seeing that the BEC only had ecclesial elements that did not constitute a Church. However the view prevailed that the Church existed in the people of God, encouraged by the Word and the discipleship of Christ.\footnote{167}

Leadership was still a crucial element within the BEC, for the facilitation of a grassroots, bottom up community of faith. The BEC fostered each person’s particular gift and role within the community. This was recognised as part of the salvific event and a form of the manifestation of the Spirit within the community for its building up.

The BEC were also concerned about the socio-political environment that they were a part of. In July 1978 there was a significant meeting within the Catholic Church in Latin America, where it began to realise the powerful effect of giving people voice and role. The poor of the BEC were allowed to speak, demonstrating that together they had begun to form a response to their poverty after being oppressed for 480 years. They stated that their oppression was due to the elitist, exclusive capitalist system. They articulated that liberation is achieved to the extent of their unification and creation of a network of grassroots movements.\footnote{168} By the next meeting in 1981 the power of participation and organisation was even more obvious.

The BEC were able to integrate faith and life. They recognised the subversive nature of Jesus and the Word, using it as a source of life in their struggle against oppression. They saw very clearly God’s concern for, Lordship over and presence in society. They recognised God as just and the one who stood with them in their struggles against oppression. They taught that one can’t separate...
being Christian and crying out for justice. They built the Kingdom through the mediation of justice and love in solidarity as a communion of persons.\textsuperscript{169}

As the BEC communities were created, associations of every kind were also created. The overall aim of these associations was to refashion the social fabric and rebuild the people as agents of their own fate, set with the task of building a livable community for all. “And Politics is the mighty weapon we have, to build a just society the way God wants it.”\textsuperscript{170} This struggle for a just society is not factored on causal enthusiasm, rather a strong sense of the arduous nature of their journey and the reality of communitas that this creates.

**Case Study Two: Finkenwald Seminary**

Dietrich Bonhoeffer was a proponent of a Christology which recognised God as a suffering God, found in this world now. He understood that to be true, the Church needed to suffer at the hands of a godless world as Christ did. His understanding was contextualised by the German Churches complicity with Nazism.

In 1930 Bonhoeffer, ‘... turned from phraseology to reality.’\textsuperscript{171} He was a brilliant theologian who combined Karl Barth’s Christology with Adolf von Harnack’s concern for the relevance of Christianity to the modern world. It was through his experiences in Harlem that Bonhoeffer started to understand faith from the perspective of the oppressed.\textsuperscript{172} With this understanding he, and the Confessing Church, were some of the only Christian voices that stood to resist Nazism.

Bonhoeffer ran the underground Finkenwalde Seminary. Here he was able to input into the development of Confessing Church pastors. During this time he wrote *Cost of Discipleship* and *Life*.

\textsuperscript{169} Ibid., 41.

\textsuperscript{170} Ibid., 43.


Together. Bonhoeffer saw that for community to be authentic it needs to be grounded in faith and not experience. He argued that we are in unity with our brothers and sisters and that human dreams and ideals of community are dangerous because they lead to coercion, judgement and a power in-balance. Bonhoeffer understood that through Christ we have authentic community. We live under his grace that enables us to see the other as God sees him. Our task is to let the Word and the Spirit build community.  

Bonhoeffer outlines a daily rhythm of prayer, the Word and work for his communities. From a space where one encounters God, in the context of community, the follower of Jesus is led to the day of work. In this way the holy and the world of things are integrated. God has the opportunity to hone the believer to the point, where the ‘it’ of the world is transcended to the realisation of the ‘Thou.’ At this point Bonhoeffer believes God is in the world, uniting prayer and work, liberating man from himself.

This is achieved through the community becoming a listening community, both internally and external to it, understanding a key ministry of the believer is to listen, and in this way help others. Helpfulness also transcends from listening to physical action. Bonhoeffer exhorts the faithful to be interruptible, less they pass the cross of Christ. In this understanding there is an intractable link between hands that are willing to help and mouths that can authentically proclaim God’s message of love and mercy.

Christian community must also be willing to bear with each other. Brotherhood is expressed when the other becomes a burden, leading to the end of manipulation. This involves the brother or sister entering into the created reality of the other, accepting and affirming it, to the point where the sense of burden is transcended into joy. The ministry of proclaiming the Word comes after listening, helpfulness and bearing with the other.

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174 Ibid., 52.
Bonhoeffer’s exhortation is for Christians to speak to each other, knowing the other is a sinner. This is not a disparaging stance, rather one that acknowledges a joint share in God’s grace and glory and the position of being God’s child. This enables us to not fear the other, speaking truth and love to them. Through all of these ministries Bonhoeffer demonstrates that as Christians, we are equal and we must guard against seeing ourselves over and above the other. The ministry of authority then is one of servanthood not a personality cult. Bonhoeffer was at pains to show that our allegiance is to Christ and not to substitute that for immediate connection with people, which damages community and the witness of the Church. Though not a systematic outline of social reform as was operating in the BEC or through ABCD, Bonhoeffer advocated a way of life that integrated deep faith and theology with an active involvement in the world, particularly standing against oppression.

Whilst operating in vastly different contexts, both the BEC of Latin America and the Finkenwald Seminary were affected by a cultural transition. As examined in Chapter Three of this paper, at the time of the middle ages, humanity was porous, believing that they were affected directly by the events happening around them. God was seen to have an existentially foundational role in society. It was impossible to perceive that society could exist outside of a common religious belief. As a result society’s equilibrium was based on hierarchical complementarity. The world was seen as enchanted, the Church the purveyor of good magic.

As the Church began to reform through Martin Luther and others, doctrines were created and these led to the internalising of faith. Of particular effect was the idea of judgement and that there was something beyond human flourishing. This led to a fear of death and the need to respond individually to the Christian call of transformation. Added to this, village life began to break down with the formation of new industries. People began to work out their own destinies, striving for

\[175\] Ibid., 82-83.
riches, with the gap widening between the seeking of human potential and the concept of flourishing taught by the Church.

Through these changes the Church lost its validating right over society, people found they could ignore God and nothing bad happened. These cultural shifts, were major contributors to the breakdown of community and the Church’s loss of unity and power. Faith became focused on the individual and internalised, with the voice of the church becoming marginalised. The door opened for the humanist alternative.

Progress and the belief that humanity had the ability to remake the world in their own image, led to massive technological development in the West. The focus became material possessions, consumerism and economic advance. Society believed this would filter down to the poorest of the poor.

However both the BEC and Finkenwald Seminary saw that these advancements had created an ever widening gap between the rich and poor, both within a country and between countries. As outlined above, the BEC saw this economic gap and the West's pursuit of wealth as key contributing factors to their oppression. The pervading attitude in the 1950’s and indeed today is that countries and people groups without these economic benefits are ignorant, backward and in need of development.

Broadly speaking, the western church, including Australia, finds itself in a cultural backdrop made up of these factors. A broken understanding and out working of community, which prizes the individual above everything, and an understanding of faith and religion, which has an individualistic and internalised outlook, and a view of success that is largely economic.

Into this culture comes a modern day expression of the Anabaptists;
Case Study Three: The Peace Tree Community, Lockridge Western Australia

The Peace Tree Community is a modern expression of Anabaptist principles, based in one of the poorest communities in Perth. They describe themselves as ‘sinners anonymous’ for ‘recovering consumers.’ Their work is to pray and embody God’s grace through acts that reflect the Kingdom of God, including the creation of permaculture gardens and housing the homeless. They focus on personal transformation and seek to empower the marginalised as opposed to handing out charity. They also stand for a non-violent approach to a violent world. They model themselves on Jesus and are motivated by the immanence of the Kingdom.

An average day begins with morning prayers. They share breakfast and go to work in various jobs. Their local community is their core focus. In 2007 there was a gang killing between two ethnic groups and there was fear of race riots and reciprocity. The Peace tree Community’s first response was to gather in prayer. Creativity flowed and they took chalk to the local streets, writing sayings like ‘something must change.’ After further prayer one of the members suggested they organise a community wide gathering called ‘Pizza for Peace,’ the community, including those from the two ethnic groups involved in the killing were invited. The Peace Tree Community led a time of prayer for an end to violence both locally and in the world. They planted an almond tree to remember the victim’s life and invited those closest to him to put soil on the base of the tree as a prayer for remembrance and healing.

The Community is based on key principles from the Anabaptist movement. These include a focus on discipleship and a direct correlation between belief and mission. The Anabaptists see that Jesus is the focal point of God’s revelation and a core example for his followers. He is teacher, friend, redeemer, Lord, and the central reference for faith, lifestyle and the shape of Church. Through Christendom and the association of the Church with wealth and power, Anabaptists

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believe the witness of the church has been damaged and it has been left ill equipped for mission. They advocate and pursue alternate ways of thinking and living, that embody and bring good news to the poor.

Anabaptists have a similar ecclesiology to the BEC. They understand Church to be a centre of discipleship and mission, where each person is valued, leadership consultative and roles are related to gift. The Anabaptists understand that they live in God’s Kingdom now in active anticipation of its eventual fulfillment. Reconciliation is key for the movement, which sees them advocate for non violent resolution of conflict, between individuals, churches, in society and between nations. This understanding also includes living responsibly as caretakers of creation. Anabaptists also understand that spirituality and economics are linked. They believe in living simply, sharing generously and working for justice that enables people to live out a true expression of their humanity.178

South American Catholic Base Ecclesial Communities, a German Lutheran seminary and a modern day example of the Anabaptists, each show the integrity and adaptability of ABCD principles. The principles provide guidance for any community that wants to take engagement with the world seriously. Coming from very different contexts they all form the basis of a community that recognises the worth and gift of each member. They each affirm the importance of the Word and prayer as well as an open and generous spirit towards others in the community. Each affirms the importance of standing with God on the side of the poor, oppressed and marginalised.

These principles and practices reflect Wright and Newbigin’s writing and point to this paper’s understanding of Kingdom shaped Church as outlined by Frost, Hirsch and others. The principles of recognising value, worth, gift and working to create a renewed world also align with the values of ABCD.

The responses of Fikenwald, the BEC and The Peace Tree Community to their contexts are remarkably similar, despite them being worlds apart. The world of the author of this paper is also different, however the response similar, through working to empower the poor and marginalised in the South Eastern Suburbs of Melbourne.

ABCD provides a methodology to enact the theological framework of a Kingdom view, that recognises God’s work of renewal within local communities. God primarily uses the Church in this process as it is the embodiment of the new creation. However the Church in our modern context has largely lost sight of this broad agenda, letting the predominant culture dictate where it can have a voice. This has seen faith become individualised and internalised. At their best God’s people have always sought to embrace those around them, particularly embodying God’s desire to give voice to the poor and marginalised.

The process of ABCD is one that the Church can lead in any local community. It recognises the value and worth of each individual, and encourages them to share their skills and gifts with the whole community. The approach encourages relationships to be built between those offering services to the community, thus diminishing isolation and growing mutual appreciation. From this base conversations are entered into that recognise the identity and context of a community as well as the issues and move towards holistic solutions. For the Church, behind this methodology is an understanding of the sin that exists in social structures and the need for them to be transformed allowing for more justice and participation. ABCD allows God’s gift of grace and human endeavour to come together.

In a cultural backdrop that has marginalised the voice of the church, ABCD methodology, whilst clearly enacting Kingdom principles, enables the church to overcome its plausibility gap, clearly showing God’s heart for the community and its renewal. It enables God’s people to be builders and repairers of city walls and streets (Isa 58:12), working for a just world where everyone has what they need. (Isa 65:17-25).
Conclusion

Through this paper I have grounded the principles of Asset Based Community Development in a Kingdom theology, forming an argument that this methodology is theologically robust in as much as it reflects God’s desire for a renewed creation. Chapter one showed that God’s work of renewal is a present reality, predominantly through the work of the Spirit in the Church. God’s renewing work through his people is a sign post to God’s ultimate reality and source of hope, the final coming together of heaven and earth, and where God’s just rule in its totality will be experienced.

Chapter two demonstrated that in order for the Church to take hold of its Kingdom mandate, it needs to be Christologically focused and grounded in the Word and prayer. The Church also needs to have a clear understanding of its universal nature and the centrality of its unity in the eucharist, which promotes fellowship with God and within the body. The Church is called to emulate God’s missional nature and so, from the universal a broad shape for a local expression can be abstracted. The Church needs to be an expression of honesty, openness, hospitality and love, both within itself and to the stranger.

Pre-Christendom the Church tended to reflect these values, from its largely underground and marginal position. Christendom saw the focus of the church shift to buildings and the creation of hierarchy. The period of Christendom, including the close relationship between church and state, has severely limited the Church’s missional effectiveness. Even as Christendom ended, its legacy can still be felt, with the need for the Church to once again embrace its universal identity and particular local shape, in order for it to be effective in its various contexts.

Each local context or community that a Church can impact is part of a broader culture. Chapter three surveyed the cultural shift in the west over the last five hundred years. Recognising that there has been a significant shift from the culture being largely religious to it being secular in the present. The journey to current post modernity has seen the cultural advances of the enlightenment as well as the disillusionment with the positivism of modernity. Presently post-modern culture offers a
plethora of beliefs options, amongst which the Christian faith is just one. The philosophers within
culture talk of there being no ultimate meaning and if a meaning can be found it will be expressed
in narrative. The culture in the West is also obsessed with a consumerism that has collapsed the
gap between the real and the hyper-real, putting as much value on what a product represents as
on the actual product itself. This journey from a predominantly religious culture to a post modern
culture has left plausibility gaps that the church must overcome, in order for Christianity to be seen
as a credible option.

Chapter four outlined a process to overcome these credibility gaps. Grounded and authenticated in
Liberation Theology, ABCD provides a clear methodology for the Church to partner with others in
local communities to grow the capacities of individuals in the context of their community and create
communities that reflect God’s desire for humanity and all of creation.

In Chapter five I have shown that Kingdom principles and community development are in harmony
and in fact when the Church has been working well, the concept and basic pretenses of ABCD
have been lived out. The examples of the BEC, Finkenwald and Peacetree were cited from many
possibilities to show that ABCD is applicable in a very diverse range of contexts.

Overall, I have argued that ABCD worked out in geographically defined local communities is a
sound and practical form for expression of Kingdom principles and is a process that a local Church
can embrace and facilitate. This process, if engaged fully, will help the Church be a more authentic
expression of what it was intended to be, bridge the plausibility gap between Church and society
as well as help the broader community move towards God’s intention.
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