Joint and Mutual Covenantal Priesthood:
A Narrative of Community for Australian Baptist Churches

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Abstract

Practical theology seeks to integrate what have, at times, been perceived to be the separate disciplines of pastoral theology, scriptural studies and systematic theology. This thesis, specifically as a project in practical theology, seeks to bring the resources of these three disciplines to bear upon the nature of community as it is and could be practised within Australian Baptist churches.

This work begins with a descriptive account in cultural and psychosocial terms of the current status of such communities by exploring the Australian cultural context and issues associated with the concept of the Psychological Sense of Community. This exploration indicates that individualism has had a significant and pervasive influence on Australian Baptist churches. This is exemplified by a reliance on a demotic discourse of destructured relationality, ambivalence regarding community boundaries, the decline of influence within such communities, and the loss of shared narratives, particularly concerning the ecclesial nature and practices of those churches. In response to the issues raised by this descriptive theology, both Scripture and Baptist ecclesiology are engaged as the basis for a historical theology concerning church community.

Scripture, as the primary source for Baptist theology, is firstly explored in seeking out the nature of community amongst God’s people. An adaptation of the work of Paul Hanson is used to demonstrate that such community occurs within the context of covenant, and is characterised by worship of God, by the nature of the lives lived together in such communities, and by a commitment to sharing God’s blessing with God’s world. This three dimensional description of community, it is argued, points to a canonical narrative of community as a joint and mutual covenantal priesthood. This narrative is then explored within the context of early Baptist ecclesiology. The wider scriptural concept of covenant was understood by early Baptists to have a particular application within Baptist churches, whereby members made a two-fold commitment to God and to one another. Within this context, the priesthood of believers was practised in both joint and mutual terms. However, from the eighteenth century on, a range of pressures associated with the Enlightenment began to impinge upon such understandings and practices. Under these pressures (primarily of individualism, but also including rationalism, experientialism, pragmatism and evangelicalism), Baptist churches came to understand themselves solely as voluntary associations, within which each believer possessed soul competency, enabling them to stand alone before God. On this basis, worship became an individual act, individual rights of autonomous persons were favoured over the interdependence of community, and
evangelism came to be understood in terms of saving souls for their own individual relationship with Christ.

The rise of individualism and the decline of community represented by these developments are shown to provide the context for the issues raised in the descriptive theology of this thesis. The resources of both Scripture and early Baptist ecclesiology are then brought to bear in response to these issues in a systematic practical theology. Covenant with God as the context for church community is reprioritised alongside voluntary association, and priesthood is reinterpreted as a joint and mutual set of practices within this context. On this basis, the worshipping community finds itself primarily grounded in Godself, alongside its practice of human forms of sociality, and from this foundation offers its joint worship to God. The community’s priesthood also comes to expression in the quality of the mutual relationships between those within it; exercising justice, praying for one another and bearing one another’s burdens. Together the church community also seeks to share God’s blessing with God’s world; jointly, both representing God to the world, and the world to God. This priestly work culminates in the sacramental practices and narration of baptism and the Lord’s Supper. In addressing the three dimensions of church community as joint and mutual covenantal priesthood, in worship, life together and sharing God’s blessing, individualism in general, and as specifically exemplified in the descriptive theology, is addressed and practical responses developed.

In this manner, this thesis provides a coherent and comprehensive narrative of community for Australian Baptist churches. In doing so, it makes a particular contribution to Baptist scholarship by bringing three sources of data into conversation (a psychosocial analysis of the current situation amongst Australian Baptist churches, a canonical narrative of community from Scripture, and the resources of Baptist church history). The narrative of joint and mutual covenantal priesthood also integrates three central dimensions of church community life (worship, life together, and mission) which have often been set in tension against one another, and provides a theocentric basis within the context of priestly community for Baptist sacramentalism.
Declaration by author

This thesis is composed of my original work, and contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference has been made in the text. I have clearly stated the contribution by others to jointly-authored works that I have included in my thesis.

I have clearly stated the contribution of others to my thesis as a whole, including statistical assistance, survey design, data analysis, significant technical procedures, professional editorial advice, and any other original research work used or reported in my thesis. The content of my thesis is the result of work I have carried out since the commencement of my research higher degree candidature and does not include a substantial part of work that has been submitted to qualify for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution. I have clearly stated which parts of my thesis, if any, have been submitted to qualify for another award.

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No publications included.

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Statement of parts of the thesis submitted to qualify for the award of another degree

None.
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Note

Biblical quotations are from the New Revised Standard Version. I have generally used gender-neutral language but do not draw attention to instances where this is not the case in quotations. Spelling is in Australian English. Grammar, notes and bibliography follow the style set out in Kate Turabian, Joseph M. Williams, Gregory G. Colomb, and Wayne C. Booth, A Manual for Writers of Research Papers, Theses, and Dissertations: Chicago Style for Students and Researchers, Kindle ed. (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2010).
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Part A: Introduction and Methodology
Introduction

“Community” is not the biblically preferred word for God’s people. It is used occasionally in the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible to translate the words associated with the Hebrew and Greek terms which are more accurately rendered “brother/s,”1 or the Greek term which refers to a large number or crowd and is alternatively rendered “multitude” or “many.”2 The Hebrew Scriptures refer, rather, to the “congregation,”3 or “an assembly for religious purposes,”4 and the Christian Scriptures and other early Christian writings use a multitude of terms including “assembly” (ἐκκλησία and συναγωγή), “disciples” (μαθητῶν), and “believers” (πιστεύοντες).5 Nevertheless, “community” has become a familiar term in Christian nomenclature so that, for example, Stanley Grenz’s theological tome was written, not for the “Church,” but for the “Community of God.”6

Such a shift represents the very intersection of contemporary Christian theology and praxis with the human sciences, such as sociology and psychology, which practical theology seeks to explore.7 How and why, it asks, has the issue of community come to attention? What pressures have been at work to cause such a focus upon it? What do the relevant historical texts have to say concerning it, and how do they marry with current understandings and practices? What, when all this is weighed together, and in light of current cultural conditions, will be the appropriate teaching and practices which will enable, in this case, Australian Baptist churches to understand themselves and function as Christian communities?

Within the gamut of methodological approaches available within the discipline of practical theology there are those which take a correlational approach, allowing the human sciences to fundamentally question and critique Christian ways of thinking and being,8 and canonical narrative approaches which attend more closely to the primary and normative

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1 In Hebrew, words stemming from נַע (ʾāḥ) (e.g., Deut 1:16), and in the Greek ἀδελφός (e.g., Eph 6:23).
2 πλήθος (e.g., Acts 6:2)
3 πᾶν (ʾāḏāh), (e.g., Ex 12:3)
4 קהל (qāḥāl), (e.g., Deut 9:10)
6 Stanley J. Grenz, Theology for the Community of God (Grand Rapids, MI: Broadman & Holman, 2000), Chap 10.
7 As framed by Don Browning, this entails “movements” of descriptive, historical, systematic and “fully practical” or strategic theology. Don S. Browning, A Fundamental Practical Theology: Descriptive and Strategic Proposals (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 1996), 47-54.
function of Scripture, whilst engaging with the human sciences in a more ad hoc manner.\(^9\) Both negatively, in terms of the Baptist rejection of Constantinian forms of accommodation, and positively, in terms of the Baptist commitment to forming belief and practice in direct relation to Scripture, this latter canonical narrative approach will be argued to be appropriate to this particular project. On these terms, this thesis will begin with a descriptive theology which will employ the concept of Psychological Sense of Community in order to explore the nature of community in contemporary Australian Baptist churches, and to highlight specific examples of the impact of individualism on such communities. These examples, it will be shown, include issues such as an almost exclusive reliance on a demotic discourse of destructured relationality in relation to membership/belonging, ambivalence regarding community boundaries, a decline in forms of influence, and the loss of shared narratives of community.

The following canonical narrative reading of Scripture in relation to community will then seek out, not just isolated instances in which the theme of community is to the fore in the biblical text, but rather attempt to identify a coherent and comprehensive narrative which speaks of God’s presence in, work concerning, and intentions for community with and amongst God’s people. This exploration will use as its starting point, Paul Hanson’s work, *The People Called*.\(^{10}\) It will, however, adapt this, suggesting that the three critical dimensions of covenant community which are apparent across both Hebrew and Christian Scriptures are worship of God, the ethical practice of relationships within the community, and a responsibility to share God’s blessing with God’s world. These three dimensions then provide a basis for the proposition that God’s people are called to live and serve in community as a joint and mutual covenantal priesthood, and that this schema does indeed provide a canonical narrative of such community.

This work of historical theology might, in Baptist terms, be expected to finish at this point, leaving Scripture to speak alone into contemporary thought and practice. If, however, the impact of particular influences such as individualism are to be fully understood, the resources of church history in general, and Baptist church history in particular, will be argued to have a useful role to play. In what ways, it will be asked, did the early English Baptists of the seventeenth century, understand their lives together in terms of joint and mutual covenantal priesthood? Again, theology and practices around worship, life together and sharing God’s blessing with the world will be explored and shown to have provided a

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significant sense of community for the churches in which these Baptists gathered. The tensions between individualism and community were certainly present, but considerable effort was applied to maintaining a theologically nuanced balance, grounded, most especially, in a thorough-going theocentrism. This, however, it will be demonstrated, was not maintained under the pressure of Enlightenment individualism with its concomitant issues, but rather such individualism became the pervasive and potent context for later Baptist ecclesiology. It is this distorted form of belief and practice which, it is argued, has engendered the situation outlined in the descriptive theology of contemporary Australian Baptist churches.

The final part of this thesis - a systematic practical theology - will then seek to bring the resources of both Scripture and historical Baptist ecclesiology to bear upon the issues raised by the analysis of individualism and community in contemporary Australian Baptist churches. Both theology and praxis of community will be explored through the lens of the canonical narrative of joint and mutual covenantal priesthood, whilst also seeking to apply the wisdom of early Baptists and the lessons learnt from those who followed them. Firstly, this exploration will conclude that worship, as a theocentric set of practices, needs to be reprioritised and recognised as providing the vital basis for church life together and sharing God’s blessing. Secondly, it will be argued that the quality of life shared within the church community requires a fresh focus, so that the community will be appropriately prepared for its worship and witness to the world. Thirdly, it will be demonstrated that sharing God’s blessing with the world demands attention in a way which integrates it with, rather than pits it in opposition to, the other two imperatives of covenant community. Each of these dimensions is then, finally, shown to be expressed in the sacramental community practices of believer baptism and the Lord’s Supper.

Recent statistical analysis indicates that Australian Baptist churches are, generally, doing relatively well in maintaining levels of attendance and participation, particularly in contrast to other “mainstream” Protestant denominations.\textsuperscript{11} This work acknowledges this dynamism, but nevertheless seeks to provide a firmer footing for such communities. This is achieved on the basis of three sources of data: awareness of the twenty-first century Australian cultural context, a canonical narrative of community, and historical Baptist ecclesiology. This integrative thrust is continued as the narrative of joint and mutual covenantal priesthood demonstrates that the three central dimensions of church community life (worship, life together, and mission), rather than being set in competition

\textsuperscript{11} See Chapter 2.3.
against one another, are entirely and vitally interdependent. Finally, it is in the context of church community understood in such terms that Baptist sacramentalism takes its place as a coherent, even vital, set of practices.
Chapter 1: Methodology

Practical theology attempts to move beyond the divide between systematic and applied theologies to a “more integrated and dialogical relationship between the practice of ministry and the resources of theological understanding.” In order to accomplish this it begins with a “crisis”; a perceived lack or failing which brings current Christian thought and practices into question. In the case of this work, such a “crisis” came to my attention in seeking to describe the nature of the theology upon which rested my own church’s practices of membership, baptism and the Lord’s Supper. At that time (2008), I concluded that the emphasis, both theologically and in practice, fell heavily on the individual and private as opposed to the communal and public, and I began to wonder whether this adequately reflected scriptural and Baptist theological norms.

According to Don Browning’s *A Fundamental Practical Theology*, such a crisis necessitates a “descriptive theology” which is both a theological and sociological task, and explores the full range of interrelated meanings that are attached to the practices of interest within the target group. This “movement” of description is followed by a “historical theology” which asks, “What do the normative texts that are already part of our effective history really imply for our praxis when they are confronted as honestly as possible?” This involves church history (and with it the history of Christian thought), but pays particular attention to the Biblical text, applying one of a range of hermeneutical approaches. This work is followed by a “systematic theology” which seeks to bring together “the vision implicit in contemporary practices and the vision implied in the practices of the normative Christian texts.” In what ways, this movement asks, are current practices validated or challenged by such an informed reading of Scripture and other historical texts? What new (or old) practices might be re-/discovered as a result? The final outcome is a “strategic” or “fully” practical theology which seeks to explore and

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13 The relationship between theory and practice is dynamic rather than linear, so that even such practical beginnings are “meaningful or theory-laden.” Browning, *A Fundamental Practical Theology*, 6.
15 I have attended and been a member of Gateway Baptist Church (Mackenzie, Brisbane) since 1999.
16 Browning, *A Fundamental Practical Theology*, 47.
17 Browning, *A Fundamental Practical Theology*, 49, emphasis in original.
promote the practices which optimally operationalise the systematic theology.\(^{19}\) The cycle of practical theology is then complete, yet open to feedback and further exploration.

Within the framework of such a practical theology, a range of methodological approaches are available, and these include correlational strategies which seek to bring theology into a mutually critical dialogue with contemporary culture,\(^{20}\) and canonical narrative approaches which focus on the dynamic cycle of telling, re-telling and practice of the scriptural narratives within the Christian tradition, drawing on the human sciences in a more limited, descriptive sense.\(^{21}\) The promoters and detractors of both such types of theology tend to present them in stark opposition to one another,\(^{22}\) but both Hans Frei and David Ford suggest that they are best understood as ranging along a continuum. The major factor in determining the place of various types of theology along this continuum concerns whether they view theology as “an instance of a general class or generic type [which] is therefore to be subsumed under general criteria of intelligibility, coherence, and truth that it must share with other academic disciplines,” or as “an aspect of Christianity [which] is therefore partly or wholly defined by its relation to the cultural or semiotic system that constitutes that religion.”\(^{23}\) At the outer limits of this dimension lie, at one extreme, forms of theology which give “complete priority” to modern forms of secular philosophy and are, according to Ford, “hardly Christian,” and, at the other, those which attempt to repeat some earlier version of Christianity with no recognition of any influences outside of their own perspective and are “hardly modern.”\(^{24}\)

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\(^{19}\) Browning, *A Fundamental Practical Theology*, 8. This thesis concludes with a systematic practical theology. The development of a “strategic” or “fully” practical theology awaits further work.

\(^{20}\) See Graham, Walton, and Ward, *Theological Reflection: Methods*, Chapter 5. For Browning such a correlational approach is integral to the nature of practical theology as he describes it. Whilst, however, I use his framework to structure the work of this thesis, I will argue below that a canonical narrative approach is more fitting to the nature of this work as a Baptist task.

\(^{21}\) Graham et al. use the term “canonical narrative theology” to distinguish this from “constructive narrative theology” which focuses on believers’ own narratives. Graham, Walton, and Ward, *Theological Reflection: Methods*, 47, 78. Whilst this latter type of narrative theology plays a significant part in church communities developing their lives in response to the canonical narrative (see for example Frank Rees, “Enabling Congregations to Become Theological Communities,” *Evangelical Review of Theology* 30, no. 1 (2006): 11.), it is the canonical type of narrative theology which is in view here.

\(^{22}\) Hans Frei, for example, rejected the use of secular disciplines promoted by correlational methods in anything more than an ad hoc manner, and preferred their subordination to “Christian self-description.” Hans W. Frei, *Types of Christian Theology* (London: Yale University Press, 1992), 38-46, 78-83. Whilst John Webster has critiqued narrative theological methods in their encouragement of “locality” (i.e., territoriality or sectarianism in terms of ‘Christian’ and ‘non-Christian’) and the loss of catholicity (i.e., that Jesus is Lord beyond the confines of any or all expressions of Church). John Webster, “Locality and Catholicity: Reflections on Theology and the Church,” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 45 (1992): 13, 16.


My proposal here is that whilst within a pluralistic society there is indeed a place for public, correlational theology, there is also the necessity, particularly in the case of ecclesiology, for a distinctively Christian dialogue. Such a dialogue attends to and prioritises the ongoing process of reading, telling, re-telling and practice of the scriptural narratives which form church communities. More specifically, there are three particular reasons, described in detail below, for preferring a canonical narrative approach in the case of this project. The first two of these outline ways in which the basis of this thesis rests upon the specific rejection of forms of accommodation, suggesting that the appropriate response is a renewed focus on the Scriptures and Christian identity. More positively, the third is that canonical narrative theology is, indeed, the most appropriate type of practical theology by which Baptist church communities are formed and sustained.

Firstly, this thesis concerns Baptist ecclesiology which is at root a re-affirmation of the primacy of the scriptural narrative over a fundamental form of accommodation known as Constantianism. If Frei perceived “the eclipse of Biblical narrative” to have been sealed by the Enlightenment, Yoder ascribes its earlier decline to the developments of both the fourth and fifteenth centuries. He describes the way in which the pre-Constantinian Church understood itself as both united with, and yet visibly separated from, the world/state: united under the actual Lordship of Christ, but separated by their respective response to that Lordship, of either submission or rebellion. As expressed by Nigel Wright, the Constantinian concordat, in contrast, meant that seduced from revolutionary faith in its crucified Messiah, the church exchanged the values which had previously inhibited its loyalty to the emperor. The unreasonable kenosis revealed in Christ was avoided. The teaching of Jesus on wealth and property spiritualised. The church, the religious arm of the state, replicated the imperial hierarchy [and] clergy became civil servants and adopted the familiar justifications of accommodation to power.

In summary, “Constantinianism [was] the explicit or implicit attempt by the Christian church acting from a position of power, privilege or patronage to impose Christian values by the use of social and political power in what [were] believed to be the interests of the kingdom of God.” This compromise was perpetuated by the magisterial Reformation of the

25 I note the convention of using the descriptor “baptist” to include those who do not formally identify as Baptist but nevertheless practice similar forms of free church ecclesiology. However, the scope of this work focuses historically on, and pertains to, churches which have intentionally identified themselves as Baptist.
27 Yoder, "The Otherness of the Church," 55,56.
29 Wright, Disavowing Constantine, 17-18, emphasis in original.
fifteenth century, and it was the failure to perceive the necessity of a church with an identity distinct from state authority that led to the rise of the English separatist movement of the seventeenth century which would become known as “Baptist.”

Secondly, and more specifically, the central issue of this thesis is the assessment, critique and response to the accommodation by Baptist church communities to the Enlightenment ideal of individualism. Though the theological distinctives of early Baptist churches were clustered around an emphasis on the direct Lordship of Jesus Christ in the life of the believer, unmediated by any human agency, these were, nevertheless, expressed within a strongly held sense of community both within and between churches. This sense of mutuality was, it will be shown, however, eroded through an increasing emphasis on the Enlightenment values of the autonomy and rights of the individual believer so that, for example, in the twentieth century, “the priesthood of the believer” had come to be understood in terms of an individualistic “soul competency.” Such developments will, indeed, need to be understood in terms of the cultural developments which gave rise to them, but with the aim of restoring a view which gives primacy to the overarching scriptural call to Christian community.

Thirdly, and more positively, whether it is with an emphasis on church communities’ acts of worship, or on their processes of character-formation for life together and witness to the world, the realistic narratives of Scripture are proposed to be the “primary perspective for Christian community.” This approach is shaped, again, by the Baptist context of this work, the theology of which has as its “necessary and sufficient organizing principle” the “shared awareness of the present Christian community as the primitive community and the

30 This critical thread was initially discerned by the European Anabaptists, but it was taken up by the English Baptists in a particular form which prioritised missional engagement with the world rather than rejection of it. Wright, Disavowing Constantine, 43.
31 The scope of this work is limited to community within churches, but the relationship between the two aspects is noted.
32 Timothy George, “The Priesthood of All Believers,” in The People of God: Essays on the Believers’ Church, ed. Paul A. Basden and David S. Dockery (Nashville, Tennessee: Broadman and Holman, 1991), 91. At its best “soul competency” was understood “as the God-given freedom to respond to God without the intervention of the state or other powers,” but as Chapter 4.2.2 will explore, it became “framed too much in terms of the rugged American individualism... to do justice to the shared discipleship baptist life requires.” James Wm. McClendon, Ethics, Systematic Theology Vol. 1 (Nashville, TE: Abingdon Press, 1994), 27, 29.
The vital Baptist question, therefore, has been and continues to be “What does Scripture say?” The present manifestation of the church community may certainly, in this context, be to some extent explored and understood in contemporary sociological and psychological terms, but it is primarily to be explored, understood, and formed by what Scripture teaches it has been, is, and will be, according to God’s word. This moderate form of canonical narrative practical theology does not, therefore, reject the usefulness of the human sciences, but ascribes to them an illuminating rather than guiding role in practical theology.

The primary and normative role of Scripture having been presented, however, it must also be noted that there is a danger in this Baptist way of considering the life of present church communities to be directly linked with their scriptural counterparts, in that it severely marginalises the role of church history, whether in general or specifically Baptist form. The issue is summarised by Paul Fiddes: “It seems to be a mark of Baptist life to adapt to the present and constantly seek to reinvent itself, which at best can be seen as openness to the Spirit of God, and at worst, as a neglect of the lessons which the Spirit has wanted to teach the church during its history.” This, I would suggest, is a very particular form of individualism by which contemporary Baptists resist the community and cross-cultural critique of other believers offered across time. Whilst, therefore, Scripture provides the primary and authoritative lens through which a narrative of community will be understood in this thesis, Baptist church history will also be engaged as part of this project’s movement of historical theology; in its early forms as providing constructive examples of the way in which the canonical narrative of community might be theologically construed and practised; and in its later forms as indicating ways in which this narrative has been and continues to be distorted and undermined.

36 McClendon, Ethics, 30, 33, emphasis in original.
37 As Garrett Green notes, “the line that separates religious language from secular, that distinguishes Christian discourse from the many other forms of modern and postmodern speech, runs not around the perimeter of the Christian community but right through the middle of the church itself.” Garrett Green, Theology, Hermeneutics, and Imagination: The Crisis of Interpretation at the End of Modernity (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 2.
38 Similarly, for Green, the human sciences play a descriptive and even explanatory role but not a foundational or critical one. Green, Theology, Hermeneutics, and Imagination, 5, 6.
39 Paul S. Fiddes, “Walking Together: The Place of Covenant Theology in Baptist Life Yesterday and Today,” in Pilgrim Pathways: Essays in Baptist History in Honour of B.R. White, ed. William H. Brackney and Paul S. Fiddes (Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, 1999), 47. Martin Sutherland suggests that Baptists “look directly to the Christ story for our reference,” whilst acknowledging that previous generations “provide continuity and a profundity of experience and discovery from which any contemporary theology constantly draws.” His expression seems to give a moderate place to (Baptist) church history, but I am unpersuaded that his expression of this is adequate to counter the particular pitfall which Fiddes describes, and is central to the issues which this thesis addresses. Martin Sutherland, “Gathering, Sacrament and Baptist Theological Method,” Pacific Journal of Baptist Research 3, no. 2 (2007): 55, 56.
Embedded within this larger methodological framework of a moderate canonical practical theology lies the related issue of the particular hermeneutical method to be applied to the scriptural text as not only primary but as a unified narrative. Colin Greene and Martin Robinson usefully trace the history of the ways in which the Bible has been read up to the present day.\(^{40}\) Whilst from the second century a pattern was established by which churches engaged with the Bible “creatively, intuitively, authoritatively, prophetically, kerygmatically, ethically, practically and... politically,” under the Constantinian concordat, “Christendom inevitably marginalized the Bible as the chief source of the Church’s ecclesial and political identity, because it offered a politically expedient alternative,” and, thereby, “compromised the church’s primary relationship to the Scriptures.”\(^{41}\) Even so, the medieval fourfold system of exegesis,\(^{42}\) particularly in its allegorical and associated typological forms of interpretation, continued to support the reading of Scripture as a narrative, which, when “viewed from the perspective of the whole human race is indeed a unified story with a beginning..., a middle..., and an end.” Vitally, the middle of the story, concerning Jesus the Christ, was understood in Christian terms to be determinative of how the beginning and end were to be understood.\(^{43}\) It was, suggest Greene and Robinson, the Reformers’ distrust of the allegorical and typological forms of interpretation which began the process of undermining the reading of Scripture as a narrative unity.\(^{44}\)

This process was accelerated by the onset of modernity, particularly with the ascendency of historical-critical methodologies, and has continued since. The succeeding cultural realities (modernity, postmodernity and Greene and Robinson’s post-postmodernity or “metavista”) have operated as imperialistic, “all-consuming narratives demanding our prior allegiance and so displacing the biblical story from its primary place as literally the story that rules the world.”\(^{45}\) Despite the paradigm-shifting insights of Barth, Auerbach and Frei in re-establishing the significance and authority of the biblical narrative for Christian life

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\(^{41}\) Greene and Robinson, *Metavista*, 97.

\(^{42}\) From the early church period, a literal approach to Scripture was supplemented by moral and spiritual readings, and by the Middle Ages the practice of hermeneutics had been systematised to include up to four senses of the Biblical text: literal, allegorical, moral and anagogical. Hans-Georg Gadamer, "Classical and Philosophical Hermeneutics," *Theory, Culture & Society* 23, no. 1 (2006): 31.

\(^{43}\) Greene and Robinson, *Metavista*, 105, 106.

\(^{44}\) Greene and Robinson, *Metavista*, 105. I would suggest that there is a connection between the loss of these types of reading and the loss of an awareness of the necessity for the application of the type of scripturally formed “imaginative faithfulness” described by Green. Green, *Theology, Hermeneutics, and Imagination*, 16.

\(^{45}\) Such “cultural stories” are imperialistic “not necessarily because of their inherent credibility and persuasiveness, but simply because we become so personally invested in them – indeed, at times commoditized by them.” Greene and Robinson, *Metavista*, 104.
and thought, Greene and Robinson find, deeply problematic. Christian responses have ranged from fundamentalism and literalism which seek to establish the authority of any given text on the basis that “God said so,” to the liberalism which “forsakes any real identity between God and God’s words or acts in favour of the history of the development of human religious responses to the divine, often in the process bracketing off any ontological or epistemological assertions about the existence or otherwise of such a divine reality in the first place.” More closely allied with the former than the latter of these, but rejecting literal verbal or propositional inerrancy, Greene and Robinson suggest that the conservative evangelical approach points to certain truths, but is still unable to establish an overall schema by which many other important questions (for example, concerning “God’s relationship with Israel, the church, women, the poor and marginalized”) may be answered.

With these insights in mind, it becomes possible to again attempt what Barth et al. proposed: to read Scripture as a narrative unity which forms the life of Christian communities. Such a task will always pay attention to what Don Carson refers to as “the great turning points in redemptive history”; creation and fall, Israel and the law, Christ, the new covenant and the communities thereof, and the eschatological summing up of all things in Christ. But, whilst my engagement with Scripture will attend to this temporal flow of the narrative, my particular interest will be in exploring two of the “ligaments that hold the canon together.” Such ligaments include the themes of rest, temple, sacrifice, and kingdom, but also, of particular interest to this project, covenant and priesthood. It is these two themes which, taken together as covenantal priesthood, will be engaged to provide a canonical narrative of Christian community which is then employed as “an interpretive instrument that provides a framework for reading the Christian Bible as a theological and narrative unity.” Such a reading does not deny that there are internal developments, tensions and critiques within the biblical text but nevertheless seeks to

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52 Carson, *Christ and Culture Revisited*, 45.
53 Carson, *Christ and Culture Revisited*, 45.
describe an overall narrative thrust. It is in this telling of the whole story that distortions such as Enlightenment individualism may be addressed.

The descriptive theological task of exploring the tensions between community and individualism in contemporary Australian Baptist churches (Part B) will be pursued through an analysis of the literature concerning Australian culture in general, and, more specifically, through the community psychology concept of Psychological Sense of Community, as it highlights both psychosocial and theological issues. This analysis will explore the impact of individualism and seek to indicate specific examples of the forms in which this has occurred in Australian Baptist churches. The focus will then turn to historical theology (Part C); firstly, in the form of a scriptural exploration of community which, it will be argued, points to a canonical narrative of joint and mutual covenantal priesthood; and secondly, a reading of historical Baptist ecclesiology through this canonical narrative lens. Together these two arms of historical theology will provide the basis for the constructive task of a systematic practical theology of community for Australian Baptist churches (Part D). This will discuss principles and practices, and also venture to occasionally provide more specific examples of ways in which these might be implemented.
Part B: A Descriptive Theology
Chapter 2: Community in Contemporary Australian Baptist Churches

The emphasis on “community” per se, appears to have arisen in the literature, both religious and secular, in response to its decline as a sociological given. John Newbrough, for example, traces the decline of what he refers to as “the First Position” in which society was dominated by “Organic Community” and for which “collectivity was paramount and individual interests were clearly secondary.”¹ This was, he suggests, replaced by a “Second” or “Contractarian” position, promulgated by thinkers such as Thomas Hobbes and John Locke, with the primary concern of “protecting individual liberty and privacy [as] the basis for human relations in the community.”² Although the rise of such individualism has been a very specific concern in the North American literature, its impact on Australian culture has also been well documented.³

Against this background, the purpose of this chapter is to describe the nature of community as it typically exists within contemporary Australian Baptist churches.⁴ Firstly, this will involve drawing on the Australian sociological literature to portray the Australian cultural context, with a particular view to religion and individualism. Secondly, this chapter will outline the dimensions of the community psychology concept of the Psychological Sense of Community, and thirdly, employ these dimensions to explore contemporary Baptist church communities in their sociological, psychological and theological aspects. This exploration will draw on statistical and documentary sources which, though by necessity generalised, will nonetheless provide a useful basis to examine both the gains and losses of Australian Baptist churches’ acculturization to contemporary individualism.

¹ J. Newbrough, "Toward Community: A Third Position," American Journal of Community Psychology 23, no. 1 (1995): 14. Although Newbrough bases his historical use of his “First Position” on the work of Frank Kirkpatrick, Kirkpatrick’s emphasis in speaking of an organic model of community is predominantly as a philosophical and sociological one, as appears in the work of G.W.F. Hegel, Karl Marx and Ferdinand Tönnies. Their work, for Kirkpatrick was primarily a response to the atomistic/contractarian position of Hobbes and Locke, but also, particularly in the case of Tönnies, reflected a lamentation for “the destruction of tradition and ‘natural’ bonds which had held persons together in the period before the rise of liberal, rational, social philosophy.” Frank G. Kirkpatrick, Community: A Trinity of Models (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2008), 73. For Australian commentary, see Section 2.1.
⁴ There are, of course, almost as many types of Australian Baptist churches as there are Australian Baptist churches. Nevertheless, there is an established tradition of utilising generalisations in order to accomplish a reasonable level of analysis. Such practice is exemplified in the work of Australian researchers such as Philip Hughes, to whose works I will make reference in this chapter.
and highlight a set of issues regarding community to which the following chapters of this thesis will respond.

2.1. Individualism and Religion in Contemporary Australia

2.1.1 Australian Individualism

The European settlement of Australia in the late eighteenth century occurred during the period in which the individualism of social philosophers such as Hobbes and Locke was being borne out in the American War of Independence (1775-1782) and the French Revolution (1789-1799). The Enlightenment was “the quest for systems of thought which might provide a secure basis for political and social order in an age when sectarian conflict had made the traditional religious sanctions dangerously divisive.” Under the influence of the Enlightenment, such sanctions were to be replaced by principles such as “the appeal to reason, the language of rights, and a growing insistence on toleration.”

Frank Kirkpatrick describes Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679) as the social philosopher “who did more than any other to develop this notion of the atomistic, self-directing individual.” For Hobbes, and Locke (1632-1704) following in his footsteps, the coming together of “natural” individual human persons, with their equal rights to property, must inevitably end in conflict. According to this view, human society is a necessary evil, an artificial construction into which individuals enter in order to preserve their individual interest (particularly property) under the sanction of force. Such societies are formed through “a rational free act,” by which “persons consent to or contract for a community of common protection with others,” but the perceived rights of the individual, rather than the commonwealth of the community, are viewed as the imperatives of human behaviour. For Ruth Grant, despite the academic retreat from treatment of John Locke as an advocate of social atomism, it is still, nevertheless, acknowledged that he did indeed intend to promote a more individualistic approach to life, one which was “more suspicious of authority, less likely to take anything on faith”:

Locke’s individualism is to be found in his assertion of individual natural rights and in his encouragement of independent individual thought. His object in both cases is to combat authoritarianism, to combat the subjection of any man to the will of another politically or intellectually, and particularly where intellectual oppression is a

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6 Kirkpatrick, *Community*, 17.
tool of political oppression. Locke means to make men independent judges of the truth and watchful guardians of their rights.⁹

The response to the Enlightenment within British society took a more contained and moderate form than its revolutionary counterparts overseas, leading to the reform and renewal of institutions, rather than their wholesale overthrow.¹⁰ Locke’s work was, nevertheless, taken for granted as the basis of British claims on Australian land as terra nullius, and as explaining the interconnection between the land claimed as property and political power.¹¹ Even more central, however, to the way in which Australian settlement proceeded was the Enlightenment commitment to the possibility of improvement and progress in the areas of agriculture, education and society: “progress meant a willingness to accept change for future advantage and a confidence that the application of reason would ultimately mean a better world.”¹² With regard to the reform of human nature, in which the Australian penal colonies were vitally interested, such values indicated that human beings, if only they were exposed to the correct influences and disciplines, might be thoroughly rehabilitated, resulting in “the greatest happiness of the greatest number.”¹³

Although not without its major issues, the system of transportation did indeed appear to support a certain measure of such optimism,¹⁴ and the settlement of Australia largely proceeded on the basis of “a society rationally conceived which could be more readily moulded into a modernising and improving form than its imperial forebear.”¹⁵

The impact of Enlightenment individualism on Australia has entailed “a way of thinking about the world that starts with the individual and focuses primarily on the individual’s needs and desires.”¹⁶ In the twenty-first century, on the one hand, Australian individualism possesses neither the enthusiasm nor the vehemence associated with individual liberty in the U.S.A., and has not become an overly significant part of Australia’s political discourse. Whilst the American mythic hero is one “who must leave society, alone or with one or a few others, in order to realize the moral good in the wilderness, at sea, or on the margins of settled society,”¹⁷ the putative Australian equivalent, the ANZAC soldier, is defined by

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¹⁰ Gascoigne, The Enlightenment, 7.
¹¹ Gascoigne, The Enlightenment, 8.
¹² Gascoigne, The Enlightenment, 10.
¹³ Gascoigne, The Enlightenment, 124.
¹⁴ Gascoigne, The Enlightenment, 145, 146.
¹⁵ Gascoigne, The Enlightenment, 169.
¹⁶ Philip J. Hughes, Building Stronger Communities (Sydney: University of New South Wales Press, 2007), 31.
mateship, egalitarianism, and sacrifice for the sake of the wider community. A similar distinction is borne out by the contrasting gun control laws of the two nations. In the U.S.A., the National Rifle Association has fought with considerable success for the continued freedom to bear arms on the basis of individual rights, whereas, in Australia, such rights were significantly curtailed in the wake of the Port Arthur Massacre, in the cause of community safety.

Yet, on the other hand, Gary Bouma suggests that individualism of the type promoted by Hobbes and Locke has long been at work in the Australian psyche, having been imported with the first European convicts and their keepers who arrived as individuals, largely without family or social network, throughout the formative years of the Australian colonies in the late eighteenth and into the nineteenth century. In this vein, and alongside the community focused aspects of the ANZAC legend, Australian identity has also been shaped by the individualism of the convicts and bushrangers who defied their oppressors and rebelled in the face of authoritarian control, and by the independent larrkinism of the ANZACs themselves. Fresh impetus was added to Australian individualism in the 1960s by a culture awash with choices about everything from employment to gender roles, and birth control to religion. Multiculturalism and overseas travel raised awareness that there were many possible approaches to life and spirituality, the advent of television brought “plurality into people’s living rooms,” and parents and educators treated their (fewer) children as individuals who had the right to choose, and should learn to think critically about all that went on around them.

The results of such child-rearing practices are still coming to light in the Millennial generations (those born after 1982), and at this stage the conclusions concerning their attitudes and behaviour around the tension between individualism and community are mixed. On the one hand, Hugh Mackay suggests that these generations are strongly

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22 Tranter and Donoghue, "Colonial and Post-Colonial Aspects of Australian Identity," 170. As Tranter and Donoghue point out, these generalizations are subject to many caveats, yet they still appear to hold some power in forming an Australian sense of identity.
“tribal,” keeping “closely and almost continuously in touch with each other, sharing information of every imaginable kind.” Social research also indicates that young people, rather than being completely selfish as they are often accused of being, are still concerned to help others, to balance their own rights with the needs of others, and for social justice. On the other hand, decisions concerning such issues are made from the basis of the individual; choosing their own sense of purpose, how to live this out, making moral choices on the basis of what makes them happy or might help them get ahead, and acting as an individual rather than as part of an organisation.

This last issue points to the deinstitutionalisation which is a significant concomitant to such Australian individualism. Philip Hughes traces the way in which bureaucratic systems, represented by social institutions, came to be seen to oppress the individual and “place restrictions on the individual quest for human fulfilment.” Increasingly, since the 1960s, Australians have no longer chosen to primarily identify themselves through their institutional roles, but rather have preferred informal, relationally based ways to get things done. This, in turn, has been understood as related to a decline in social capital, marked by a loss of the trust in other individuals and organisations which undergirds the reciprocity necessary for community. Bouma suggests that Millennials may be rebuilding social capital in alternative, less formalised ways, which are yet to be fully explored and documented, but, as will become clear throughout the rest of this chapter, deinstitutionalisation poses significant questions concerning the shape of Baptist church communities.

All in all, whilst Australian individualism may be of a less militant type than that expressed in North American culture, it is nevertheless deeply ingrained and pervasive.

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27 Hughes, *Putting Life Together*, 56, 105, 194.
29 Hughes, "A Maze or a System: Changes in the Worldview of Australian People."
2.1.2 Australian Religion and Individualism

Such secular individualism, some would suggest, finds its roots in a Protestant religious individualism: “To be saved, the individual had to be distinct, separate, and responsible.” Yet it also appears that, having passed into broader Western society, individualism has returned to impact the religious institutions of such societies, including those of Australia. Although there was an early desire for Church and State to work hand in hand to promote temperance and good order, the Enlightenment values of voluntarism and separation of church and state were adopted in the midst of growing religious pluralism, and the scene was set for the development of a distinctively Australian blend of religion and individualism.

As Bouma notes, “while Australian religion and spirituality is largely an amalgam of imported streams and strands, these are constructed and reproduced in distinctively Australian ways.” Contemporary Australian religion is characterised, for example, by norms of relatively subdued, “laid back” forms of expression, and low expectations regarding the frequency with which Australians might participate in religious activities. Whilst previous generations attended church regularly because of a perceived duty to do so, most contemporary Australians are likely to regulate the frequency of their attendance around the degree to which “they find it enjoyable and personally satisfying,” and to choose which church to attend, not according to loyalty to a denomination or local church, but by how they feel about the experience and “what they get out of it,” “dropping in” when it suits, without formal commitment. Approaches to “making sense of life,” are no longer just inherited as part of ethnic or cultural identity, but rather are adopted by personal choice. Such changes in the motivation for church attendance have led, unsurprisingly, to a change in the nature of the churches which are attended, from local community-based churches of around 200 people to three main forms of congregation; mega-churches (mainly evangelical/Pentecostal), smaller, dwindling local churches, and small informal “house church” type gatherings. Interestingly, and in apparent contradiction to the norms outlined above, the relatively “high demand” denominations, such as Pentecostals and

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34 Gascoigne, The Enlightenment, 20, 33.
35 Bouma, Australian Soul, 31.
36 Bouma, Australian Soul, 34, 35.
37 Hughes, "A Maze or a System: Changes in the Worldview of Australian People."
38 Kaldor, Hughes, and Black, Spirit Matters, 2.
39 Bouma, Australian Soul, 99.
Baptists, are the churches which, in contrast to most other “mainstream” denominations, are maintaining or growing their attendance figures.40

Australian religious organisations have suffered the same loss of credibility and support as other formal institutions, with younger generations being less willing to participate in formal, structured ways of getting tasks done, and having a tendency to “develop loosely structured ad hoc groups which will gather only as long as they are needed to achieve the specific purpose of the group.”41 The credibility of religious organisations in Australia has also been specifically undermined by such issues as “the stolen generations,” and their handling of sexual abuse.42 Bouma suggests, however, that whilst this has undoubtedly caused some Australians to turn their backs on organised religion and to view it with suspicion, personal forms of spirituality have continued to gain ground, with many Australians now preferring to identify themselves individually as “spiritual,” rather than “religious.”43

Such personal experience is also regarded as a more acceptable basis for conversation regarding religion than sectarian dogma, and this also reflects “a cultural macro-trend from the rational to the experiential and emotional as the dominant forms of authority.”44 Whilst the other traditional sources of authority within Christian circles (Scripture, tradition and reason) continue to have varying degrees of influence on religious practice, Bouma identifies that the emphasis has shifted away from rationality toward experience.45 In Christian worship this has meant a movement away from those acts which focus on orthodoxy (e.g. singing theologically informed hymns, exegetical preaching) to a more “open participative, experiential religion,” which encourages orthopassy (correct feelings), or at least an honest expression of emotion.46 The expectation, expressed in song and prayer, is of a direct, personal encounter with God, which, in some instances, is portrayed as either psychologically or financially beneficial to the individual.47 In this sense, Bouma’s suggestion that worship is “participative” may be accurate, but the decline in use of more

41 Hughes, “A Maze or a System: Changes in the Worldview of Australian People.”
42 Bouma, Australian Soul, 20.
43 Bouma, Australian Soul, 20. Kaldor et al. attempt to define what might be meant by “spirituality” in an Australian context. It may include, but not be confined to “religion,” and it may be transcendent or immanent. It is generally thought to relate more to the subjective and personal than to the institutional. Kaldor, Hughes, and Black, Spirit Matters, 34, 35. For Andrew Singleton it is “any enduring experience or awareness of something greater than the self,” Andrew Singleton, “Religion and Spirituality,” in Public Sociology: An Introduction to Australian Society, ed. John Germov and Marilyn Poole (Crows Nest, NSW: Allen & Unwin, 2011), 294.
44 Bouma, Australian Soul, 46, 86.
45 Bouma, Australian Soul, 86.
46 Bouma, Australian Soul, 92, 93.
47 Kaldor, Hughes, and Black, Spirit Matters, 65.
formal and liturgical forms of worship would also appear to have precluded some other forms of participation.

As one might expect, such reliance on personal experience also buys into the long-standing Australian dislike of authoritarian leadership. Respect for leadership is not based on position but on individual performance and character, and there is little sense of social hierarchy either in relation to religious “professionals” or God, with far more value being placed on relational currency such as intimacy and honesty. There are low expectations as to how conduct will be shaped by religious convictions, and a growing proportion of Australians identifying themselves as Christian believe that attending church is unnecessary to being a “good” Christian. Along these same lines, Kaldor, Hughes and Black report that the largest proportion of those identifying themselves as Christian were “reflectively” so (thinking through issues for themselves), as opposed to “uncritically” so. Australians also react very negatively to any sense of religious people acting like “God’s police,” and intolerance is largely regarded as intolerable, perhaps with echoes of early colonial times when clergy were seen as part of the oppressive establishment, and religion was viewed by that establishment as a means to improve moral standards. “Giving people a fair go,” and “live and let live” are, instead, preferred modes of relating to others around religious issues.

The Australian Millennial generations continue to both reflect many of these trends and to have developed some ways of responding to religious organisations which are very particularly their own. As Hughes notes, census data can be unreliable in eliciting young people’s own ideas about issues such as religion because forms are often completed by parents. Whilst, for example, the 2001 census indicated that young people (aged 13 to 24 years) had similar patterns to their parents of around 65 per cent having a religious affiliation, direct questioning of young Australians indicated that only around 56 per cent described themselves as identifying with a religion. Many, as has been suggested above, understand themselves to be free to make choices concerning their religious orientation,

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49 Hughes, "A Maze or a System: Changes in the Worldview of Australian People."
50 Bouma, *Australian Soul*, 34; Hughes, "A Maze or a System: Changes in the Worldview of Australian People."
51 Kaldor, Hughes, and Black, *Spirit Matters*, 24. The “reflectively” Christian disagreed with the statement, “I think we should just believe and not question our beliefs,” whilst the “uncritically” Christian agreed with it.
52 Bouma, *Australian Soul*, 40, 47.
53 Bouma, *Australian Soul*, 46, 47.
and to use religious doctrines to construct their own views.\textsuperscript{56} Even those who do choose to become involved with a religious organisation do not expect to “automatically accept its forms of authority or packaging of beliefs,” but “rather, they develop their own belief systems based on what they feel is right and appropriate for themselves.”\textsuperscript{57} Perhaps most strikingly, as Hugh Mackay reports, the meaning of life for most young Australians is found in relationships rather than formal religion.\textsuperscript{58}

In summary, current Australian religious norms tends to be low-key rather than showy, informal and casual rather than formal and committed, egalitarian and self-directed rather than accepting of authority, and experiential rather than rational. Such trends, with the exception of a positive response to some “high demand” organisations, appear to be continuing amongst Australia’s young people. Whilst there is ongoing interest in “spiritual things,” these are largely viewed as individual and private rather than communal and public matters.\textsuperscript{59}

2.2. Community and the Psychological Sense of It

Having described something of the nature of Australian individualism and its impact on Australian religion in general, our focus now turns to issues of community, and the exploration of a framework which will support the following, more focused, discussion of Australian Baptist church communities.

The term “community” indicates that there are relationships between a group of people, usually in a certain locale, that go beyond casual acknowledgment. These relationships are closer than casual relationships because the group shares some common goals, values, and, perhaps a way of life that reinforce each other, creates positive feelings, and results in a degree of mutual commitment and responsibility.\textsuperscript{60}

Such a broad definition is perhaps understandable given that early sociological work on the subject concluded that there were ninety-four possible definitions of community.\textsuperscript{61} It has also been necessary to clarify, as the definition hints, the difference between “the community” which highlights geographical location, and “community” which focuses on social interactions.\textsuperscript{62} Although there have been considerable efforts to renew a sense of

\textsuperscript{56} Hughes “The Nature of Spirituality “: 366.
\textsuperscript{57} Kaldor, Hughes, and Black, Spirit Matters, 60.
\textsuperscript{58} Mackay, Advance Australia ... Where?, 282.
\textsuperscript{59} Bouma, Australian Soul, 99.
\textsuperscript{60} Bruhn, The Sociology of Community Connections, 11.
\textsuperscript{62} Bruhn, The Sociology of Community Connections, n.4, 250.
geographically located neighbourhood community, authors such as Hughes have documented the many reasons for its continued decline in the Australian context, as elsewhere in the Western world. From around the 1960s, women, who had previously spent significant amounts of time in the local neighbourhood, were now in paid employment elsewhere, car ownership meant that many activities could easily be carried out at a distance from the home, the importance of neighbourhood relationships was attenuated by the use of the telephone, and televisions both occupied people and diluted their identification with a local community. Accordingly, Chavis and Newbrough reported in 1986 that “the occurrence of community has evolved within different settings and systems other than the traditional residential locale,” and, therefore, “a community should be defined as any set of social relations that are bound together by a sense of community.”

A definition and theory of the “sense of community” to which this last quote refers, was developed by McMillan and Chavis on the basis of their comprehensive review of related research, and whilst it appears to focus on members’ experience of community rather than being a more direct measure of the phenomenon itself, it has continued to prove a useful tool for exploring issues concerning both quantitative and qualitative aspects of community. McMillan and Chavis conclude that “sense of community is a feeling that members have of belonging, a feeling that members matter to one another and to the group, and a shared faith that members’ needs will be met through their commitment to be together.” Their definition of the Psychological Sense of Community (PSOC) has four elements: membership, influence, integration and fulfilment of needs, and shared emotional connection. These, together with the instrument designed to measure them (the Sense of Community Index or SCI), have since been subject to significant scrutiny across varied contexts and countries, including Australian educational and church settings. The outcomes of such research appear to support the ongoing usefulness of

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63 See, for example, J.W. Ife, *Community Development: Community-Based Alternatives in an Age of Globalisation*, 2nd ed. (Frenchs Forest, N.S.W.: Pearson Education, 2002).
64 Hughes, “A Maze or a System: Changes in the Worldview of Australian People.”
65 Hughes, “A Maze or a System: Changes in the Worldview of Australian People.”
70 See, for example, Ron Miers and Adrian T. Fisher, “Being Church and Community: Psychological Sense of Community in a Local Parish,” in *Psychological Sense of Community: Research, Applications, and"
these four original dimensions as a means of examining the nature of community, and it is to these we now turn, firstly as they have been presented in the research literature, and secondly, in the next section (Section 2.2.3), as the basis for detailed discussion of aspects of community in Australian Baptist churches.\textsuperscript{71}

Membership\textsuperscript{72} is, according to McMillan and Chavis, “a feeling that one has invested part of oneself to become a member and therefore has a right to belong.”\textsuperscript{72} Members of a community have a sense that they are a part of the community, and that there are boundaries to such a community which provide the emotional safety within which feelings and needs can be expressed, and relational intimacy developed.\textsuperscript{73} Truthfulness and trust are vital to such disclosure.\textsuperscript{74} Such boundaries, which may be created by forms of language, symbols, style of dress or specific rituals, have both positive and negative aspects. Positively, they do indeed provide emotional safety for “insiders,” and enable a sense of inclusion, reinforcing behaviours which benefit the functioning of the community. On the other hand, this is balanced by the exclusion of others, sometimes engendering a sense of “rejection and isolation” for those who are left on the “outside.”\textsuperscript{75} Membership also includes a “sense of belonging and identification” which indicates a belief in one’s acceptance by the community, and a willingness to make a personal investment, by way of time, emotional energy and financial resources, to that community.\textsuperscript{76}

Influence, the second of the four criteria for the PSOC, has two potential directions of operation within a community: firstly, individual members are attracted by a sense of being able to influence decisions and actions taken by their community, and, secondly, there is a reciprocal influence by the community, for example, by way of behavioural norms, on its


\textsuperscript{71} Obst and White, whilst suggesting changes to the four-factor structure of the SCI nevertheless concluded that their research provided support for “retaining measures that encapsulate the four dimensions of PSOC.” Obst and White, “Revisiting the Sense of Community Index,” 691.

\textsuperscript{72} McMillan and Chavis, "Sense of Community: A Definition and Theory," 9.

\textsuperscript{73} McMillan and Chavis, "Sense of Community: A Definition and Theory," 9.


\textsuperscript{75} McMillan and Chavis, "Sense of Community: A Definition and Theory," 9.

\textsuperscript{76} McMillan and Chavis appear to use the language of “membership” and “belonging” in interchangeable ways. The discussion of this particular dimension in relation to Australian Baptist churches will therefore be supplemented by reference to Darrell Jackson’s work concerning the various discourses around membership and belonging which are relevant in this particular context. Where formal, denominational membership is discussed, it will be noted as such. Darrell Jackson, “The Discourse of ‘Belonging’ and Baptist Church Membership in Contemporary Britain: Historical, Theological and Demotic Elements of a Post-Foundational Theological Proposal” (DTh Thesis, University of Birmingham, 2009), http://etheses.bham.ac.uk/373/ (accessed 24 Jan, 2013).
members which is necessary for community cohesiveness.\textsuperscript{77} McMillan and Chavis report on several studies which indicate that these two forces can and do operate at the same time, so that community members who “acknowledge that others’ needs, values, and opinions matter to them are often the most influential group members.”\textsuperscript{78} Both types of influence (by the individual on the community and vice-versa) have both positive and negative potential outcomes. On the one hand, the individual needs some sense of influence on their community, but if this becomes over-inflated it can result in the domination of the group by that member (or an associated sub-group). On the other hand, whilst some level of community influence on the individual is necessary for a sense of identification and community cohesiveness, overly developed influence by the group on its members can become “so strong that it demands high conformity, suppressing self-expression.”\textsuperscript{79} This is where, Zygmunt Bauman suggests, the tension between the security of community and the freedom of the individual meet with “security and freedom [as] two equally precious and coveted values which could be better or worse balanced, but hardly ever fully reconciled and without friction.”\textsuperscript{80}

For McMillan and Chavis, \textit{integration and fulfilment of needs} is summed up as “reinforcement,” the motivator behind all kinds of behaviour on the part of community members, including those necessary for the maintenance of community.\textsuperscript{81} Members of the community must “get something out of” their investment in the community in order for their community focused behaviour to be maintained. These reinforcers include the status which comes from being a member of the community, and the perceived competencies of others in the community which have the potential to benefit members.\textsuperscript{82} Beyond basic survival requirements, such needs tend to be prioritised around personal values, and the degree to which such values are shared among community members will determine the extent to which a community can “organize and prioritize its need-fulfilment activities.”\textsuperscript{83} In summary, “Integration and Fulfilment of Needs, refers to the idea that common needs, goals, beliefs, and values provide the integrative force for a cohesive community that can meet both collective and individual needs.”\textsuperscript{84}

\textsuperscript{77} McMillan and Chavis, “Sense of Community: A Definition and Theory,” 11.
\textsuperscript{78} McMillan and Chavis, “Sense of Community: A Definition and Theory,” 11.
\textsuperscript{81} McMillan and Chavis, “Sense of Community: A Definition and Theory,” 12.
\textsuperscript{82} McMillan and Chavis, “Sense of Community: A Definition and Theory,” 13.
\textsuperscript{84} Obst and White, “Revisiting the Sense of Community Index,” 692.
Finally, *shared emotional connection* is based upon a history which is shared, or at least identified with, amongst the community. For Dockecki, Newbrough and O’Gorman, such history (along with traditions, current functioning, goals and aspirations of the community) is carried by the narratives which are shared among community members. Connection is also supported by both the quantity and quality of the interactions between community members (the more frequent and positive the interactions, the greater the sense of connection), and by the degree to which members are prepared to risk themselves and their resources for other members and the community as a whole. To promote a sense of community, events and happenings, both positive and negative, which are shared by the community, must be invested with significance, and both issues and tasks brought to some resolution. Beyond these aspects, McMillan and Chavis point to a “spiritual bond” which, for religious communities, may be a primary purpose rather than a side-effect of emotional connection.

### 2.3. Contemporary Australian Baptist Communities in Relation to the Psychological Sense of Community

For each of the dimensions of the PSOC, there are indications of ways in which Australian Baptist church communities appear to function well, particularly in comparison with some other denominations, and ways in which they face challenges. In addition, what may be seen as a gain in terms of one dimension of the PSOC may stand in tension with other aspects of a sense of community. These gains, challenges and tensions are the subject of this exploration.

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90 In general terms, those identifying as Baptist have increased or at least maintained their presence as a proportion of the Australian population in the past thirty years. This was at a high of 2.13% in the 1911 census and fell to a low of 1.26 in 1986. Since then it has varied between 1.60% (2006), and 1.66% (1991 and 1996). In 2011 it stood at 1.64 %. Hughes, Fraser and Reid also note, however, that this maintenance has been significantly supported by the inclusion of Baptist immigrants, particularly from Myanmar and Thailand: in summary, “a total of 28 per cent of those who identified themselves as Baptist in the 2011 Census were born overseas, and another 17 per cent had one or both parents born overseas.” Philip J. Hughes, Margaret Fraser, and Stephen Reid, *Australia's Religious Communities: Facts and Figures from the Australian Census and Other Sources* (Nunawading, VIC: Christian Research Association, 2012), 22, 23.
2.3.1 A Sense of Membership

To begin on a positive note, in terms of a sense of membership based on the personal investment of involvement in church activities, Australian Baptist churches do comparatively well. Analysis by Hughes, Fraser and Reid, suggests that 63 per cent of those identifying as Baptist indicate that they are involved at least on a monthly basis, compared with an average of all those identifying as Christian of 24 per cent. Involvement in mid-week groups (including social groups) may be as high as 71 per cent, with “just over half (54%) of all Baptist attenders regularly attend[ing] a small group, prayer meeting, discussion group or Bible study group.” Such relatively high attendance and involvement indicates some capacity within such churches to counteract the Australian norm towards low levels of involvement, and various factors may account for this. It would appear, for example, that denominations such as the Baptists which have never been part of the Australian establishment (in its broader, rather than ecclesiastic, sense) have fewer nominal members who identify with the denomination on the basis of their cultural or family heritage, and are therefore less likely to attend regularly. In addition, as Hughes and Cronshaw explain, “Baptists make an individual, adult commitment to their faith, and either maintain their involvement or drop out of the Baptist community, often relinquishing their sense of identity with the Baptists.” Membership of a Baptist church community is, therefore, largely understood to be on the basis of personal and current choice, and identifying as Baptist is more likely to indicate an active involvement with a church in accordance with the “strong expectations” within Baptist church communities of regular church attendance and involvement in other church-related groups.

Beyond this superficial analysis of those who identify as “Baptist,” the situation around the PSOC dimension of membership in Australian Baptist churches becomes far more complex. In outlining the PSOC, McMillan and Chavis do not clearly distinguish between the concepts of membership and belonging, but the point is of particular interest for

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91 It is noted that the application of the term “church” to a local congregation is a particularly Baptist phenomenon. See further discussion in Chapter 3.3.
92 Denominations which are doing less well include Roman Catholics (18%), Anglicans (6%), Presbyterians and Reformed (20%), and those identifying with the Uniting Church (19%). Those doing better include Seventh Day Adventists (86%), and Pentecostals (87%). Hughes, Fraser, and Reid, Australia's Religious Communities, 8, Table 3.
93 The pattern for Baptist churches differs from that of other denominations in that social groups tend to be less popular than other types of groups. Philip J. Hughes and Darren Cronshaw, Baptists in Australia: A Church with a Heritage and a Future (Nunawading, VIC: Christian Research Association, 2013), 90.
94 Peter Kaldor, John Bellamy, and Ruth Powell, Build My Church: Trends and Possibilities for Australian Churches, National Church Life Survey (Adelaide: Openbook, 1999), 16.
95 Hughes and Cronshaw, Baptists in Australia, 89.
96 Hughes and Cronshaw, Baptists in Australia, 89.
Australian Baptist churches considering that by 2011 only 37 per cent of those attending Australian Baptist churches on the Sunday of the National Church Life Survey were formally members of those churches.\(^{97}\) The issues concerning formal membership are summarised in the Baptist Union of Victoria document entitled “Re-Imagining Baptist Church Membership.”\(^{98}\) They include membership being considered irrelevant; those coming from other church backgrounds being accustomed to “different rules”; formal members being outnumbered by non-members; the higher levels of commitment of some non-members over those of members; and the realities of “organic church life” being incompatible with denominational/constitutional forms of membership.\(^{99}\) Darrell Jackson provides a comprehensive exploration of the issues at work for Baptists concerning membership and belonging, and, although his research was conducted in Great Britain, the issues in that context appear very similar to those in the Australian situation.\(^{100}\) He identifies that there are three discourses around belonging/membership which require attention: “A historical-theological source, within which a discourse of covenant has become more dominant in recent years; a constitutional source within which the discourse of denomination is predominant; [and] a demotic source, within which the discourse of relationality is predominant.”\(^{101}\)

The scriptural-historical-theological discourse of covenant appears to have been a relatively minor factor in membership and a sense of belonging for contemporary Australian Baptist churches in recent history.\(^{102}\) The local church constitution templates of New South Wales (2008) and Victoria (2010),\(^ {103}\) make no reference to the concept, whilst the Queensland “Guidelines for Belief and Practice” make mention of the need for a “covenant statement” in the context of the “autonomy and accountability among

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\(^{97}\) Hughes and Cronshaw, Baptists in Australia, 90.


\(^{99}\) Baptist Union of Victoria, ”Reimagining Church Membership,” 1.

\(^{100}\) Most strikingly and with relevance to this section, Baptist churches in Great Britain are experiencing a very similar decline in formal membership whilst seeing increasing attendance, particularly by those who have “switched in” from other denominations. The prior affiliation of these “switchers in” may vary between the two contexts, but at this broad level, the issues raised are the same. Jackson, “The Discourse of Belonging ”, 8.

\(^{101}\) Jackson, ”The Discourse of Belonging “, 14, emphases in original.

\(^{102}\) In Practical Theology terms, this historical-theological source includes both Scripture as the normative Christian text and historical theology. See Chapter 1. For the sake of clarity, future references will refer to it as a scriptural-historical-theological source.

Queensland Baptists.\textsuperscript{104} The Baptist Union of Victoria has, more recently, begun to promote the concept of covenant membership within their church communities, but it remains unclear at this stage how widely this practice has been taken up.\textsuperscript{105} The recent \textit{Church Membership Report}, produced by representatives of Australian Baptist Ministries and the Uniting Church in Australia, suggests that the concept and practice of church covenant has had minimal impact in Australia, with “only a minority of Australian Baptist churches [having] adopted this practice.”\textsuperscript{106} Where other scriptural references are used to describe the church community, these are often limited to disembedded notions of “family” and “body of Christ” (see further comments below).

Issues concerning Jackson’s second category of discourse around denomination and constitution appear to be thoroughly intertwined with the Australian rejection of institutional forms of sociality. In these terms “a certain tension, even contradiction, exists across the corpus of the [local church constitutional] documents when considering the function of a church member as a voter in contrast with their status as a believing member of the body of Christ”:\textsuperscript{107} as the Australian \textit{Church Membership Report} concludes, “church membership has become increasingly irrelevant and a majority of active church attendees are in no formal relationship with their local church community.”\textsuperscript{108} The decline in the significance of denominational structures which provide the basis for such membership is further demonstrated by the apparent ease with which evangelical Christians switch to churches other than those of their previous denominational affiliation. A general evangelical approach in the local church and attractive “family programs and spiritual


\textsuperscript{105} Baptist Union of Victoria, "Covenant Membership." This website includes general information, documents concerning the historical and theological aspects of covenant membership, and samples of such covenants.

\textsuperscript{106} Representatives of ABM & UCA, \textit{Church Membership: Dialogue Report} (Sydney, Australia: UCA National Assembly, 2012), 7. This finding is supported by Jackson who traced the various ways in which professional British Baptist theologians have sought to promote the use of the scriptural and theological concept of covenant. He concludes that, even with considerable effort at promoting the ideas and practices associated with covenant membership, including through denominationally distributed literature, they have had little impact against the force of the demotic discourse at either denominational or local church levels. Jackson, “The Discourse of 'Belonging'”, 68-91. Jackson's analysis contrasts with the assessment of Michael Parsons for whom the contents of \textit{Gathering for Worship}, suggest “that Baptists, generally, have been and continue to be strident in maintaining a covenant idea of church membership and commitment.” Michael Parsons, "Church as (Covenant) Community - Then and Now," in \textit{Beyond 400: Exploring Baptist Futures}, ed. David J. Cohen and Michael Parsons (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2011), 211. I would suggest that Jackson, in researching what is actually happening at the local church level, provides the more accurate picture of the situation.

\textsuperscript{107} Jackson, "The Discourse of 'Belonging' ", 107.

\textsuperscript{108} Representatives of ABM & UCA, \textit{Church Membership}, 7, 8.
values” therefore appear to be sufficient grounds for attendance, and Baptist churches have been making small but consistent net gains from church attendees switching between denominations. Since, however, a significant proportion of these “switchers in” have been baptised as infants in other denominations, and apparently remain unpersuaded of the necessity of undergoing believer baptism, they are thereby excluded from formal membership in most Baptist churches. Disinclination to become involved in the “business” and a rejection of the institutional structures of the local church plays alongside such a post-denominational approach, particularly amongst the young, and it is difficult to discern whether this is the cause or the result (or perhaps both) of the diminishing practice of congregational governance, particularly in larger Baptist churches.

Neither the scriptural-historical-theological nor the institutional-denominational-constitutional forms of discourse thus appear, at present, to provide a solid grounding for a sense of belonging to Australian Baptist church communities. Rather, this role seems to devolve almost entirely to the third of Jackson’s forms of discourse, the demotic discourse of relationality. This is marked by an emphasis on the experience of personal authenticity and trust rather than focusing on correct belief, behaviour or formal, constitutional membership as the basis of fellowship. Mid-week groups, for example, which formerly emphasised formal Bible study and/or intercessory prayer for church and mission concerns, are often now “Life” or “Home” groups which, whilst still including Bible study and prayer, predominantly relate these to personal experience and focus on providing support – emotional, practical and spiritual – for their participants. Such forms of relationality tend, however, to focus on the needs of the individual and to be generally destructured, as is demonstrated by the much-used language of “family.” This language

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110 Kaldor, Bellamy, and Powell, *Build My Church*, 41.
111 Parker, Ball, and Nickerson, *Pressing On*, 146.
112 The shift away from traditional Baptist congregational governance is represented by Brian Winslade, *A New Kind of Baptist Church: Reframing Congregational Government for the 21st Century* (Macquarie Park, NSW: Morling Press, 2010). His position is not, however, uncontested. See, for example, the range of views presented in Graeme Chatfield, ed. *Leadership and Baptist Church Governance* (Eastwood, NSW: Morling Press, 2005). The conduct of meetings is discussed further in the next section (2.3.2) on the sense of influence.
114 The “Innisfail Baptist Family” (no “Church”) provides an interesting example of this, complete with the conflation of church family and nuclear family interests: “The Innisfail Baptist Family is part of the Queensland Baptist Family of Churches...” and they are “a Family-Friendly ‘middle of the road’ group of people.” "Innisfail Baptist Family," http://www.innisfail-baptist-family.com/bfc_who.html (accessed 24 Jan, 2013). Jackson traces a set of consequences of destructured family discourse which include the loss of
is used to encompass relationality, including mutual responsibility and accountability, but such relationality is without formal structure, and appears to only hold as long as the individual’s needs are met: the outcome is that “the discourse of the family serves the purpose of preparing adherents and members for a form of belonging that justifies the giving of priority to individual comfort and security.”

Jackson proposes that the language of the church community as “the body of Christ” serves to counter such trends because, in such terms, “relationality becomes more ontological and the mutuality of relationship is deepened through the reciprocal action and reaction of obligation and service.” But, Australian Baptist churches appear able to take this language and give it, also, an individualistic slant. The situation is exemplified by Dubbo Baptist Church, which states as one of its core values, “We value FUNCTIONING AS THE BODY OF CHRIST. We value highly the worth of every individual and the diversity of their gifts.” In evangelical terms, the individual relationship of the believer to Christ is thus prioritised, and diversity rather than any form of essential unity or mutuality is emphasised. It would appear, therefore, that whilst the narratival images around family and body of Christ which are in use in Australian Baptist churches make certain points and employ scriptural allusions, both are also deeply impacted by the pervasive individualism of Australian evangelical culture, and, in Jackson’s terms, tend to be used in a fashion which is largely “disembedded” from their scriptural context.

This decline in the discourses of Scripture-history-theology and institution-denomination-constitution, and the reliance on destructured relationality, appears to have resulted in a deep ambivalence in Australian Baptist churches concerning their boundaries. On the one hand, formal membership is the point at which a boundary is raised for most Australian Baptist church communities, with formal membership being closed to those who have not place for “formal investiture to a position of authority,” informal decision-making, lack of any “formal means of applying censure for deviant behaviour,” that “relationality is purely functional and according to need,” that the influence of anyone from beyond the local church “family” is discounted, and texts become secondary to the experience of family relationality. Jackson, “The Discourse of 'Belonging' ”, 152-154.

Jackson, “The Discourse of 'Belonging' ”, 153, 154. In this sense, although being “family” might appear to suggest a certain level of commitment, there is a transient nature to such relationships. Zygmunt Bauman suggests that the language of “network” is particularly enlightening in this regard. Whereas other terms such as “relations,” “kinships” and “partnerships,” all suggest a certain stability, “in a network, connecting and disconnecting are equally legitimate choices... In a network, connections are entered on demand, and can be broken at will. An ‘undesirable, yet unbreakable’ relationship is the very possibility that makes ‘relating’ as treacherous as it feels.” It is this sense of transience which, Jackson’s work implies, Baptist church members perhaps apply, even whilst using the language of “family.” Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Love: On the Frailty of Human Bonds* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2003), xii.


undergone believer baptism.\textsuperscript{119} In this way, the majority of Australian Baptist churches appear, like their counterparts in Britain, to be attempting to maintain some semblance of adherence to institutional-denominational-constitutional structures. On the other hand, and at the same time, they are deploying a whole range of language and practices which reduces distinctions between formal members and other attendees.\textsuperscript{120} These forms of distinction-reduction appear equally familiar in the Australian context. They sit alongside the other driving forces for most Australian Baptist churches, which include a desire to be both deeply Australian,\textsuperscript{121} and evangelistic\textsuperscript{122} in their desire to minimise their boundaries and to be as inclusive as possible. This is exemplified by the use of contemporary music in worship, the lack of formality in dress and presentation, the move away from religious styles of architecture and efforts to reduce the use of religious (particularly denominational) jargon.\textsuperscript{123} Such low boundaries are epitomised by the almost universal practice of open communion, with the Lord’s Supper open to any Christian believer, “inviting ‘everyone who loves and wants to serve the Lord’ to share in the symbolic meal.”\textsuperscript{124} In terms of the PSOC description of membership (Section 8.2.2), it seems that inclusivity and destructured relationality are favoured over the need to maintain the boundaries which enable other forms of sociality (i.e., the scriptural-historical-theological and the institutional-denominational-constitutional-) to function.

For Australian Baptist church communities, in summary, the discourse of membership/belonging tends to minimise scriptural-historical-theological and institutional-denominational-constitutional issues, and is almost entirely reliant upon destructured relationality. In maintaining some semblance of the constitutional forms of membership, and yet at the same time engaging in a whole range of language and practices which attempts to reduce distinctions (both with other attendees, and those from the “outside”),

\textsuperscript{119} Representatives of ABM & UCA, \textit{Church Membership}. 8. A minority of churches practice some form of "open membership" which allows either full or associate membership to “a person who has been baptised according to the rites of another Christian church,” and who is able to give a “public profession of their faith in and commitment to Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour.” Baptist Union of Victoria, “Sample Church Constitution.” See also the range of options in David Brown, "Baptism and Church Membership: A Resource to Help Local Baptist Churches Work through the Issue," NSW Baptists, http://admin.baptistnsw.asn.au/baptism-and-church-membersh.pdf (accessed 23 Nov, 2011).

\textsuperscript{120} In Jackson’s research these included comments by both members and non-members valuing spiritual status over formal membership; recognising that some non-members lived more appropriately and were more devoted than non-members; describing entering into formal membership as a formality (“signing on the dotted line”); including non-members with members in decision-making processes; and putting failure to join in formal membership down to a desire to avoid involvement in decision-making. Jackson, “The Discourse of ‘Belonging’ ”, 140-142.

\textsuperscript{121} That is, in accord with the norms outlined in Section 2.1 above.

\textsuperscript{122} That is, seeking to maximise the opportunity for “outsiders” to come to faith.

\textsuperscript{123} Hughes and Cronshaw, \textit{Baptists in Australia}, 82.

\textsuperscript{124} Hughes and Cronshaw, \textit{Baptists in Australia}, 39.
such communities also display a deep ambivalence regarding their boundaries, with the emphasis, for the most part, falling on openness.

2.3.2 A Sense of Influence

As with the sense of community membership, the sense of influence has multiple aspects which, depending on the ways in which they are employed, have the potential to both support and undermine the overall sense of community. Here, firstly, we turn our attention to the ways in which those involved in Australian Baptist churches might have their sense of community impacted by their capacity, or the lack thereof, to influence their church community.

In those Baptist churches which continue to practice a traditional form of congregational church governance, the influence of formal members is given a very particular form and framework. According to Stan Nickerson, “Church members and the church as a body are competent to hear the voice of Christ, as it were, directly. They can have ‘the mind of Christ’ (1 Corinthians 2:16) and are responsible to him. Consequently it is appropriate that every member be given a voice in the church’s decision-making process.” The Victorian sample constitution lists the following as functions of members’ meetings: the approval of new members (3.2), approval of changes to the membership roll (3.6) including for disciplinary reasons (3.6.4), the calling or removal of a pastor (4.2.3), election of members to the “leadership team” (4.3.1), approval of financial reports (5.9), approval of reports by the pastor/leadership team and other church groups (5.11/12), appointment of member delegates to Union Assembly meetings, transactions affecting church land or buildings (5.13), adoption of policies (7) and any alterations to the constitution (8). Ordinary meetings are to be held three times per annum (5.1), in addition to the AGM.

Such a listing provides a sense of the very comprehensive nature of the influence which has been available to members on their Baptist church community, but there do appear to be changes underway. It seems probable that these are as a result of two interrelated issues. Firstly, as has already been indicated, more than half of those who attend Australian Baptist churches are unable to take part in such members’ meetings as a result of their lack of official membership. Whilst some are precluded from membership on the basis of their not having undergone believer baptism, a proportion of these non-members

126 Baptist Union of Victoria, "Sample Church Constitution."
127 Hughes and Cronshaw, Baptists in Australia, 90.
are so by choice, preferring to refrain from engaging with the “business” or institutional aspects of church activity. Secondly, a further factor in the reduction of this form of influence is that some Australian Baptist churches are moving away from traditional governance structures. In a model not dissimilar to that described by Brian Winslade in *A New Kind of Baptist Church*, for example, the constitution of Gateway Baptist Church (a regional church in Brisbane, Queensland) allows for three types of meeting, which are now an annual general meeting, special meetings and forums. Few if any of the latter two types are held, and the business of the AGM is restricted to receiving reports, election of the Board of Elders and Senior Pastor, property dealings and changes to the constitution. All other functions are carried out by the Board of Elders, “Resource Groups” which report to the Board, and the Staff Ministry Team.

If, then, institutional forms of influence of church community members on those communities are being diminished, has there been a concomitant loss of sense of community? The answer appears to be both no and yes.

Firstly, it would appear likely that disenfranchisement is only a significant issue when the decisions being made are perceived to be of importance to community members. Sociological trends indicate that decisions which are viewed as being of “only” institutional or “academic” (i.e., theological) significance, rather than being personally relevant, are regarded as of minimal importance. In this case, preclusion from involvement in them seems unlikely to impact upon a sense of community. From this perspective, many of those attending Australian Baptist churches appear satisfied (if not relieved) to delegate such tasks to others without this reducing their sense of community. Additionally, it seems likely that, given the shift to more open styles of leadership, influence might increasingly be expressed on an informal, relational basis. Those who are motivated to influence their church communities, about what they regard as important decisions, will now find that some of those in positions of leadership are increasingly exercising that

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130 For Martin Sutherland, commenting on the a similar situation in New Zealand, “the corporate leadership model is increasingly portrayed as the way forward, with members reduced to a role as in a company annual meeting – tasked only with electing a board and receiving reports.”
131 I am not presupposing that the equation of institutional/theological = unimportant is necessarily correct, but just that this is the current perception.
132 Jackson’s interviews provide examples of the way in which inclusion in formal decision-making is downplayed. Jackson, "The Discourse of ‘Belonging’", 142.
133 Winslade also suggests that participation in decision-making can be supplemented by “visitation by pastors/leaders, suggestion box, occasional surveys, cottage meetings, non-decision making forums, etc.,” but it is unclear to what extent these options are being taken up. Winslade, *A New Kind of Baptist Church*, 194.
leadership “by listening rather than talking; by relating rather than achieving goals; by being a fellow traveller rather than a superior guide; by trust rather than position.”\(^{134}\) For those who seek to exercise some level of influence on their church community, such informal channels may be more accessible than in the past yet, particularly in larger churches, in churches where leaders do not adopt such an accessible style of leadership, or for those who for reasons of personality or lack of communication skills are unable to catch a leader’s ear, such access may be hard to come by. There may be many voices which, as a result, go unheard, perhaps implying a valuing of some types of voices over others.\(^{135}\) Additionally, it should be noted that the loss of influence through congregational governance does not distinguish between administrative and substantive matters: the opportunity for members to influence both types of issues is lost.\(^{136}\) In such situations, the PSOC research seems to indicate that there will, indeed, be some loss of influence and, therefore, of sense of community.

In regard to influence in the other direction - of the church community on its members - this is a point of particular tension for Baptist church community members, where the demands and benefits of individualism and community are in tension. Post-Enlightenment Baptists, including those of the Australian variety, have placed a particular emphasis on the individual nature of religious beliefs. They hold to liberty of conscience and the “right of all believers to interpret the Bible as they see fit”;\(^{137}\) the necessity “that the individual believes that ‘Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God...’ (John 20:31) and that they experience fellowship with God through Jesus Christ as a living reality in their lives”;\(^{138}\) the church as a voluntary association;\(^{139}\) the priesthood of all believers with its associated denial of the need for any mediation between Christ and the individual;\(^{140}\) the capacity of individual members to “hear the voice of Christ, as it were, directly”;\(^{141}\) and baptism as a personal act of faith\(^{142}\) - all of which is reflected, at a wider level, by the autonomy of the local church.


\(^{135}\) Winslade would argue that this should be indeed the case, with there being a “question of qualification in terms of maturity and spirituality in the making of decisions.” Winslade, *A New Kind of Baptist Church*, 81. He also argues that the “tyranny of the articulate” may apply in members’ meetings, but I would suggest that it also works, perhaps more so, in less formal channels. Winslade, *A New Kind of Baptist Church*, 82.

\(^{136}\) By “substantive” I mean those issues, which may be either theological or organisational, which have a significant bearing on the life of the community (e.g., discussion of the nature of membership), as opposed to those decisions which are peripheral but notorious for taking up time in members’ meetings (e.g., the colour of the new carpet).

\(^{137}\) Nickerson, "Baptist Beliefs," 18.

\(^{138}\) Nickerson, "Baptist Beliefs," 20.

\(^{139}\) Nickerson, "Baptist Beliefs," 22.

\(^{140}\) Nickerson, "Baptist Beliefs," 23.

\(^{141}\) Nickerson, "Baptist Beliefs," 23.

\(^{142}\) Nickerson, "Baptist Beliefs," 24.
under the direct lordship of Christ, in relation to all other authorities including denominational associations.\textsuperscript{143}

Such commitments, in the context of contemporary individualism, appear to have given rise to a degree of freedom in matters of doctrinal belief and conduct which move significantly beyond the expectations of preceding generations.\textsuperscript{144} Whilst, for example, the Baptist Union of New South Wales template for constitutions for Baptist churches suggests that they require an affirmation by candidates for membership of “the general beliefs set forth in this Constitution under the heading ‘Doctrinal Position of this Church,’”\textsuperscript{145} this appears to be exceptional, with other documents simply referring to an ability to give testimony to a commitment to Christ.\textsuperscript{146} Such a trend was highlighted in the 1991 report of the Heritage Task Force to the Victorian Annual Assembly, indicating, even then, a strong trend towards “a general theological orientation of evangelicalism,” with a significant and increasing attenuation of distinctively Baptist theology.\textsuperscript{147} Such a trend is perhaps currently exemplified by indications that, for many Millennials, a decline in “in depth” biblical and theological teaching within Baptist churches is being filled by recourse to podcasts, some of the authors of which place their emphasis on radical individual discipleship which may not include a clear place for the local, denominational church.\textsuperscript{148}

Concerning individual conduct, typical, current Baptist church constitutions, whilst still making some reference to the possibility of sanctions for inappropriate behaviour, indicate that such action would occur only as a result of the most serious infractions, and only then as a last resort in cases where, for example, “the conduct of the Member in question, in the opinion of the Pastoral Resource Group, constitutes a serious hindrance to the work of the Church.”\textsuperscript{149} There may be, according to Hughes and Cronshaw, “an expectation within Baptist churches that members will live in such a way as will demonstrate the reality of their commitment to the Lordship of Christ,” but this appears to remain a general and rather vague, rather than defined and acted upon, expectation. Except for long-term non-attendance at one extreme, and sexual misconduct by leaders at the other, the practice of

\textsuperscript{143} Nickerson, “Baptist Beliefs,” 26. My use of Stan Nickerson’s account of Baptist beliefs is not meant to suggest that his approach is a particularly individualistic one: I have just selected those items from his work of particular interest here.

\textsuperscript{144} Further commentary on historical Baptist practices in Chapter 4 will clarify this further.

\textsuperscript{145} Baptist Churches of NSW & ACT, “Church Constitution Template,” (2008), 4. Whilst I have attempted to access material from a cross the states, constitutional templates from Queensland and South Australia were under review and therefore unavailable at the time of writing.

\textsuperscript{146} For example, Baptist Union of Victoria, “Sample Church Constitution,” 2

\textsuperscript{147} The Heritage Task Force, A People Called Baptist: The Report of the Heritage Task Force to the Annual Assembly (Baptist Union of Victoria, 1991), 18. This issue is explored in Chapter 4.2.5.


\textsuperscript{149} Gateway Baptist Church, “The Constitution of Gateway Baptist Church,” 3.3 (b).
sanctions against those who contravene such standards appear to be rarely employed in Baptist churches within contemporary western cultures.\textsuperscript{150} The English authors, Haymes, Gouldbourne and Cross, suggest that earlier forms of Baptist practice in this area are now viewed as severe rather than “pastorally sensitive,” and that, as those influenced by Western traditions, “we live in a particularly individualistic age, when each of us is likely to hold that certain areas of our lives and behaviour are of no concern to anybody else.”\textsuperscript{151} Certainly, such a highly moderated approach (relative to past practices) is well attuned to Australians’ intolerance of “God’s police.” The issue of behavioural norms is, therefore, now left to congregational teaching and, as with influence of the individual on the wider community, personal influence through small groups and individual discipleship.\textsuperscript{152} Such a shift, whilst appearing appropriate to the current Australian cultural milieu, also carries with it a perhaps less than considered assent to the privatisation of such issues, and a decline in pastoral care for those who are struggling with issues of either belief or conduct.

In summary, many Australian Baptist church community members do appear to have lost or to be losing the opportunity to influence their communities, and whilst this may be experientially mitigated by disinterest in institutional and theological matters, PSOC research indicates that there are likely to be costs incurred in terms of a sense of community. Similarly, with influence of the community on its members, the tensions between conformity/mutuality/community and freedom/autonomy/privatisation appear to be very largely resolved in favour of freedom/autonomy/privatisation, with potential loss of community cohesiveness. Both aspects of influence are increasingly reliant upon informal, personal relationships which, whilst seeming appropriate to a deinstitutionalised, relationally orientated culture, may also have unforeseen practical, sociological and theological implications.

2.3.3 Integration and Fulfilment of Needs

Research conducted by McMillan and Chavis suggests that integration of members into the community depends on how well their most significant needs are met by that community.\textsuperscript{153} In turn, the perceived significance of particular needs will be influenced by

\textsuperscript{150} See, for example, J.W. MacGorman, "The Discipline of the Church," in The People of God: Essays on Believers’ Church, ed. Paul A. Basden and David S. Dockery (Nashville, Tennessee: Broadman & Holman, 1991), 82.

\textsuperscript{151} Brian Haymes, Ruth Gouldbourne and Anthony R. Cross, On Being the Church: Revisioning Baptist Identity, Studies in Baptist History and Thought (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2008), 114, 115.

\textsuperscript{152} See John Sweetman’s comments regarding the difficulties of discipling through the destructured relationality of small groups. John Sweetman, "The Call to Disciple," The Queensland Baptist 11, no. 3 (2013): 7.

\textsuperscript{153} McMillan and Chavis, "Sense of Community: A Definition and Theory," 12.
the community, as members communicate and, to varying degrees, develop shared values.\textsuperscript{154} Such values, although not always reflected in behaviour, “are dispositions to action,” and “descriptions of how, ideally, people believe they should live.”\textsuperscript{155} This section will provide a “snapshot” exploration of the values of two Australian Baptist church communities (one large and city-based, the other smaller, in a regional centre) based on their value statements and the resources invested in their activities.\textsuperscript{156} This analysis focuses particularly on those issues already discussed as relevant to the Australian religious/Baptist context. These two examples will then provide the basis for a broader discussion of values and need fulfilment in Australian Baptist church communities.

Gateway Baptist Church is based at Mackenzie, Queensland, but draws attendees from across the region to the south of Brisbane, and from Logan and the Redlands. It has thirteen staff on its pastoral team (the allocation of these to the various values is indicated below), and weekly attendance is estimated at around 1,500 people. The “Core Values” statement begins with “Biblical Truth”, acknowledging an authority beyond the members and supported by a daily Bible reading plan.\textsuperscript{157} This is linked to a statement of beliefs which is based on a broad evangelical theology, without mention of Baptist distinctives, and indicates a preference for a welcoming, low boundary-setting community environment.\textsuperscript{158} “Empowering Leadership” focuses on the development of a broad leadership throughout the congregation, which is also supported by “Effective Systems and Structures” (Executive Pastor role). This “let leaders lead” approach is also reflected in the church’s governance structures, as discussed in Section 2.3.2. The relational currency of honesty and intimacy is promoted through the value entitled “Authentic Community,” concerning God’s design of human persons for “real and open relationships” (Small Groups Pastor and Church Family Care Coordinator), and culturally sensitive, experiential religion is valued as “Passionate Spirituality” (Creative Ministries Coordinator). Non-judgmentalism and acceptance of difference are valued through both “Extravagant Grace,” based on “God’s unconditional love for us,” and “Celebrating Diversity” (Carewerx Coordinator - refugee support and easy English sermons). The value of “Active Mission” is “central to all that we do,” and includes social justice/welfare work, “reaching the whole

\textsuperscript{155} Kaldor, Hughes, and Black, \textit{Spirit Matters}, 129.
\textsuperscript{156} This section was completed in early 2012. References to church documents and websites were current at that time.
\textsuperscript{157} Gateway Baptist Church, "Gateway Baptist Church Core Values," http://gatewaybap.com/About_Us/Core_Values/ (accessed 24 Nov, 2011).
\textsuperscript{158} Gateway Baptist Church, "What We Believe," http://www.gatewaybap.com/About_Us/What_We_Believe/ (accessed 24 Nov, 2011).
person for Christ” (four ministry staff positions, including Missions Pastor, Community and Care Pastor, Carewerx Coordinator, and Discipleship and Evangelism Pastor).159

Values which are not explicitly addressed in the core values statement, but in which the church chooses to invest its resources, include programs for children, youth and young adults (three pastoral staff positions), marriages (“Lovers” functions designed to be relevant to both church and non-church people), and counselling services, again for those from both within and without the church community. Overseas missions are mostly based around community development and social justice issues. In 2011, approximately 21% of total church income was expended on “Mission” activities.

Dubbo Baptist Church is based in the rural New South Wales centre of Dubbo (city population 38,000; regional population 130,000), and has a Sunday attendance of around 300 people. The church has a statement of core values listing seventeen articles, which can be summarised as focused on a relationship with God (a life of discipleship, Bible-study, prayer and worship), evangelism (sharing the gospel and making disciples), relational authenticity and acceptance (”true openness”, “support” and “integrity”), spiritual and personal development (encouraging discipleship and leadership), and support of “the family as God intended it.”160 Regarding the church community itself, they “value FUNCTIONING AS THE BODY OF CHRIST,” but, as was noted above, rather than this article going on to discuss unity (which has a brief article of its own), its main focus in on “the worth of every individual and the diversity of their gifts.”

Interestingly the Dubbo church website homepage appears to express a strong value regarding wider community involvement which the statement of core values itself does not include: the church meets at the “Dubbo Baptist Community Centre,” in “the heart throb of the Dubbo community to support this community in whatever way it requires.”161 This occurs through counselling services, the provision of second-hand clothing and welfare services, a community kitchen and a school student hostel for students from the surrounding region. Personal communication with Peter Anderson, former Pastor and current Elder at Dubbo Church, indicates that this community focused value was adopted some years ago and that emphasis on it has declined in recent years, perhaps as a result of a lack of continuing focus from church leadership, with, for example, the majority of volunteer work for Emmanuel Care now being done by people from outside the Baptist

159 Gateway Baptist Church, "Gateway Baptist Church Core Values."
160 Dubbo Baptist Church, "Dubbo Baptist Church Core Values."
church community. The church is in the process of re-evaluating its priorities but is currently seeking to provide support for young families, both within and beyond the church community, and to identify and equip young people within the church to connect with local indigenous youth.

So, what do those who attend Australian Baptist churches get out of their involvement in such communities? The two examples described here suggest that, firstly, these church communities focus on needs for authentic relationality, individual spiritual development and family support. These are needs/values of community members which appear to focus on what happens within the community itself, but may also serve the function of ensuring the winsomeness of the community to those who are currently outside its boundaries, thus also serving the evangelical value of sharing faith with others. Any danger of community membership becoming a self-involved “therapy,” appears to be offset by the fact that both church communities also appear, secondly, to have developed strong values around serving those outside their boundaries more directly, with a tendency for this to be missional/evangelical but couched in terms of a holistic social welfare/justice approach. Over-arching all, these Australian Baptist church communities appear to express the value that there is something beyond themselves and that they exist, not as an end in themselves, but in the service of God and others.

In summary, albeit on the basis of this limited analysis, contemporary Australian Baptist communities appear to express a significant range of values and to be meeting a wide raft of needs, if also being, at the same, in danger of exhausting their community members.

2.3.4 Shared Emotional Connection

The dimension of shared emotional connection, like those of membership, influence, and integration, has multiple aspects, and, again, there are ways in which Australian Baptist

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162 The positive emphasis on family life is reflected, according to Hughes and Cronshaw, in the figures concerning marriage, and a relative intolerance of sex before marriage and divorce. Hughes and Cronshaw, Baptists in Australia, 83, 84.

163 The 2011 NCLS survey data suggest that a commitment to “wider community care or social justice” has increased markedly over the past ten years (from 11% to 21%) for those attending Australian Baptist churches. In this, Hughes and Cronshaw see the influence of Australian Baptist leaders such as Tim Costello Hughes and Cronshaw, Baptists in Australia, 96, 61.

164 Although Hughes observation that “most of those who have been involved in Baptist churches have had little time or energy for involvement in other aspects of the wider society,” probably tends to ignore wider community involvement through church activities, high demands made on members’ time and energy may well be an issue of increasing concern in a time-poor cultural setting. Philip J. Hughes, "The Baptist Churches in Australian Society," Australia's Religious Communities (Christian Research Association, 2010). This issue is best addressed, this thesis argues, through sharing the responsibility to meet the needs of those both within and beyond the church community, according to God’s calling and gifting. See Chapters 5-8.
church communities have strengths and are experiencing challenges. In terms of frequency and quality of interaction of members, the picture appears relatively positive. As was noted above (Section 2.3.1), more of those who identify as Baptist attend church services and other types of church activities more regularly than those who identify with most other denominations, so that the frequency of contact amongst members of church communities is relatively high. It might also be suggested that, whilst the reduction in congregational (constitutional) meetings has marked a loss in the frequency and depth of involvement of members with their church communities particularly in discussion of substantive issues, it has also reduced some of the negative aspects of members’ interactions, for which Baptist church members’ meetings have been notorious.\(^{165}\)

On the other hand, however, sharing narratives (and their attendant practices) which bind the community together, and in doing so produce a sense of belonging to that community, appears to be more problematic for Australian Baptist churches. It appears helpful to divide shared narratives into two categories; those which are shared in the sense that they are held in common by those within the community, and those which, as well as being held in common, actually speak to the nature of the community itself. Analysis in Section 2.3.1 above indicated a tendency on the part of Australian Baptist churches to engage with a narrow range of the latter type in ways which are disembedded from the scriptural narrative and transform them into the former type. For example, the narratival image of the body of Christ should, according to Jackson indicate that the church community is ontologically related and that its mutuality of service is grounded in this.\(^{166}\) Instead, however, “the body of Christ” becomes a narratival image which, though held in common, is nevertheless one of individual discipleship in relationship with Christ, albeit in loose association with other members of the community. The opportunity to build the “spiritual bond,” referred to by McMillan and Chavis, which goes deeper than emotional connection, thereby appears to be attenuated.\(^{167}\)

The same pattern is apparent in the narratives which are used to provide significance to the scripturally and historically key community acts of baptism and the Lord’s Supper. The scriptural narratives which are employed to give baptism significance, predominantly relate to individual obedience (it is an ordinance of Christ to be obeyed), personal testimony of

\(^{165}\) Such problems have included the monopoly of discussion by some members, the divisiveness of decision making by majority vote, and disrespect of leaders. Winslade, *A New Kind of Baptist Church*, 82, 83.

\(^{166}\) Jackson, “The Discourse of ‘Belonging’”, 153.

faith, and the identification of the candidate with Christ. Any action on God’s part has occurred prior to the event of baptism in conversion and the giving of the Spirit. Then, according to Hughes and Cronshaw, “following baptism, a person may be welcomed as a full member of the local congregation.” Similarly with the Lord’s Supper, it is “a memorial supper,” ordained by Christ, which “provides an opportunity for people to reaffirm their recognition of the authority of Jesus Christ,” and the emphasis is, for the most part, on individual believers who obey and remember: the significance lies in personal piety rather than communal and ethical practice. For Queensland Baptists, according to the “Guidelines for Belief and Practice,”

[The Lord’s Supper] dramatises the basis, in Christ’s atonement, of our continued membership in the body of Christ as cleansed Christians. It keeps us aware of our fellowship with the saints of all ages and with the other members of the body of Christ and keeps us looking forward to our future glorification in Jesus Christ. There appears to be some slippage here between the language of “the body of Christ,” which is generally understood in individualistic terms (see Section 2.3.1), and the shift to the universal (“the saints of all the ages...”), without any clearly specific focus on the local body of the church community.

These narratives which are held in common also appear heavily focused on the present time. As was discussed in Chapter 1, this is a strength for Baptists in relating their lives to the New Testament, yet may also limit their recognition of God’s people’s past and future. Church history, whether local, denominational, or wider, is a resource which is rarely drawn upon. At the level of the local church community, whilst in the past individual Baptist churches tended to keep records and have a written history, such activities are now generally regarded as of low priority. According to Dr. David Parker, Archivist for Queensland Baptists,

Churches appear to be focused so much on the present situation that even the recent past seems irrelevant to them. This means that there is little interest in preserving or even creating records. Informality, changes to the organisational

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171 Hughes and Cronshaw, Baptists in Australia, 40.
172 Hughes and Cronshaw note, as a recent development in some churches, that it has become “more common for leaders to invite participants to reflect on Jesus eating with people on the margins (to encourage God’s people today to do the same).” Hughes and Cronshaw, Baptists in Australia, 40.
174 The next paragraph begins with another reference to “the universal church” before going on to address the nature of the local church.
structure of the churches and the arrival of the electronic/digital age have also militated against effective record keeping.\footnote{175}{David Parker, 13 Jan 2012 2012.}
The historical, as Parker suggests, is not perceived to be directly relevant to the individual or their community in their current circumstances.

This perhaps applies to an even greater extent when historical-theological narratives concerning denominational history are perceived to be sectarian. These appear to hold little interest for most Australian Baptist church communities, and are perhaps even regarded with some suspicion. In 1991, the Heritage Task Force, having surveyed Baptists in Victoria, reported to the Annual Assembly of the Victorian Baptist Union that what was important about being a Baptist, whilst including believer baptism and “conversion for membership,” mainly devolved to active involvement in the local church, contemporary styles of worship, and an “emphasis on evangelism.”\footnote{176}{The Heritage Task Force, \textit{A People Called Baptist}, 16. Interestingly, the value placed on “contemporary worship” appears to have waned somewhat between the NCLS surveys of 2001 and 2011. Hughes and Cronshaw, \textit{Baptists in Australia}, 94. Ian Hussey suggests that this is puzzling in light of an increased sense of inspiration from worship services, but might be related to “the winding down of the ‘worship wars’ in many churches [so that] people are not passionately clinging to contemporary worship.” Ian Hussey, "Reflections on NCLS Results for Qld Baptists 2011," (2012). Unpublished paper.} The outcome was that “those aspects of Baptist life which are most distinctive in a historical sense are those which are presently most attenuated in the life of the denomination.”\footnote{177}{The Heritage Task Force, \textit{A People Called Baptist}, 18.} One likely motivation for this loss of interest in denominational historical narratives appears to be the kind of distinction-reduction discussed in Section 2.3.1. As has already been discussed, Australian Baptist churches have a large proportion of attendees who are not “Baptists” in the formal sense of having taken up membership, and many of these have a background in other denominations.\footnote{178}{Australian Baptist Ministries, "Where We've Come From," \texttt{<http://www.baptist.org.au/About_Us/Where_We_ve_Come_From.aspx} (accessed 27 Jan, 2011); Kaldor, Bellamy, and Powell, \textit{Build My Church}, 41.} It may therefore be perceived as ungracious, unwelcoming, and even un-Australian (according to the cultural religious values examined in Section 2.1), to emphasise Baptist distinctives. Secondly, however, it also appears likely that the disinterest in both denominational and wider church history, is due to its inevitable entailing of the theological alongside the historical, and, as Bouma has pointed out, theology and doctrine as the rational bases for faith are currently out of favour.\footnote{179}{Bouma, \textit{Australian Soul}, 86.}

In a similar fashion, although there are perhaps signs that this is changing,\footnote{180}{See, for example, Ross Clifford and Philip Johnson, \textit{The Cross Is Not Enough: Living as Witness to the Resurrection} (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2012).} the future of God’s people is mainly envisioned in terms of five or ten year church plans. “Salvation,” in
evangelical terms, may have to do with the individual being with God in heaven after death, but the emphasis lies heavily on the believer’s experience of God in the here and now, rather than there being some greater vision of the telos of creation and community which provides a guiding vision for the present beliefs and practices of the church community.\textsuperscript{181}

In summary, Australian Baptist church communities do indeed appear to have shared narratives, but these are mainly in the form of narratives which are held in common about the individual lives of community members, rather than about the ontological nature of the community itself. They are, for the most part, focused in the present, and upon the individual and experiential, rather than the communal and the theological. To return to Jackson’s terms, such narratives further support a destructured relationality, with a thinning out of narratives around the scriptural-historical-theological and formalised institutional-denominational-constitutional belonging.

Conclusion

The picture thus constructed on the basis of an exploration of the PSOC in relation to Australian Baptist churches is broadly consonant with the Australian cultural context of significant and pervasive individualism and deinstitutionalisation. Whilst Protestant and particularly Baptist theology have historically contributed to such individualism, Australian Baptist church communities now appear to be experiencing the intensified cultural impact of such trends, and research concerning the PSOC suggests that, at a psychosocial level, there are both gains and losses in terms of achieving a sense of community.

Overall, this discussion of the various dimensions of the PSOC points to Australian Baptist churches as relationally warm and active, particularly and increasingly around issues of social justice and wider community involvement. On the other hand, their sociality is based almost entirely on discourses of destructured relationality rather than scriptural-historical-theological and institutional-denominational-constitutional forms of membership/belonging. This emphasis gives rise to a marked ambivalence around boundary issues, with some lingering desire to maintain formal structures being largely offset in favour of distinction-reduction. Structured forms of influence (both of the member on their community and of the community on its members) are also in decline, with, again, an increasing reliance on

\textsuperscript{181} See “About Eternity” in Queensland Baptists, "Queensland Baptists Guidelines for Belief and Practice," 3. Again, it may be that attempts to deal with eschatology beyond this general, evangelical stance, particularly when dealt with at a superficial level, have proved to be too divisive in the past.
destructured relational forms of influence. Narratives, even when alluding to Scripture, tend to be shared in the sense that they are held in common and concern the individual, rather than being about the actual nature of the community, and are largely focused in the present, and upon the individual and experiential, rather than on the communal and the theological.
Part C: A Historical Theology
Introducing Part C

My aim is to now take the issues raised by the descriptive theology of community in Australian Baptist churches and bring these into conversation with the resources of Scripture and early Baptist ecclesiology. Together these resources serve as the basis for the practical theology movement of historical theology. This process will not consist of simply lifting the dimensions discussed in the previous chapter and seeking out possible references to them in Scripture and Baptist ecclesiology, because to do so would present several problems. Firstly, the categories used by the twenty-first century human sciences of psychology and sociology cannot be forced upon the religious understandings of different cultures dating from many centuries BCE. Secondly, to seek to do so would be to limit the capacity of Scripture and theology to speak on their own terms, and thereby to miss a broader, or perhaps even different, understanding of what they have to say about community. And thirdly, the methodology for this project suggests that Scripture, and secondarily theology, should not only converse with the findings of the human sciences, but should take the primary role in leading such a conversation, responsive to, but also enabling the critique of contemporary expressions of Christian life and practice. As was expressed in Chapter 1, the descriptive theology of this thesis provides an illuminating but not guiding light to this work.

That is not to say, however, that the choice of canonical narrative outlined in this Part of the thesis was uninfluenced by the outcomes of the preceding descriptive theology. In fact, the choice of the framework for Chapter 3, which is then continued in Chapter 4, was made on the basis that, at both the level of “big questions” and specific practices, it addresses many of the issues which have been raised by the descriptive theology of Chapter 2. Such questions range from the essential nature of church communities, the basis of membership of them and the nature of the boundaries which encircle them, the nature of relationships within such communities, and the source and character of the values, narratives and practices which bind them together.

This part of the thesis begins in Chapter 3 by seeking to answer the vital Baptist question, “What does Scripture say?” In doing so, it explores Scripture in a way which moves beyond engagement with individual texts to outline a particular canonical narrative of community, which “provides a framework for reading the Christian Bible as a theological and narrative unity.”¹ Chapter 4 then explores the way in which this particular canonical

¹ Soulen, *The God of Israel and Christian Theology*, 13, emphasis in original.
narrative also provides a comprehensive and coherent framework for understanding early Baptist ecclesiology and practices, and how, under the pressure of Enlightenment influences, this narrative was undermined. This move to include historical Baptist ecclesiology alongside Scripture in this historical theology does not lessen the priority given to Scripture, but does seek to pay attention to the lessons which may be gleaned from past attempts by earlier Baptists to live according to that Scripture.

Together these two chapters of historical theology (Part C) will then guide the constructive process (Part D) of responding to the issues raised by the descriptive theology (Part B).
Chapter 3: Community in Scripture

Introduction

As outlined in Chapter 1, Australian Baptists, like their counterparts around the world, are vitally interested in what the Bible teaches about God, themselves as God’s people, and God’s world, and expect what they learn from the Bible to form their beliefs and practices. The aim of this chapter is, therefore, to explore the concept of community in Scripture and to discern a canonical narrative concerning community which enables reading the biblical text as a comprehensive and coherent, theological and narrative unity. The narrative which is arrived upon is not presented as the only canonical narrative for understanding Christian community, but it is one which, I propose, is fitting to both the nature and scope of this project.

The initial exploration of community in Scripture in this chapter is based on Paul Hanson’s comprehensive work, *The People Called: the Growth of Community in the Bible*. As was suggested in the Introduction to Part C, the choice of this particular work is based upon its capacity to provide a framework from which to respond to the themes and questions raised in Chapter 2. Indeed, it has been noted that, whilst Hanson is not a sociologist, *The People Called* nevertheless demonstrates a knowledge and appreciation of sociological issues concerning “community” in a historical context. According to John Brackett, Hanson has, in a unique fashion, been able to bring together “a superior knowledge of Old Testament studies and a fine grasp of the New Testament, and to integrate both into an insightful framework of sociological study.” It is this specific combination of factors which makes his framework appropriate for the work of this thesis.

Hanson’s work proposes that, across the sweep of Scripture from Old Testament to New, God’s intention for community may be perceived in three key dimensions: worship, righteousness and compassion. Whilst these three dimensions are referenced throughout this chapter, I propose, however, that the second and third of these dimensions (righteousness and compassion) may more helpfully be considered as an inseparable unity: as Hanson himself points out, “righteousness and compassion are portrayed in both Testaments as indivisibly related and equally giving expression to God’s reaching out to

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2 Brackett, review of *The People Called*, 375.
So what Hanson also refers to throughout his work, and which I have expanded to make the third dimension of my study of community in Scripture, is the nature of the relationship between the people of God and the world beyond the boundaries of that community. This is an issue which not only speaks to that relationship itself but also to the very nature of the relevant communities in the two Testaments.

Specifically, the task of this chapter will be to outline God’s covenant making activity as the context for human community in the Old Testament, and to trace how this context points to three key dimensions of the community which entered into covenant relationship with God. These three dimensions as portrayed in the Old Testament are the acknowledgement of God as primary to the community, resulting in the centrality of worship; the imitation of God who is righteous, just and compassionate as shaping the ethical life of that community; and God’s intention for Israel to be the means of conveying God’s blessing to the nations beyond the community. It will be proposed that, as a result of this exploration, a particular narrative of God’s community comes into view as covenantal priesthood: a joint and mutual priesthood within the context of covenant. This narrative, firstly, pertains to Israel; it is then fulfilled in the high priesthood of Christ; and, finally, it is bestowed upon the church communities of the new covenant. The ways in which this narrative may be perceived in the beliefs and practices of New Testament believers is then examined, in their joint ministry to God in worship, their mutual ministry to one another within their communities, and their joint ministry to God’s world. The chapter concludes with an exploration of baptism and the Lord’s Supper as events in which all three of these dimensions are practised.

### 3.1. Community in the Old Testament

The Old Testament canon begins with the narratives of community, created and then fallen. The beginning of community in its primal form between a man and a woman in communion with God is portrayed as entirely integrated into God’s creative purposes for humanity and the whole created realm. The creation of humanity is first narrated in Genesis 1:26-27 and is retold, with greater relational emphasis, in Genesis 2:18-25. Although in the first account, the creation of male and female is related to procreation, in the second account the reason given for the creation of woman is that “it is not good that

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3 Hanson, *The People Called*, xvii.
the man should be alone.” As Grenz notes, exegetes from Calvin to Gerhard von Rad “find in this observation an indication of the social character of human existence.”

For Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the sexual bonding of marriage as depicted in Genesis 2 is the foundational narrative of what it is to live in relationship and community. For Adam and Eve, there is the discovery that, as God’s human creatures, they share a common origin and are drawn towards and dependent upon one another. Such a drive toward human bonding is to be seen, not only in the limited terms of marriage between a single man and woman, but, more broadly, as the basis for the whole web of human relationships of which any community consists. Yet, on the other hand, this first couple very soon come to understand that they constitute a limit for one another: a limit which is made easier to bear by love, and yet which, when that love fails, leaves only an unbounded desire “to possess the other or to destroy the other.” The outcome is that

now he no longer sees the limit that the other person constitutes as grace but as God’s wrath, God’s hatred, God’s begrudging. This means that the human being no longer regards the other person with love. Instead one person sees the other in terms of their being over against each other; each sees the other as divided from himself or herself. The limit is no longer grace that holds the human being in the unity of creaturely, free love; instead the limit is now the mark of dividedness. Man and woman are divided from each other.

...And community, both amongst humanity and between humanity and God, is marred. This failure of which Bonhoeffer writes is representative of the breakdown, at its very roots, of all human community as it is portrayed in Scripture, and it would appear that God’s purposes have been thwarted. But the scriptural narrative then proceeds to trace the means by which God persists in calling a people to be God’s own, both for their own sake and, through them, for the sake of God’s whole creation. This relationship will be covenantal in nature, and it is this covenant bond which is to form the context for the continuing scriptural account of community.

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7 Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall*, 99.
8 Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall*, 122.
9 This project focuses on human community, but, in a broader sense, it is clear that God’s redemptive plans include the whole of creation.
10 My approach to covenant, like that, for example, of Bernhard Anderson, is scriptural/descriptive, rather than Reformed/systematic. Bernhard W. Anderson, *Contours of Old Testament Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999). Since the seminal work of E. P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism: A Comparison of Patterns of Religion* (London: SCM Press, 1977), the concept of covenant has received increasing attention and recent scholarship has continued this trend. See, for example, N. T. Wright, *The Climax of the Covenant: Christ and the Law in Pauline Theology* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1991); and the
Covenant or בְּרִית (bêrit) is, in brief, a treaty, contract, agreement or pledge between two or more parties. It appears in ancient literature in the context of relationships between nations, between individuals, between a monarch and their subjects, and between YHWH and the people of Israel. Beyond this basic meaning however, the term, as it is used concerning this latter context, is rich in meaning. It has associations with God’s חֶֶ֫סֶד (ḥesed) or “steadfast love” by which YHWH expresses loyalty to such covenants, and with שָלוֹם (šālôm) or peace, involving a sense of completeness, wholeness, harmony and fulfillment, which is “the result of God’s activity in covenant.” Such covenants were always initiated and, at least for God’s part in them, sustained by God, but to varying degrees of explicitness and emphasis carried with them an obligation for human response.

Beyond the universalism of creation itself, and its echoes in the Noahic covenant of Genesis 9:1-17, the narrative of YHWH’s particular covenant community begins with the calling of and covenanting with Abram which forms “the basic biblical promise, and is then elaborated and (partially) fulfilled throughout the Pentateuch, and indeed the whole Bible.”

To Abram, YHWH initially promises:

‘Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you. I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.’ (Gen 12:1b-3)

And then:

‘I will establish my covenant between me and you, and your offspring after you throughout their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you. And I will give to you, and to your offspring after you, the land where you are now an alien, all the land of Canaan, for a perpetual holding; and I will be their God.’ (Gen 17:7-8)

And finally, in describing the tenor of the relationship:

12 Deut 7:9, 12; Isa 54:10; 55:3. Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament, s.v. "698 חֶֶ֫סֶד.
15 Baker, "Covenant: An Old Testament Study," 26. Although there is certainly an expectation that Abraham will respond in obedience to God’s promises (Gen 17:1,9ff), the emphasis both here and, to an even greater extent in the earlier versions (Gen 8:1-3; 15:4-11), is on God’s promises. According to Birch et al, “the language of promise feeds into the language of covenant.” Bruce C. Birch et al., A Theological Introduction to the Old Testament (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1999), 80.
The LORD said, ‘Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do, seeing that Abraham shall become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him? No, for I have chosen him, that he may charge his children and his household after him to keep the way of the LORD by doing righteousness and justice; so that the LORD may bring about for Abraham what he has promised him.’ (Gen 18:17-19)

These covenant statements are summarised in the formula which occurs in various forms throughout the Old Testament whereby YHWH promises “I will be their God, and they shall be my people.”

The main features of God’s covenant promises as they are portrayed in these passages, and as they relate to our interest in community, fall into three key areas. Firstly, God is primary and central: this covenant agreement is at YHWH’s instigation (it is God who “calls”), and it is YHWH who will be the people’s God. Recognition of this in worship will, therefore, be the central and defining focus of the resulting community. Secondly, there is to be a particular relationship between YHWH and, not just an individual, but a people (Abraham and his descendants), and being in such a communal relationship inherently requires certain standards of ethical behavior (“doing righteousness and justice”) which reflect God’s nature as righteous and just. Thirdly, the blessing which is to be poured out on the people who are called has a trajectory beyond themselves to all the families/nations of the earth: YHWH blesses them, not only for their own sake, but so that blessing may be conveyed to others. These three defining and enduring features of the Israelite community, as we will now explore, are both inextricably linked and yet also in tension with one another, and the emphasis within the canon, depending on Israel’s historical situation, fell on each of them to varying degrees across the Old Testament canon.

3.1.1 God’s People as a Worshipping Community

Israel’s community was, first and foremost to be a worshipping community, a “congregation” ((turn ‘ēdā), that is, “an assembly by appointment”, or “especially an assembly for religious purposes” (קָהָל qāhāl). All other factors which might influence the nature of this community were relativised in light of who their God was found to be in remembering worship: worship in which the people remembered everything YHWH had done, most especially in the Exodus, and, in doing so, thankfully reaffirmed their

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17 For example, Ex 12:3; 16:1; 35:1; Lev 8:5; Num 20:1; 1 Kings 8:5; Ps 74:2; Jer 6:18 Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament, s.v. "878 רַע"  
18 For example, Deut 9:10; 18:16; 2 Chr 20:5; Neh 5:13; Joel 2:16) Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament, s.v. "1991 יָפְנוּ."
confession of who God was.\textsuperscript{19} Such remembering was facilitated through the communal reading of the law, and the celebration, year by year, of the feasts and festivals which God appointed for the community to commemorate together.\textsuperscript{20} The community was thus completely defined by the fact that YHWH was their God and they were YHWH’s people.\textsuperscript{21} Such worship sought to acknowledge YHWH as creator, covenant maker and redeemer, and to place “all other realities in their proper relation to [that] source and center.”\textsuperscript{22} Therefore, as the Sinai covenant affirmed, Israel’s worship was to be “uncompromisingly, ruthlessly, monotheistic,”\textsuperscript{23} with covenantal monotheism as the very foundation of the relationship between YHWH and YHWH’s people, and with the goal of ensuring “the tabernacling of the holy God in the midst of a worshipping community or ‘congregation’ (ʾēđā).”\textsuperscript{24} Yet, the proximity to a holy God which was evoked in such worship was also deeply problematic, bringing an awareness of sinfulness and uncleanness, and a sense of fear.\textsuperscript{25} Israel’s cultic worship sought to overcome these obstacles through priestly mediation, purification and atoning sacrifice, thereby allowing Israel to draw near and to worship her God (see Section 3.2.1).

\textbf{3.1.2 God’s People as an Ethical Community}

Far from being an isolated cultic issue, however, such holiness was also inextricably linked with the second feature of covenant community.\textsuperscript{26} God’s people were called to participate in YHWH’s holiness, being holy as their God was holy.\textsuperscript{27} The community was, as a result, to be predominantly patterned after YHWH’s own dealings with them: as a community, they were called to reflect the character and actions of their God, and “to assure Yahweh’s continued presence with the people [by] acting toward other humans even as Yahweh had first acted toward them.”\textsuperscript{28} They were to love YHWH, but this was to be inextricably linked to love of neighbour, and even of the foreigners residing amongst them.\textsuperscript{29} In Brueggemann’s terms, Israel’s whole life and purpose was “to host the holiness of

\textsuperscript{19} Hanson, \textit{The People Called}, 24-26.
\textsuperscript{20} Deut 31:11; Josh 8:34; Neh 8:3, 8, 18; Lev 23. \textit{Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible} (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1988), s.v. “Feasts and Festivals of Israel.”
\textsuperscript{21} Deut 6:4-5
\textsuperscript{22} Hanson, \textit{The People Called}, 26.
\textsuperscript{24} Anderson, \textit{Contours of Old Testament Theology}, 83.
\textsuperscript{25} Exod 20:18-21; Lev 16:18-19; Isa 6:5-6.
\textsuperscript{26} Birch et al., \textit{A Theological Introduction to the Old Testament}, 138.
\textsuperscript{27} Lev 19:2. Birch et al., \textit{A Theological Introduction to the Old Testament}, 138.
\textsuperscript{28} Hanson, \textit{The People Called}, 44.
Yahweh,” and to do so by “order[ing] its life so that it is qualified for communion with Yahweh, even as it is to practice justice for the sake of the community.”

Being in relationship with YHWH could, then, in no wise be separated from being engaged in a network of relationships with others; a community, acting as YHWH had acted towards them, with righteousness, justice and compassion.

In contrast to the gods of the surrounding nations who patronised the ruling classes of those societies, YHWH acted on behalf of the most oppressed, and in doing so did away with the systems, both religious and social, which privileged any group or individual. According to Brueggemann, “the antithesis between the Egyptian gods (cf. Exod. 12:12) and Yahweh, the God of the Exodus, has its inescapable counter-part in the contrasting social intentionalities of Egyptian imperial policy marked by monopoly and exploitation, and the will of Yahweh marked by covenantal egalitarianism.” Thus, compassion was not to be set against the righteous standards necessary to maintain order within the society, but rather in dynamic relation to them, producing “a righteous standard capable of ordering the new society... with a heart reaching out to embrace all – especially the weak and the poor and the alien – within the protective habitation of God’s šālôm.” And, again, all this was to be referenced against the touchstone of worship of a holy and compassionate God because, in the act of remembering YHWH’s redemptive work, was thus “kept alive the divine example of the bond of righteousness and compassion.”

Whilst the righteousness, justice and compassion required by the covenantal relationship with YHWH did, as was mentioned above, extend to “the alien,” such holiness was seen, increasingly throughout the Old Testament canon, to require separateness from the nations which surrounded the community. Under the pressure of establishing the community in Canaan, the crisis of exile and the difficulties which continued to impact those who returned to the land, it was hardly surprising, perhaps even necessary, that a

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31 Hanson, *The People Called*, 22.


33 Hanson, *The People Called*, 73.

34 Hanson, *The People Called*, 73. Such a schema was certainly put to the test, particularly during the rise of the monarchy in Israel. The monarchy was supposedly limited so as not to contradict YHWH’s absolute lordship over YHWH’s people (Judg 8:22-23), and yet, by the time of Solomon, a pattern had emerged whereby political, financial and military power were all centralised around the royal court. It was against such distortions of kingship, especially when these detracted from the people’s worship of YHWH, that many of the prophets protested (e.g., 2 Sam 12:1-14); 1 Kings 18; Amos 5:10-13) Hanson, *The People Called*, 91, 97, 122, 126. The ambiguous place of the monarchy (and state) is summarised by Nigel Wright for whom “as with King Saul, the state is both a rejection of divine kingship and a gracious divine accommodation to human autonomy.” Wright, *Disavowing Constantine*, 172.

35 Lev 18:2-5.
tendency developed towards isolation and exclusivity.\footnote{36} By the period of the Second Temple, conflict within the community between the Zadokites and Levites had resulted in a tendency to restrict holiness, even within the community, “to the tiny circle of those [who it was understood were] exempting themselves from God’s wrath by virtue of their assertion of superior righteousness and special favor.”\footnote{37} As exemplified by Ezra, the issue was one of preserving “the holy seed” which had been faithlessly mixed through inter-marriage with the “peoples of the lands.”\footnote{38}

### 3.1.3 God’s People as a Blessing to the Nations

Yet, on the other hand, the same holiness which formed the basis of both worship and the ethical life of the community, and which was the basis of the emphasis on preserving the community from those beyond its boundaries, also provided the link to the third of the features of the Israelite covenant community proposed here: that Israel’s holiness, her separateness, was not just \emph{from} the nations but \emph{for} the nations. In the midst of the crisis of humanity’s rejection of YHWH’s sovereignty, the very reason for Israel’s existence was that “Yahweh insistently wills that the world should be brought to blessing.”\footnote{39} According to Richard Bauckham, such blessing refers to God’s characteristically generous and abundant giving of all good to his creatures and his continual renewal of the abundance of created life. Blessing is God’s provision for human flourishing. But it is also relational: to be blessed by God is not only to know God’s good gifts but to know God himself in his generous giving. Because it is relational the movement of blessing is a movement that goes out from God and returns to him. God’s blessing of people overflows in their blessing of others and those who experience blessing from God in turn bless God, which means that they give all that creatures really can give to God: thanksgiving and praise.\footnote{40}

YHWH had blessed creation from the beginning, but sin had brought, in its place, a curse.\footnote{41} How was this to be overcome? Christopher Wright suggests that the theme of the reestablishment of blessing is present in different ways in each of the major covenants of the Old Testament.\footnote{42} In the Noahic covenant, God’s commitment was, in fact, extended to the whole of creation, to “all flesh that is on the earth.”\footnote{43} Through Abraham, as we have

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\footnote{36} Hanson, \textit{The People Called}, 298.
\footnote{37} Hanson, \textit{The People Called}, 268.
\footnote{39} Brueggemann, \textit{Theology of the Old Testament}, 431.
\footnote{40} Richard Bauckham, \textit{Bible and Mission: Christian Witness in a Postmodern World} (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 2003), 34.
\footnote{41} Gen 1:22; 3:17; 4:11.
\footnote{42} Wright, “Covenant.”
\footnote{43} Gen 9:8-17. Wright, "Covenant,” 57.
already seen, YHWH promised to bless the nations,\(^44\) and although the possibility of cursing persisted,\(^45\) “blessing predominates in the promise... and it is clearly blessing, not curse, that is the goal of God’s calling of Abraham.”\(^46\) It was on this basis, that YHWH rescued Israel from slavery in Egypt and, at Sinai, reaffirmed and gave greater specificity to covenant relationship with the people.\(^47\) It was in the preamble to the giving of the Sinai covenant that God reminded the people of God’s own redemptive initiative, placed God’s action in a universal perspective and informed Israel of its role in the midst of “the whole earth” as “a priestly kingdom and a holy nation.”\(^48\) The thrust continued in God’s covenant with David, which involved an “incipient universality,”\(^49\) and was taken up, as exemplified by the book of Isaiah, in both the scattering and re-gathering of Israel.\(^50\) In the midst of this, the courtroom drama of Isaiah 40-48 reveals that Israel, as it was to be finally vindicated, was also “servant and has inside its own judgment the unchanged and insistent capacity to be ‘light to the nations.’”\(^51\)

Can this last dimension really be claimed to be a dimension of the community of Israel itself, or does its significance lie only in relationships external to that community as it related to the world beyond itself? My proposal here is that the relationships between Israel and the nations did indeed inform the nature of that community: was it to be inwardly-focussed and self-absorbed with its righteousness and compassion limited within the community, or to remain conscious that covenant with YHWH entailed a more generous form of community with an ethical responsibility and imaginative reach beyond its own boundaries?\(^52\) The Old Testament canon, despite recording periods in which this dimension (and both of the other dimensions) of community came under great pressure,

\(^{44}\) Gen 12:3; 18:18; 28:14. As Wright notes, there is debate over the term ‘through you’ (Gen 12:3), as to whether it is instrumental or associative, reflexive or passive, but, he concludes, it “is unmistakable... that God’s goal is the blessing of the nations and that Abraham/Israel are key to the fulfilment of that goal.” Wright, “Covenant,” n.5, 60. Further to this, although blessing is sometimes paired with cursing according to how people and nations respond to Israel as at Gen 12:3a and 27:29, Mathews suggests that “the purpose of calling Abram is to bless, for blessing dominates the call, but curse is also purposeful since the call assumes that opposition is the reality Abram faces.” K.A. Mathews, Genesis 11:27-50:26, The New American Commentary (Nashville, TE: Broadman and Homan, 2005), 116. See also Hans Walter Wolff, “The Kerygma of the Yahwist,” in The Vitality of the Old Testament Traditions, ed. Walter Brueggemann and Hans Walter Wolff (Atlanta, GA: John Knox Press, 1982), 52.

\(^{45}\) Gen 12:3; 27:29.

\(^{46}\) Bauckham, Bible and Mission, 35.


\(^{49}\) Wright, “Covenant,” 74.


\(^{52}\) That is, Israel knew of her role before the nations, was responsible for participating in it as the people fulfilled their covenant commitment to God, and was to continue to creatively conceive of itself in such a role.
appears to affirm that the latter approach was part of God’s intention for Israel. The use of the term “mission” as applied to the Old Testament, is certainly a contested one, and is not, in its New Testament sense, in view here. Nevertheless, Israel had a role to play in the transmission of God’s blessing to the nations. For Suzanne McDonald, Israel’s election was, therefore, “an ‘election to representation’”: “simply by being Israel in the utter particularity of its covenant relationship with God, Israel represents God in and to the world... As the nations respond to Israel, so they are responding to the God of Israel.” This representation was most fully expressed in Israel’s obedience, and, yet was not dependent upon it. Rather, and as a further aspect of being a means of blessing to the nations as expressed in Isaiah, Israel in its disobedience and rejection of its election, became like Sodom and Gomorrah, and thereby came to represent the sinful nations before God and to bear God’s judgment as God deployed those nations against God’s own people.

In overview, then, this section has described how community was God’s initial intent for humanity (Gen 1-3), and how, in response to the fundamental breakdown of such community (Gen 3-11), God called the people of Israel to Godself as a covenant community, in community with Godself and with one another. I have argued that, within this context, this community can be meaningfully framed with reference to three dimensions of their existence: the joint worship of their covenant-making/keeping and holy God; the mutual practice of righteousness, justice and compassion which reflected God’s character amongst them; and a joint responsibility to convey God’s blessing to “the nations.” In doing so, I will now proceed to argue, a priestly shape to Israel’s communal character has come into view which, whilst only made explicit on two occasions in the Old Testament canon, is nevertheless a coherent and constructive way to understand the nature of Israel’s community. The aim of the following section is, therefore, to examine the concept of priesthood in the Old Testament as it is more usually portrayed as a cultic office, and to further illuminate the way in which it provides a narrative of covenant

53 Hanson contrasts, for example, the exclusivity of the theme of “the holy seed” as it appears in Ezra and Nehemiah with an “alternative vision” of inclusivity in Joel, Ruth and Jonah. Ultimately, however, in Christian canonical narrative terms, it was this latter vision that more fully expressed the trajectory of God’s dealings with the nations. Hanson, The People Called, 254, 298, 312.
54 Christopher Seitz provides a useful examination of ways in which the term “mission” is both aberrant and, when adapted, useful in its application to Israel in the OT. Christopher R. Seitz, Figured Out: Typology and Providence in Christian Scripture (London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 145-47.
55 McDonald, Re-Imaging Election, 98, emphasis in original.
56 McDonald, Re-Imaging Election, 99.
57 Isa 1:10; 24-27. Seitz, Figured Out, 153, 154.
58 Exod 19:3-6; Isa 61:5-7.
community. This narrative is then explored in relation both to Jesus Christ as the perfect high priest, and to the communities of the new covenant.
3.2. Covenantal Priesthood

3.2.1 Israel as Covenantal Priesthood

When YHWH declared to the people of Israel at Mount Sinai that they would “be for me a priestly kingdom,” there had been very little prior reference in the canon to priesthood in any form, let alone within Israel. There was, however, a clear expectation that Israel’s priesthood, as it was proclaimed here, was to be understood within the wider canonical context of Israel’s Aaronic and Levitical priesthood which was inaugurated shortly thereafter by Moses at God’s direction. As expressed by Frank Rees, the “priestly ministry as exercised by the caste of priests serves and represents the macro priesthood of the whole nation.” From this point on, the makeup of Israel’s cultic priesthood constantly shifted and changed, and, depending on the biblical literature to which reference is made, various parties may be seen to have been in the ascendancy, and/or on the side of righteousness or iniquity. Yet, Richard Nelson proposes, the overarching goal of priestly activity within Israel is clear: “Priesthood established community, both between God and the people and within society itself.”

Towards this end, the cultic priests of the old covenant had to constantly pass between the holiness of YHWH and the profanity of living amongst the people, so that all priestly activity had to be unfailingly cognisant of God’s holiness which was regarded as “objectively dangerous, something like radiation or high-voltage electricity (Exod 19:21-24; Num 4:19-20), [from which] ordinary people had to keep their distance.” Similarly on Israel’s “cultural map,” the clean had to be guarded and that which had become unclean had to be purified. Access to YHWH in YHWH’s holiness was, therefore, a specialised task which necessitated that the priests, who were made holy at their installation, knew and understood the boundaries between holy and profane, clean and unclean, and

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60 For example, King Melchizedek of Salem, “priest of God Most High” (Gen 14:18), the priests of Egypt (41:45; 46:20; 47:22), and Moses father-in-law, Jethro, as the priest of Midian (Exod 2:16; 18:1). The role within Israel had been fulfilled by lay/family leaders such as Noah, Abraham and Job (Gen 8:20; 22:13; Job 1:5) Alex T.M. Cheung, “The Priest as the Redeemed Man: A Biblical-Theological Study of the Priesthood,” Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society 29, no. 3 (1986): 266.
63 Nelson, Raising up a Faithful Priest, 15.
64 Nelson, Raising up a Faithful Priest, 26.
65 Nelson, Raising up a Faithful Priest, 17, 20.
carefully maintained their holiness and purity, thereby preserving their privilege of passing between the profane and the sacred.\textsuperscript{66}

This priestly access to YHWH, however, was not for the sake of the priests themselves, but rather a necessity for their work as intermediaries. They were “both insulators and connectors for the rest of the community”: they insulated the people from the danger of YHWH’s overwhelming holiness, and yet preserved the community’s life-giving and centering connection with their God.\textsuperscript{67} This communion between Israel and YHWH was maintained by priestly worship in the temple, expressed in praise and music, and in presiding over the feasts and festivals (summarized in Leviticus 23) which constantly reminded the people of Israel of God’s creating, saving and covenant-keeping action on their behalf (see Section 3.1.1).\textsuperscript{68} It was also vitally expressed as the priests presided over the complex system of sacrifices, the detailed meanings of which have largely been lost, but the covenantal principles of which Wenham summarizes thus:

First, God’s choice of Israel is recalled every time an animal, or wheat, or wine, was picked to be offered. Second, God’s demand to be holy, to keep the commandments and so on was recalled in every sacrifice… The total consecration to the service of God required of every Israelite was most clearly portrayed in the burnt offering when the entire beast was immolated in the fire. But Israel both corporately and individually often fell short of this ideal, and under the covenant sin was never ignored, indeed it provoked God’s anger… God the giver of life may take it away from his people if they fail to live by his commandments. This message is underlined in every sacrifice, in that the animal representing the Israelite is condemned to death… the very institution of sacrifice signals the irrepressible hope built into the covenant, that however much Israel sins, restoration and new life are possible if she repents (Lev 26:4—45; Deut 30:1-10): the animal dies so that the Israelite may live. Life in its fullness is God’s ultimate plan for Israel, indeed as Gen 8:21 (cf. Gen 12:3) says, for the whole world, and every sacrifice declares the gospel of hope, that the God who so hates sin that he contemplates destroying all mankind has through sacrifice provided a way of salvation.\textsuperscript{69}

Such sacrifices never “create[d] salvation” but were rather the “means by which people might receive, appropriate and give thanks for that grace which God offers.”\textsuperscript{70}

The overall vision is one of a priest who, qualified by the holiness of his own life (both gifted to him at installation and guarded by him in the cultic and ethical purity of his life), constantly turned in mediation between YHWH and the people. The priest faced YHWH, representing the people in their humble and grateful worship before YHWH’s holiness and

\textsuperscript{66} Nelson, \textit{Raising up a Faithful Priest}, 59, 61.
\textsuperscript{67} Nelson, \textit{Raising up a Faithful Priest}, 85.
\textsuperscript{68} Hanson, \textit{The People Called}, 51.
\textsuperscript{70} Rees, “The Worship of All Believers,” 177.
covenant faithfulness. Then, inevitably, the priest turned to face the people, conveying what he had witnessed in his worship, and representing YHWH to them: guaranteeing YHWH’s good will; presenting YHWH’s image to them; and speaking on YHWH’s behalf in revelation, instruction, and blessing/declaration.71 Having been face to face with the people in their plight, in compassion based on personal experience, Israel’s priest then turned again to YHWH and represented the people before YHWH: the high priest bearing in his breastplate a reminder of the tribes of Israel, bringing Israel to “continual remembrance before the Lord,”72 confessing the sins of all the people over the scapegoat, and interceding for them.73 And so on, over and over, driven by a priestly imperative to live and serve in the gap between YHWH and YHWH’s people, Israel.

This then, is the priestly pattern which was laid upon Israel as a people in the midst of “the whole earth” which YHWH declared to be YHWH’s own.74 They were to be a community which jointly turned to YHWH in grateful, remembering worship; a community which turned to one another and practiced their mutual priesthood in righteousness, justice and compassion which imitated YHWH’s holiness, maintaining their fitness for their priesthood; and a community which jointly conveyed YHWH’s blessing to the world, representing YHWH to it and it to YHWH.

This, on a broad scale, was what living in covenant relationship with YHWH required, yet by the post-exilic period, it was clear that the edifice of the Sinai covenant, and Israel’s attendant priesthood, had been severely impacted, even broken, by the people’s continued transgressions.75 YHWH’s judgement had been evident in the form of the destruction of the temple and the city of Jerusalem, the termination of the monarchy, and the imposition of the Babylonian exile.76 The people who returned from exile had sought to renew their covenant relationship with YHWH through ceremonies and adherence to the Law of Moses,77 yet, even in the midst of the post-exilic drive towards renewal of covenant, there

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71 Judg 8:27; 17:13; 8:27. Nelson, Raising up a Faithful Priest, 86, 87. Revelatory speech disclosed God’s will for the people through oracles (1 Sam 1:17; 14:36-42); instructional speech taught boundary keeping and the ethical and legal practice of God’s holiness (Lev 15:31; Jer 18:18; Mal 2:7); and performative speech (blessing and declaration) “effected blessing upon Israel and validated the effectiveness of their sacrifices” (Deut 27:12-26; 1 Chr 23:13; Ps 118:26). Nelson, Raising up a Faithful Priest, 40-46.
73 Lev 16:21; Ezra 6:10; Joel 1:13. Nelson, Raising up a Faithful Priest, 86.
74 Exod 19:5-6
75 Isa 24:5; Jer 11:6-10; 22:9; 31:32; Ezek 44:7; Hos 6:7; 8:1.
77 Neh 1:5; cf. Exod 20:6; Deut 5:10; Exod 34:6-7.
remained an awareness that “transgression was inevitable and with it the threat of catastrophe.”

Nevertheless, what appeared vital if Israel’s covenant God was to be re-engaged in Israel’s rescue from ongoing oppression was a more assiduous keeping of the Law of Moses, where it had formerly been transgressed. Alongside such efforts stood the hope that, in place of the Sinai covenant, the prophets had foretold that a new and everlasting covenant would be made by YHWH, founded upon the eternal promises given to Noah, Abraham, and David, and, with the fulfilment of Torah, the new covenant would finally deal with the major problem of sin. According to the prophets, YHWH had promised an inward transformation, based on an internalization of the law, and a personal knowledge of and relationship with YHWH empowered by the presence of the Holy Spirit. Such promises held out great hope, and yet, pagan oppression from without and inevitable transgression from within, posed a profound and ongoing question concerning how YHWH might act to fulfil these promises, ancient and new.

3.2.2 Jesus Christ as the New High Priest

Just such an understanding of the necessity of covenant fulfilment and making-new, biblical scholars have argued, formed the basis of both Jesus’ own sense of vocation and how his followers understood his earthly ministry, death and resurrection. Firstly, Jesus perfectly fulfilled the requirements of God’s covenant law and purposes. For him, this did not mean the keeping of the minutiae of the regulations which had been drawn up under the specific context of the Sinai covenant, but rather the fulfilment of God’s intent for God’s people to live in covenant; in perfect love and service to Godself and one another. The sabbath, Jesus could therefore proclaim, “was made for humankind, and not humankind

for the sabbath”; God desired “mercy and not sacrifice”; and those who kept the letter of the law and yet flouted its intended purposes were to be condemned. So it was, also, that Jesus spoke, not of the abolition, but of the fulfilment of the law and the prophets which, in Jesus’ view as represented in the gospels, was coming to pass with his own ministry and the accompanying in-breaking of the kingdom of God/heaven. It was on this basis, according to the Gospel of Matthew, that Jesus repeatedly asserted “You have heard that it was said... But I say to you...”

Secondly, in addition to his perfect keeping of God’s covenant law, in Jesus God fulfilled “his plan to save the world by focusing its problems, through the Torah, first on to Israel and then on to her Messiah.” Jesus’ form of intensification of Torah (“But I say to you...”), unlike that of the Essenes and Pharisees, was to be underwritten by something more to be “accomplished.” Jesus understood himself to be about to representatively bear both the curse of God’s judgment upon Israel for failing to keep God’s covenant with them (and with it the judgment of the sin of the world) and its concomitant suffering, and to experience the final vindication also promised to Israel.

As a result of this complete fulfillment of the law and the prophets, the new covenant, as had been promised, was to be inaugurated. The early Christian interpretation of the meaning of Jesus’ death and resurrection took up this same narrative: Christ’s resurrection was the definitive sign that his sacrifice had indeed fulfilled the requirements of God’s covenant with Israel, and that a new covenant had now been inaugurated. As a result, as had been promised, sins were being forgiven, God’s spirit was being poured out, and the blessing of the nations, promised to and through Abraham, was being released.

By perfectly fulfilling his role in these ways, Jesus had qualified as the perfect high priest: perfect in his representation of God to humanity; perfect in his compassionate

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91 Matt 5:22, 28, 32, 35, 39.
96 Col 1:14, 1 John 2:12.
97 Acts 2:1-4; 10:45; Rom 5:5.
98 Acts 1:8; Rom 4:16; Gal 3:29.
99 John 1:14; 5:19, 30; 8:28; 12:49; 2 Cor 4:4; Col 1:15; Heb 1:3.
representation of humanity to God;\textsuperscript{100} and perfect in both his capacity to offer and to be an atoning sacrifice.\textsuperscript{101} In all these ways “he offers to the Father that worship, that obedience, that life of love in unbroken intimate communion.”\textsuperscript{102} In these terms Jesus’ access to the Father was made complete and eternal. Even more fully, as a “pioneer,” he had opened the way for others to enter into God’s holy presence “in full assurance of faith.”\textsuperscript{103} The veil in the temple was torn in two, suggesting both judgment on what had gone before, and opening up access to the sanctuary for Jesus’ followers.\textsuperscript{104} Jesus’ “once for all” and eternally continuing priesthood “has obviated any further need for either mediating priesthood or atoning ritual.”\textsuperscript{105} Yet, in this access which he opened up, believers too had become a priesthood, whose worship was offered both \textit{in} and \textit{through} Christ.\textsuperscript{106}

3.2.3 The Priesthood of Believers

Their existence as such is explored in the Letter to the Hebrews in the language of service and sacrifice,\textsuperscript{107} and approach and entry into the holy.\textsuperscript{108} According to Alex Cheung, “as the Israelites were all in principle priests through their identification with the Aaronic priest, so also Christian believers, by virtue of their being in union with Christ, obtain a priesthood that is derived from Christ’s.”\textsuperscript{109} The derivative nature of the priesthood of New Testament believers is highlighted in the types of sacrifice which they were called to make: no longer cultic or atoning, but prayerful and ethical in nature.\textsuperscript{110} The theme of priesthood is also taken up elsewhere, with Paul’s ministry to the Gentiles as his “priestly service of the gospel of God,”\textsuperscript{111} as service to God,\textsuperscript{112} and as a form of eschatological rule.\textsuperscript{113} More fully, however, Peter “uses the concept of priesthood to describe the identity of the Christian community.”\textsuperscript{114} According to Nelson, this passage acts in a similar way for

\textsuperscript{101} John 1:29; 36; Rom 3:24-25; 1 Cor 5:7; Eph 5:2; Heb 5:7-10; 7:26-28; 9:11-14, 23-27; 1 Pet 1:19; Rev 5:12.
\textsuperscript{103} Heb 2:10; 12:2; 10:12-25; Mark 16:19; Col 3:1; Heb 1:3; 6:19-20; Rev 3:21.
\textsuperscript{104} Cheung, "The Priest as the Redeemed Man," 272.
\textsuperscript{105} Nelson, \textit{Raising up a Faithful Priest}, 151-152.
\textsuperscript{107} Heb 13:15
\textsuperscript{109} Cheung, "The Priest as the Redeemed Man," 273.
\textsuperscript{110} Heb 13:15; Rom 12; 2 Cor 9:11-15; Phil 4:18; Rev 5:8; 8:3-4. Cheung, "The Priest as the Redeemed Man," 274.
\textsuperscript{112} Rev 1:6.
\textsuperscript{114} 1 Pet 2:4-10. Nelson, \textit{Raising up a Faithful Priest}, 155.
Christian believers to God’s promise and call to the ancient Hebrews at Sinai: both communities have been chosen for covenant relationship and recently rescued, and both are called to obedience, with a task to perform before the nations. It is as a holy priesthood that the new covenant community is called to make spiritual sacrifices, which involve “the community’s ethical conduct and good deeds (1:15; 2:15, 20; 3:1-2, 16-17; 4:19), and their self-denying submissiveness (2:13-14, 18; 3:1, 5-6; 5:5-6).” As a result of both God’s calling and the quality of the lives which God empowers them to live God assures them that

Once you were not a people, but now you are God’s people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. (1 Pet 2:10)

In this context, it even becomes possible to follow Jesus’ example of suffering, not in any sense as making atonement, but nevertheless, as a means of winning others to Christ.

Nelson summarizes his findings on priesthood as represented in the New Testament thus:

Therefore, the community’s collective designation as a priesthood is both a pledge of election and a summons to holiness, evangelism, and the Christian life. The church’s priesthood is not an abstract quality that can be possessed or an office that can be held, but a designation that they are a group who share in common the practice of priestly tasks. Neither ritual prerogatives nor individual privileges are in view, but the shared election, holiness, and responsibilities of the whole people of God.

It is with this impetus that we now come to explore how, with Jesus as high priest, teacher and exemplar, the new covenant communities came to express their priesthood in their worship, the quality of their life together, and the sharing of God’s blessing with those beyond such communities.

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115 Exod 19:3-6.
120 Nelson, Raising up a Faithful Priest, 163.
121 1 Pet 2:18-25; cf. 1 Pet 2:12. Paul also refers to joining in Christ’s suffering as being for the sake of being “glorified with him” (Rom 8:17), for the consolation of those who also suffer (2 Cor 1:5-7), gaining Christ and becoming like him in both his death and resurrection (Phil 3:8-10), and Christ’s body, the church (Col 1:24).
122 Nelson, Raising up a Faithful Priest, 168, emphasis added. I would suggest that Nelson’s triad of holiness, evangelism, and the Christian life, are closely akin to the aspects of covenantal priesthood (worship, the sharing of blessing, and the imitation of God’s righteousness and compassion in communal life) which I have highlighted.
3.3. The Priestly Communities of the New Covenant

According to the authors of the New Testament, in the place of the Mosaic covenant, a new covenant had been inaugurated by the shedding of Jesus’ blood. Such a new covenant, by its very nature (Section 3.1), required a “reconstituted covenant people,” and, in full consonance with this, Jesus lived, taught and ministered from within the community of the twelve disciples and his wider circle of followers, and with the full intention that his stories would “generate a new form of community.” This community was to be a reformed Israel, in the form of “cells of followers” within wider Israel, some of whom would literally follow him as he travelled and taught, but who might also continue to live as distinctive gatherings within their local communities. They were Jesus’ flock and his family.

By the post-resurrection period those who followed Jesus were known by a variety of terms. Most frequently, however, they were designated ἐκκλησία, with the term occurring 114 times in the New Testament and most frequently translated as church, but also occasionally as assembly and congregation. The term was occasionally used in a universal sense and may even have been stretched to indicate a “mystical church” which is “the one body composed of all believers of all ages,” but by far its main scriptural usage was in relation to the local manifestations of that reality.

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125 Wright, Jesus and the Victory of God, 246.
126 Wright, Jesus and the Victory of God, 275, 276.
128 These included: disciples (Acts 6:1-2, 7; 9:19, 26, 38), believers (Acts 2:44; Rom 3:22; 1 Cor 14:22), those who call upon the name of the Lord (Acts 9:14; 21; 1 Cor 1:2; 2 Tim 2:22), and brothers (Mark 3:34-35; Rom 8:29; 1 Cor 5:11; 1 Pet 5:12). Dunn, Beginning from Jerusalem, 8-11. To modern protestant readers these terms (except for brothers) might be read as having individualistic overtones, but the people of Paul’s time would have assumed that disciples followed together, believers believed together, and those who called upon the name of the Lord did so together. In the same manner, it is noted that the majority of Epistles were addressed to church communities rather than individuals.
129 Matt 16:18; Matt 18:17; Acts 5:11; Acts 11:22; Rom 16:1; 1 Cor 1:2; Eph 5:25; 3 John 6; Rev 1:4.
132 Matt 16:18; Acts 9:31; 1 Cor 6:4; Eph 1:22; Col 1:18.
133 Heb 12:22-23.
134 For example, Acts 8:1; Rom 16:3; 1 Cor. 1:2; 16:19; 1 Thess 1:1. Grenz, Theology for the Community of God, 467. Grenz therefore concludes: “As the visible fellowship of believers gathered in a specific location, the local church is the most concrete expression of the covenanting people. At the same time, the gathered congregation derives its significance from its participation in, and as the representation of, the common whole. Each congregation is nothing less than the local reality of the one church. Therefore, each local church is the church of Jesus Christ in miniature. Because the local expression is the church of Jesus Christ in miniature, all the lofty phrases used in the New Testament of ‘the church’ are to be true of each congregation of believers.” Grenz, Theology for the Community of God, 467-468. On this basis, and in the
already had a rich heritage, being derived etymologically from ἐκ and καλέω, and being used accordingly to designate “those who are called out.” The term had been used by the Jewish Septuagint scholars to translate the Hebrew word qāhāl, and its use by the New Testament churches suggests that a connection between these communities and the Old Testament nation of Israel was in view. Nevertheless, its usage by the New Testament writers also suggests that in identifying themselves as ἐκκλησία these communities were, in addition, being faithful to that which Jesus Christ had newly instituted. Most importantly, it signaled that the communities described in the New Testament were “not merely a human association, a gathering of like-minded individuals for a religious purpose, but... a divinely created affair.” The term ἐκκλησία in this way functioned as an image which carried with it a narrative, both historical and theological, as to the nature of such communities.

Beyond this central descriptor, the New Testament communities also took on a whole new set of narratival images associated with the new covenant which were necessary to fully describe and narrate their nature and life as grounded in God: they were constituted by the Holy Spirit; they were God’s household and family; they were the body of Christ; they were the “new humanity”; and the new temple of the Lord/Spirit. In addition, as had been true of Israel, they were designated as God’s nation and priesthood. The church communities which found themselves thus called were communities which worshipped, lived together in love, and sought to share God’s blessing with God’s world. Each of these dimensions of their community life will now be addressed, first separately, in interests of drawing attention to the realities of “churches” and “communities,” I will, from this point on, use these plural forms rather than their more reified singulars.

136 Dunn, Beginning from Jerusalem, 600. Grenz, Theology for the Community of God, 464.
137 Matt 16:18; 18:17. Grenz, Theology for the Community of God, 465. The word was also in common usage in the first century Roman world as a general term for an assembly of citizens, gathered to conduct civic business. The ways in which ἐκκλησία may or may not correspond to various types of such secular assemblies has been thoroughly explored: e.g. Edward Adams, “First-Century Models for Paul's Churches: Selected Scholarly Developments since Meeks,” in After the First Urban Christians: The Social-Scientific Study of Pauline Christianity Twenty-Five Years Later, ed. Todd D. Still and David G. Horrell (London: T&T Clark International, 2009).
140 Gal 1:2; 4:4-7; 6:10; Eph 2:19; 1 Tim 3:15; 1 Pet 2:17; 4:17. Although familial terms are occasionally used to describe the relationship between God and God’s people in the Old Testament (Exod 4:22), this usage becomes far more prominent in the New Testament.
141 Rom 12:3-5; 1 Cor 12:12-27; Eph 1:22-23.
142 Eph 2:15.
143 1 Cor 3:16; 2 Cor 6:16; Eph 2:21; 1 Pet 2:5. See Grenz, Theology for the Community of God, 466-467; and Banks, Paul's Idea of Community, 49-52.
and then in terms of the way in which they were dynamically interrelated in the contexts of baptism and the Lord’s Supper.

3.3.1 The Joint Priestly Worship of New Covenant Communities

As we have already seen (Section 3.1.1), as described in the Old Testament, Israel’s worship was always purposed to have been “uncompromisingly, ruthlessly, monotheistic.” This came to radical expression in Jesus’ own life and teaching, in which he called for “undivided devotion to God, in which life became integrated around its rightful centre by removing all idols and distractions and freeing the faithful to focus on the one ultimate, life-giving Reality in worship.” Such worship, just as it had for the ancient Hebrews, therefore relativised all other commitments and authorities. “Idols” and “distractions” included the search for security in wealth, seeking the admiration and approval of people instead of God, any alternative forms of cultic involvement, the fear of authorities, whether Jewish or Roman, and even family. This latter shift was particularly significant within the Jewish culture of Jesus’ day in which familial obligations could, under normal circumstances, override compliance with other religious commandments and duties. Jesus redefined his family as those who did the will of God, and, in doing so, “intended his followers to inherit all the closeness and mutual obligation that belonged with family membership in that close-knit, family-based society.” The covenant community was no longer to be based on human inheritance, at either the familial or broader ethnic level, but rather on adoption as God’s children, and entry into “the family of faith,” which resulted in new covenant membership, under the Lordship of

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145 Wright, “Covenant,” 68.
146 Hanson, The People Called, 399.
149 1 Cor 10:14-22.
153 Gal 4:6; Rom 3:14-17.
154 Gal 6:10.
Christ. As Jesus taught, and exemplified, ultimately, even the self and the love of one’s own life were to be relativised in the light of God’s being and will, and always with a view to the community.

The New Testament also, however, encompassed a radical redefinition of the God to whom this monotheistic worship was to be offered. Although the term “God” or theos was rarely applied to Jesus in the New Testament, it was used by a variety of witnesses including Thomas, Paul, the writer to the Hebrews, and Peter. In a more thoroughgoing fashion, however,

...the fact of [Jesus’] deity is established by his supernatural birth; his sinless life; his fulfilment of Old Testament messianic prophecy; his demonstrated authority over nature, disease, demons, and death; his claim upon the attributes and prerogatives of God, including forgiving sins and judging sinners; and his resurrection from the dead and his heavenly exaltation.

And, in addition, the presence of the Spirit was recognised as a third divine person engaged in the continuing work of both the Father and the Son. God as three in one was not, therefore, only the object of worship, but its “source and life”: the worship that Jesus offered to the Father in both his sacrifice and his prayers “both originate from the Father, and are directed to the Father.” Those in Christ (“the one true worshipper”) were called into sonship through the Holy Spirit, and that Spirit taught, convicted and guided them as they participated in Christ’s worship of the Father.

The focus of such worship according to the New Testament, like that of Israel, included remembrance, and encompassed the ways in which God had been at work from creation, through Israel, and most especially in Christ. Jesus himself had constantly demonstrated his own deep familiarity with Scripture, and used it to speak of God, Israel’s history and of

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155 John 1:11-13; Rom 9:6-8. As Gerald Borchert points out, even within human families, as represented in Paul’s household codes, the authority of the patriarch is relativised by the Lordship of Christ, as is all human authority within the church family (Eph 5:21-32). Gerald L. Borchert, Worship in the New Testament: Divine Mystery and Human Response (St Louis: MO: Chalice Press, 2008), 135-136.


158 See, however, N.T. Wright’s analysis of Paul’s writing in 1 Cor 8:6: “There can be no mistake: just as in Philippians 2 and Colossians 1, Paul has placed Jesus within an explicit statement, drawn from the Old Testament’s quarry of emphatically monotheistic texts, of the doctrine that Israel’s God is the one and only God, the creator of the world... Paul has redefined it christologically, producing what we can only call a sort of christological monotheism.” Wright, The Climax of the Covenant, 129.


160 Lea and Greffin, 1,2 Timothy, Titus, Titus 2:13.


162 John 17; Luke 22:31; Rom 8:34.


his own role in fulfilling that history.\textsuperscript{165} The New Testament authors then in turn, in addressing the church communities, made references to the Hebrew Scriptures in an "astonishing variety of ways,"\textsuperscript{166} and those scriptures were employed in their preaching and teaching, and were read as church communities gathered together.\textsuperscript{167} Even in embracing the Gentiles, such communities understood themselves to be included in the continuing narrative of God's covenant dealings with Israel and the world: Israel's story was their own story.\textsuperscript{168} Beyond remembrance, however, worship for the new covenant communities also embraced hopeful anticipation. Such hope was grounded in the reality that what had been promised to Israel had now been inaugurated in Christ. This had been Jesus' own expectation,\textsuperscript{169} which had also been powerfully affirmed by God in Jesus' resurrection, by which he had become "the first fruits" of the eschaton.\textsuperscript{170} Everything, from Paul's hopes concerning "hard-hearted" Israel's final destiny, to believers' conduct in the face of prosecution, persecution, and even execution, was formed and shaped by the certainty that, in Christ, their future was assured.\textsuperscript{171}

Both remembrance and anticipation were celebrated in the midst of a present, ongoing and dynamic encounter with God which, by the work of the Holy Spirit, encompassed the whole community. Such worship, as one might expect given the shared presence of the Spirit with all the members of the church communities, no longer revolved around a single human priest who alone had access to the Father (Section 3.2.1). Now, as participants in "a polycentric-participative community," based upon baptism and charisma, each member was expected to bring their gifting and contribution to worship, with the outcome that when they came together "each one has a hymn, a lesson, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation."\textsuperscript{172} They were to particularly value those gifts of the Spirit which "speak to

\textsuperscript{165} Matt 21:42; 26:54; Mark 14:49; Luke 4:21; 22:37; 24:27;
\textsuperscript{167} Acts 1:16; 8:35; 17:2, 11; 1 Tim 4:13.
\textsuperscript{168} Rom 11.
\textsuperscript{169} Witherington particularly points to Jesus' references to God's kingdom. Witherington, The Indelible Image 1:79.
\textsuperscript{170} 1 Cor 15:20, 23; 2 Cor 1:19-22.
\textsuperscript{172} 1 Cor 14:26. See also 1 Cor 12. Miroslav Volf, "Community Formation as an Image of the Triune God: A Congregational Model of Church Order and Life," in Community Formation in the Early Church and in the Church Today, ed. Richard N. Longenecker (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2002), 231. I have substituted the term "baptism" here, for what Volf describes (elsewhere but in relation to the same issue) as "the Christian call to faith." Baptism is the New Testament term which encapsulates the whole constellation of activities involved in moving "into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord" (1 Cor 1:9), and provides the context for the charismata. Volf, After Our Likeness, 225.
other people for their upbuilding and encouragement and consolation.” With Christ as their high priest making the way open to God, and with the Holy Spirit as their very present orchestrator, these priestly participants did not stand alone before the Father in worship but ministered together to him, not just polyphonically but symphonically. They were to come, “with a true heart in full assurance of faith”: not each one for their own sakes, but together, confessing their hope in God’s faithfulness, and encouraging one another in the Christian life. Their worship was monotheistic, trinitarian, and embraced past, future and present, in an array of joint priestly practices.

3.3.2 The Mutual Priestly Life of the New Covenant Communities

One of Jesus’ most damning complaints against the Jewish leaders of his time was that they had separated their worship of God from its necessarily concomitant life of righteousness, justice and compassion, lived out in the midst of their community. This ethical imperative, like that given to the ancient Hebrews, was based upon a requirement that God’s people should live together in ways which imitated God. Now, however, Jesus, in his fulfilment of the law and prophets, had provided both teaching and example as to what this would look like under the new covenant and, primarily, it looked like love: his new commandment was that “just as I have loved you, you also should love one another.” This dynamic participation in Christ, and thereby in the Father, by the Spirit, reinforced the indissoluble connections between love, obedient service, and mutual care. For Paul, such love was “the law of Christ”: it was “the new order of freedom, in

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173 1 Cor 14:1-5.
174 David Cunningham prefers the term “polyphonic,” and recognises that this may theoretically be either “harmonious” or “dissonant.” His emphasis is on the fact that “Christianity proclaims a polyphonic understanding of God – one in which difference provides an alternative to a monolithic homogeneity, yet without becoming a source of exclusion.” David S. Cunningham, These Three Are One: The Practice of Trinitarian Theology, Challenges in Contemporary Theology (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1998), 129, emphasis in original. Whilst acknowledging this, I nevertheless suggest that in this context, the diversity and harmony of New Testament worship are more familiarly summed up as symphonic.
175 Heb 10:19-25.
177 Lev 19:2.
178 Eph 1:4; 1 Pet 1:15; 1 Cor 6:12-20.
179 John 13:34. Indeed, the imitative object of the Christian life had now shifted from God (as represented in the Jewish Scriptures) to Jesus himself (Phil 2:1-11; 1 John 3:4-10, 23-24): “The pattern for our behaviour is Jesus, who loved all the way to the point of death, a fully perfect and truly self-sacrificial act... whereas in non-Christian Jewish discourse the phrase ‘just as’ was usually completed by ‘Scripture says,’ here and elsewhere in the Johannine literature the phrase in completed by Jesus – by what he was, or said, or did, or commanded.” Witherington, The Indelible Image 1:502.
180 John 15:9, 10; 1 John 3:11-24.
which the believer obeys the will of God incarnate in Christ and revealed by the Holy Spirit as a grateful response to God’s antecedent grace (cf. Rom 8:1-4).”

Fundamentally, this required that the communities of the new covenant would take the reconciliation which they had experienced with the Father, and apply it to their mutual relationships: “Christ’s death is also the basis for the restoration of human relationships, since the enmity between human groups has been ‘slain’ by God’s action or reconciliation (Eph 2:16).” The preservation and, when required, restoration of community amongst God’s people was of paramount concern. Jesus laid down a pattern for such reconciliation in Matthew 18:15-20, outlining the roles of believers as they sought to restore one another to fellowship with God and one another, and the church community as a whole. In this setting the church community was given Christ’s authority in matters of “binding and loosing,” and the associated remitting or retaining of sins, and assured of his presence with them. In the power of the Spirit, the church community together was to withhold fellowship/discern what was permitted (bind) or to leave free/permit/forgive (loose), but always with the imperative of reconciliation to the fore. In Paul’s terms, they were to bear one another’s burdens. These practices were of the essence of being a church community because, in the midst of their implementation “where two or three are gathered in [his] name,” Christ himself was present.

For Paul, in this same spirit, there was no doubt that the true worship of Christ’s followers, their fitting and reasonable response to all that God had done (Rom 1-11), would consist of the priestly exercise of offering their bodies, their whole beings, as “a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship” (Rom 12:1), resulting in their mutual, sacrificial service. This reorientation of mind and will towards obedience to God

182 Hanson, The People Called, 440.
183 The Eerdmans Bible Dictionary (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans) s.v. “Reconciliation.”
184 Matt 18:15, 16.
185 Matt 18:17, 18.
186 Matt 18:18; cf. 16:19; cf. John 20:23; cf. John 20:23. For Newbigin, “what is being communicated here is not the revelation of a timeless truth, namely, that God forgives sin. It is the giving of a commission to do something that will otherwise remain undone: to bring the forgiveness of God to actual men and women in their concrete situations in the only way that it can be done so long as we are in the flesh – by the word and act and gesture of another human being.” Lesslie Newbigin, The Open Secret: An Introduction to the Theology of Mission, Revised, Kindle ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995), 48.
188 Gal 6:1-2; Eph 4:1-3. This included the practice of mutual confession which was associated with baptism and initiation into the faith (Mark 1:5; Acts 19:18), but was also described as an ongoing practice (1 John 1:9) which, at least in James, was an explicitly auricular one (Jas 5:16).
189 Matt 18:20. This would become of major significance for early Baptist ecclesiology. See Chapter 4.1.1.
(v.2), would result in the relativisation, as we have seen above (Section 3.3.1), of the individual’s self-interest (v.3) because, fundamentally, “we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another” (v.5). The love and mutuality of the community was not, therefore, dependent upon personal inclination but was structured by its relatedness in Christ. The functions of community members might vary, but each gift was to be brought to bear in the service of the community (vv. 4-8); through love and “mutual affection” (vv.9-10), giving honour to one another (v.10),191 perseverance in prayer for one another (v.12), financial support (v.13), sharing the joys and sorrows of life (v.15), and living in harmony, with particular attention to those in poorer circumstances (v.16).192

Thus, new covenant communities were to be formed through imitation of and participation in God’s love, through reconciliation and in mutual priestly service. It was this background which provided the context for a broad form of governance for new covenant communities. Whist this has proved difficult to systematise,193 certain principles are, according to Robert Banks, evident. These include the “dissolution of traditional distinctions” within the community, such as those which had previously existed between priests and laity, officials and ordinary members, and holy and common people.194 Rather, all were called to priestly service, and all roles were dependent for their significance, not on the office of the one who served, but rather the dignity of the one who was served by all (i.e., God): no one possessed “a particular holiness denied to others.”195 Concerning organization, Paul addressed his instructions regarding such matters to whole church communities rather than to sections within them,196 and, as we have already seen, all were called to care for one another;197 to share the responsibility for the restoration of those who sinned;198 and to enable and ensure one another’s growth in maturity.199 In summary, then, “responsibility for community life lies with every member to play their particular part in the leadership of the community. Rather than being the task of one person or a select group, leadership is a

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191 The significance of this in a society in which honour was a contested commodity has already been noted.
192 Paul also discusses ways in which, as living sacrifices, community members would also extend their acts of love beyond the community boundaries to those who were strangers, persecutors and enemies (Rom 12: 13, 14, 17-21). This will be dealt with in the next section, but this sense of mutuality within the community is clearly a strong priority.
194 Banks, Paul's Idea of Community, 127.
195 Banks, Paul's Idea of Community, 128-135.
197 Gal 6:2; 1 Cor 12:25; Phil 2:4; 1 Thess 5:11.
198 1 Cor 6:1-6; Gal 6:1; 1 Cor 5:3-5. Banks, Paul's Idea of Community, 136-137.
199 Rom 15:14; 1 Cor 14:31; Col 3:16; Eph 4:15. Banks, Paul's Idea of Community, 137.
corporate affair devolving in some measure upon all.”

Leadership was certainly practised in many forms, but all of these found their context in this priestly congregational setting.

3.3.3 The Joint Priestly Sharing of God’s Blessing with the Nations

If such was the nature of relationships within church communities, how were those communities envisaged to now respond to those beyond their boundaries? As has already been indicated, the “rigid” boundary, the *sine qua non* of membership, had, in the person and work of Jesus Christ, been shifted from the realm of human ethnicity to that of faith and discipleship. The overall pattern of the mission of the church was then laid down with Jesus’ commission to his disciples: “As the Father has sent me, so I send you.”

According to Lesslie Newbigin, in the context of the preceding chapters of John’s Gospel (John 13 ff.), the disciples were not only to teach what Jesus had taught, but to become participative bearers of the Kingdom:

> Put briefly, it seems clear that he entrusted the future of his cause to the group of disciples, gave himself completely to them, admitted them into the intimacy of his union with the Father, bound them to himself in the sharing of a meal that, having been part of his shared life with them, would continue after his death, and sent them out to be not only the teachers of his truth but the bearers of that glory which he had from his Father. In them the reign of God would not only be proclaimed: it would be present.

Similarly, with his death and resurrection and, thereby, the fulfilment of his role on behalf of Israel, Jesus commanded his followers to “go therefore and make disciples of all nations.” In this, Christopher Wright finds echoes of the other “Great Commission” given to Abraham which, in anticipation of Christ, states, “Go... [and] be a blessing... and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you’ (Gen 12:1-3). Those from amongst both the Jews and the Gentiles who had been reconciled to God in Christ had now been entrusted as ambassadors with that same message for the world: “be reconciled to God.”

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201 Banks notes that the forms of leadership identified in Paul's epistles occur in the form of function rather than official position. They are not used in any technical or ecclesiastical sense. Banks, *Paul's Idea of Community*, 141-145.
204 Newbigin, *The Open Secret*, Location 650.
205 Matt 28:19.
207 Rom 5:11; 2 Cor 5:18-20.
In all this, God’s blessing was now not only to be conveyed in a passive, ontological sense as it had been for Israel, but with intentional action in the dynamism of the Holy Spirit. There was now nothing to be feared from contact with those beyond the community: the community was no longer on the back foot, “a righteous remnant in the midst of a defiled world,” but rather there had been “…a reversal of the relation between the holy and the profane. No longer was the holy threatened, under siege, or on the defensive. The reign of evil had been broken, and the unholy was in retreat.”

According to the authors of the New Testament, the light would shine and darkness would “not overcome it”; unbelieving husbands would now be “consecrated” through their wives; and good would indeed overcome evil. Church communities and their members must therefore always stand in readiness to welcome new members into the household of faith: the boundary of the household of God was definite and yet radically open to the world beyond itself.

On this basis, and in fulfilment of the church communities’ calling to priesthood, priestly representation provides a framework for understanding how they were to share God’s blessings.

Firstly, the churches were to represent God to the world, through ministries which followed Jesus in his “mission of self-emptying, of humble service.” This representation of God through participation in kingdom building was expressed in three forms. Firstly, the proclamation of the “good news” of Christ was to be carried out by the churches as they followed Jesus’ command to “Go…,” in preaching, evangelism and baptising.

Secondly, and entirely in continuity with such proclamation, church communities were to participate with God in building the kingdom by perpetuating those actions which Jesus performed and identified as the markers of the inauguration of that kingdom (healing, liberating and raising up the poor). Thirdly, God was also to be represented to the world by the witness

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208 Hanson, *The People Called*, 440, 441.
209 John 1:5; 1 Cor 7:14; Rom 12:21. Hanson, *The People Called*, 441.
210 There continues to exist, as there was in the Old Testament, a dichotomy between “insiders” and “outsiders,” but this is now on the basis of belief/baptism rather than being a member of ethnic Israel. Insiders are, as they were in the Old Testament, those who belong within the covenant family of Abraham. This “very particular community” consists of “those who find themselves ‘in Christ’ by the Spirit through faith.” Suzanne McDonald, *Re-Imagiing Election: Divine Election as Representing God to Others and Others to God* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2010), 110, 111.
212 There are a variety of ways of categorizing the various missional activities of the church. I have chosen a framework which is appropriate to the emphases of this project.
213 Matt 28:19-20a; Acts 10:42; Eph 4:11; 1 Tim 5:17.
214 Martin Goldsmith, *Matthew and Mission: The Gospel through Jewish Eyes* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 2001), 92-93. Healings continued to accompany the proclamation of the good news (Acts 3:1-10; 4:30; 9:34; 14:8), the poor were cared for (Acts 6:1-6; Jas 1:27), and the oppressed were to be treated with dignity (Rom 16:1; Phlm 16; Jas 2:15). Graham Twelftree argues that in Luke’s Gospel, Jesus’ so-called social action is limited...
of church communities in the quality of their lives together as they reflected the nature of God in Jesus. In a similar and yet much heightened fashion to Israel as the people of God under the Abrahamic covenant, the churches described in the New Testament were set apart from the world for their witness to and for the world and to show what it meant to live in the world as salt and light, reflecting the reality that Jesus was Lord. What was true for the church communities was to be shared, as far as was possible, with those outside their boundaries.

Secondly, church communities were also called to participate in sharing God’s blessing with God’s world by representing that world to God. According to Suzanne McDonald, “the continuing sinfulness of the covenant community [was] both its reproach and also, through its sharing in the sinfulness of humanity as a whole, an aspect of its representational role.” McDonald proposes that “both Old and New Testament scholarship suggest that Israel and the church [existed] not only to mediate knowledge of the nature of God and of his dealings with humanity, but also to be at the heart of the dynamic by which God works out his purposes in and for the world.” The New Testament church communities stood both separated from the world and yet still in solidarity with it before God, just as Jesus, as Israel’s representative Messiah, had stood in that place for Israel. As N.T. Wright suggests, when the church took up its role as God’s people for the sake of the world, it found that its role was “Christ-shaped,” and that it was called “to bear the pain and shame of the world in its own body, that the world may be healed.” Such sharing and bearing did indeed remind the new covenant church communities of both the privilege of their place before God, but also their hopeful solidarity with the world, so that in both representing God to the world, and the world to God, they came as humble, priestly servants to stand in the gap.

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to his fellow Jews (i.e., those within the community of God’s people), and therefore cannot be taken as a model for social action in mission. I would suggest, however, that this is an incorrect categorisation of how Jesus was transacting with those around him: they were indeed the people of Israel and the chosen of God, and yet were still in need of the salvation which he brought. At this turning point in Israel’s history, Jesus was inviting those who assumed themselves to be already within the community of salvation (John 8:39), to nevertheless enter into his family through obedience and faith in him (Matt 12:48-49). As Jesus demonstrates, those in need of salvation, whether Israelite or Gentile, are the objects of salvific activity in all its forms. Graham H. Twelftree, People of the Spirit: Exploring Luke’s View of the Church, Kindle ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: SPCK Baker Academic, 2009), 181 ff.

215 John 13:35.
218 McDonald, Re-Imagining Election, 148.
219 McDonald, Re-Imagining Election, 149, emphasis in original.
220 See Chapter 7.4 for a discussion of the basis of this solidarity.
221 See, for example, 2 Cor 4:7-12; 2 Tim 1:8-9; 1 Pet 2:18-25. Wright, The Climax of the Covenant, 256.
3.3.4 The Life of the Priestly Community Expressed in Baptism & the Lord’s Supper

As we have already explored, the new covenant church communities as described in the New Testament were called by God to express their priestly work through their joint worship, their mutual lives of love and care, and their joint dedication to sharing God’s blessing with the world in which they lived. This final section will describe how, in baptism and the Lord’s Supper, each of these facets came to expression.

New covenant worship, as was explored above (Section 3.3.1), created spaces in which church communities participated in the life of God; worshipping the Father, in and through the Son, and by Holy Spirit. In ordaining the practices of baptism and the Lord’s Supper, Jesus authoritatively invited those who followed him to enter into enacted forms of remembrance and anticipation. In baptism, those who came identified with his death and burial, and looked forward to sharing in a “newness of life” which, though commencing with baptism, would be fulfilled at the resurrection. In the Lord’s Supper, Christ specifically requested his disciples to “do this in remembrance of me”, and yet also to anticipate another feast to come. More powerfully, however, they were also participative acts in which believers entered into God’s presence and work in their present...

As an act of worship, Christian baptism was distinctively “in the name of Jesus Christ,” or, in abbreviated form, “into Christ,” which “indicated the baptisand’s putting himself/herself under the authority, and power, which ‘the name of Jesus’ expressed.” Through words of repentance and confession of faith in Christ, and baptismal action, believers entered into a whole constellation of effects worked by God:

- forgiveness of sin, Acts 2:38 and cleansing from sins, Acts 22:16, 1 Cor. 6:11; union with Christ, Gal. 3:27, and particularly union with Him in his death and resurrection, Rom. 6:3 ff, Col. 2:11 f, with all that implies of release from sin’s power, as well as
- the effect of baptism in the name of the Trinity

226 Rom 6:3; Gal 3:27.
227 Dunn, *Beginning from Jerusalem*, 188, 650. Allusions to baptism are often missed, particularly in Paul’s writings, because the language of baptism extends beyond the use of the term itself: being “in Christ,” being clothed (Gal 3:27; Eph 4:24; Col 3:10), putting on and off (Rom 13:14; Col 2:11), and death, dying and rising (Rom 6:2-8; Gal 2:19-20; Col 3:1-4) are also recognised as references based on the Christian baptismal ritual. *Dictionary of Paul and his Letters* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), s.v. “Baptism.” In Acts and in the Pauline writings, baptism is largely in the name of Christ, although other members of the Trinity are understood to be involved (e.g., 1 Cor 6:11; Titus 3:5-7). In Matthew 28:19, on the other hand, baptism is in the name of the Trinity. George Beasley Murray, having weighed the various arguments, suggests that this, “in its present form is indeed a liturgical formula”: This on the basis that “it is possible that the Matthaean text represents a primitive tradition of the instruction of the Risen Lord to his disciples, the formulation of which has been stamped by the liturgical needs of the Church.” George R. Beasley-Murray, *Baptism in the New Testament* (Milton Keynes, UK: Paternoster, 1962), 83.
228 Acts 3:19; Rom 10:9-10; Heb 10:22-23; 1 John 4:15.
guilt, and the sharing of the risen life of the Redeemer, Rom. 6:1–11; participation in Christ’s sonship, Gal. 3:26 f; consecration to God, 1 Cor. 6:11, hence membership in the Church, the Body of Christ, 1 Cor. 12:13, Gal. 3:27–29; possession of the Spirit, Acts 2:38, 1 Cor. 6:11, 12:13, and therefore the new life in the Spirit, i.e. regeneration, Tit. 3:5, Jn. 3:5; grace to live according to the will of God, Rom. 6:1 ff, Col. 3:1 ff; deliverance from the evil powers that rule this world, Col. 1:13; the inheritance of the Kingdom of God, Jn. 3:5, and the pledge of the resurrection of the body, Eph. 1:13 f, 4:30.

The Lord’s Supper, similarly, was not just an event of human remembrance and anticipation, but of partaking or participating in Christ. Such participation not only drew the past and future together in the present, but was also, again, the means by which disciples were drawn into God’s own life: it was eating Christ’s body and drinking his blood which enabled Jesus’ disciples to abide in him, just as he abided in his Father. Neither were such events viewed as transactions between individual believers and God, but they were fundamentally participative acts which formed and sustained church communities. Being “in Christ” or baptised “into the name of Jesus Christ” was synonymous with becoming one with both Christ and his body, the church. Baptism was associated, for the most part indivisibly, with the gift of the Spirit, “as the means of placing one in the body.” It was this Spirit who provided unity for the community “in the bond of peace,” and by whom gifts were given, in the context of baptism, “for the common good.” New Testament baptism was “a visible act among a visible community of Christ’s people.” According to Michael Bird, in similar terms, the participation in Christ which was established for the Corinthians through partaking of the one loaf, “creates the horizontal or social dimension of ecclesial unity... the meal creates Christian fellowship.” And, for Dunn, the repeated connection of the bread and cup with the body and blood of Christ points to the fact that “Paul’s concern centred on the bread and the cup as the primary

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231 John 6:52-59
235 Eph 4:3; 1Cor 12:7-13.
238 1 Cor 10:16-17; 11:24, 27, 29.
expressions of the unity of the congregation and as means to that unity when properly celebrated.\textsuperscript{239}

As communal acts of worship, baptism and the Lord’s Supper, were also, unsurprisingly, freighted with ethical meaning.\textsuperscript{240} As the act of initiation into such a “visible” community, baptism was expected to produce an “accompanying moral transformation.”\textsuperscript{241} To repent, as was required at baptism was “to change one’s life, based on complete change of attitude and thought concerning sin and righteousness.”\textsuperscript{242} In its language associated with baptism, the New Testament affirms that baptism was “a moral-religious act,” and that, accordingly, the teaching which accompanied it included ethical instruction.\textsuperscript{243} Ethical behaviour was also exhorted (in the imperative), on the basis of what had been achieved by God (the indicative), on the behalf of the participant in baptism,\textsuperscript{244} and this specifically included the relativisation of all human distinctions, grounding relationships within the community “in Christ.”\textsuperscript{245} For Paul, similarly, the meal that the community shared must be shared appropriately in order to bring their unity to “visible expression.”\textsuperscript{246} It is imaginable, Dunn suggests, that if the Corinthian hosts were the providers of the food and drink, their social equals were being preferentially served, or, if each participant was bringing his/her own supplies, then the inequality in what was received would be even greater.\textsuperscript{247} Paul’s injunction to “wait for one another” might well have related to the fact that those who were liable to arrive later were probably slaves and the poorer classes with obligations to fulfil.\textsuperscript{248}

\textsuperscript{239} James D.G. Dunn, \textit{The Theology of Paul the Apostle} (Cambridge: Eerdmans, 1998), 615, 616, 619.

\textsuperscript{240} To live in community as God’s people, as has been argued above (Sections 3.1.2 and 3.3.2), is to come under certain patterns of conduct for life together.

\textsuperscript{241} Dunn, \textit{Beginning from Jerusalem}, 650. Concerning the exclusivity of baptism, Dunn writes that “whereas it was possible for the individual to be initiated into more than one mystery cult, baptism implied an initiation into Christ which made it impossible to regard membership of the church as simply one among a number of similar or competing loyalties.... 1 Cor 1:11-13; and 10:14-23 Dunn, \textit{Beginning from Jerusalem}, 651.


\textsuperscript{244} See, for example, how Paul uses baptism (Col 2: 9-15) as the context for the “putting off” and “putting on” in Col 3:1-17.

\textsuperscript{245} Gal 3:27-28; cf. Rom 10:12; 1 Cor 12:13. Dunn, \textit{Beginning from Jerusalem}, 738. For Francis Watson, in the case of the letter to the Ephesians, “the fact that the letter as a whole is addressed to all Christians at Ephesus, irrespective of gender, age of socioeconomic status, is an indication that the new, common identity is not just an idea but a genuine social reality, reflecting the theological reality of the eternal divine oikonomia whose goal is the summing up ... of all things in Christ. (1.10).” Such differences were not obliterated, but, for example in the case of gender, “the form of ‘patriarchal marriage’ is maintained: the wife must submit to the husband as to her head. But behind the facade, its substance is subverted and transformed. The bridging of the gulf between above and below by Christ the reconciler is, if not the abolition, at least the deconstruction of patriarchal marriage.” Francis Watson, \textit{Agape, Eros, Gender: Towards a Pauline Sexual Ethic} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 225-226, 234, emphases in original.

\textsuperscript{246} Banks, \textit{Paul’s Idea of Community}, 83.

\textsuperscript{247} Dunn, \textit{Beginning from Jerusalem}, 814-815.

\textsuperscript{248} 1 Cor 11:33. Dunn, \textit{Beginning from Jerusalem}, 815.
expression of what he had done amongst them at enormous cost, they were continuing to express their factionalism and dishonouring the poor. In all this, they were in danger of acting “without discerning the (Lord’s) body.”

It was these very ethical practices which, John Howard Yoder proposes, were a form of witness conducted “...Before the Watching World.” Baptism and the Lord’s Supper were, in these terms, social practices “lived out by the early Christians, under divine mandate, which at the same time offer[ed] a paradigm for the life of the larger society.”

In baptism, the basis of equality, as the churches witnessed to its reality, lay neither in creation (for the perfection of that had been lost through sin) nor in some humanist set of rights, but rather on the grounds of “the good news of redemption.” New Testament churches were called, therefore, to show the world what was possible on this basis by exhibiting, for example, the possibility of peace through the reconciliation of people of different ethnic backgrounds. Similarly, the form of sharing and attention to one another’s welfare which was supposed to be encompassed by the practice of the Lord’s Supper, seems likely to have been associated in Jerusalem with the generous and joyful sharing of the believers’ “possessions and goods,” including their bread, and might well be seen as a major contributing factor to their “having the goodwill of all the people,” so that “day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.”

Thus, across the New Testament canon, a vision emerges in which the communities of the new covenant are called to fulfil their priestly roles in joint worship, in mutual love and care, and in seeking together to share God’s blessing with God's world.

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249 1 Cor 10:16-17. Dunn, Beginning from Jerusalem, 816.
250 1 Cor 11:29. Ben Witherington, Making a Meal of It: Rethinking the Theology of the Lord’s Supper (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2007), 58, 59.
251 John Howard Yoder, Body Politics: Five Practices of the Christian Community before the Watching World (Scottsdale, PA: Herald, 2001). The five practices which Yoder examines are “binding and loosing,” the Lord’s Supper, baptism, the priesthood of all believers (entitled “The Fullness of Christ”), and community decision making (entitled “The Rule of Paul”).
252 Yoder, Body Politics, x.
253 Yoder, Body Politics, 35.
255 Acts 2:44-47.
Conclusion

As stated in the introduction to this chapter, this work does not suggest that this canonical narrative approach of priestly community is the only way in which the concept of community in Scripture might be explored. On the other hand, I have argued that it is an appropriate and constructive means by which to approach the issue. The pattern began to emerge, as witnessed in the Old Testament, as Israel struggled to live in covenantal response to God’s saving action on their behalf. God did indeed call Israel to worship, but this was not to be separated from a life lived throughout the community. And it was always God’s plan that, through Israel, God’s blessing, not cursing, would flow to the world God had created. In all this, the priestly shape of Israel’s community emerged. Yet, under the press of sin from within and pagan oppression from without, Israel failed in her vocation, so that God in God’s mercy acted on behalf of both Israel and the world to fulfil and renew the covenant in the person of Jesus Christ.

According to the New Testament, in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, the new covenant was inaugurated and, together with it, a new and perfect high priesthood came into being. In being and making atoning sacrifice, in his perfect representation of God to the world and the world to God, Jesus opened the way for those who followed him to enter into God’s presence. They did so, this canonical narrative reading of the New Testament suggests, not as isolated individuals but as church communities, whose sociality was both structured by the law of Christ and deeply relational, but also, most significantly, grounded in their shared life in Godself, in Christ by the Spirit. From this grounding, the priestly imperative of serving in the gap between God and the world, which had been initiated by God in the ancient Jewish priesthood and perfected in Christ, was now passed on to these new communities. The story had climaxed but was not complete, so that the church communities of the New Testament are narrated as having had a vital, derivative role to play in continuing God’s work. In the time between resurrection and eschaton, empowered by the Holy Spirit, they were called to participate with God in proleptic community and anticipatory labour, looking forward to the Father’s final work in drawing all things together in Christ.
Chapter 4: Community in Baptist Theology

The previous chapter of this thesis (Chapter 3) explored the canonical narrative of priestly covenant community as a scriptural vision of the communal life of God’s people. The first task of this chapter is to trace the way in which, within the framework of the Protestant Reformation, early Baptists took up this vision of community. Miroslav Volf has argued that this Baptist approach inevitably resulted in an overemphasis on individualism, both in its covenant basis which, he believes, represented an entirely human enterprise, and in its christological rather than trinitarian emphasis:

If personal faith plays a decisive role in the salvific experience, then this exclusive soteriological-ecclesiological concentration on Christ can, strictly speaking, ground only the salvation of the individual, but not the ecclesial salvific community itself. Each person stands directly under the dominion of Christ; what all together are to be remains unarticulated, emerging rather simply from that which each is to be in and for himself or herself.¹

In contrast, I would argue that on both these counts the ecclesiology of the early Baptists was firmly grounded in a profound sense of being called together as churches by the triune God to be the people of that God, so that whilst a certain individualism was undeniably present, the loss of balance which later saw such individualism overwhelmingly define Baptist thought, was far from inevitable. This vision, as will be explored below, whilst deeply committed to a personal form of regeneration as the only basis for membership of the church, was also entirely committed to the recognition that persons who underwent such regeneration were called by the Father into Christ’s body, the covenanted local church, through the agency of the Holy Spirit who continued to work amongst and through them.

It is clear, however, from the description of community in contemporary Australian Baptist churches which was set out in Chapter 2, that such a vision has not been maintained, and that the ecclesial outcomes for such churches are indeed as Volf describes them: they are fraught with an individualism which leaves very little basis for understanding the local church in terms of community as described in either Scripture or early Baptist thought. If such developments did not inevitably follow from early Baptist ecclesiology, from whence did they emerge? The second task of this chapter is to explore the ways in which Baptist ecclesiology came under the influence of particular aspects of the Enlightenment and the constellation of developments which attended it in ways which, I will demonstrate,

¹ Miroslav Volf, After Our Likeness: The Church as the Image of the Trinity (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 196-197.
negatively impacted that ecclesiology. The resulting shifts in Baptist theology, it will be proposed, rather than its original form, provide the basis for understanding the contemporary Australian Baptist prioritising of individualism over community. In making this argument I will seek to describe the nature of such impacts in a broad Baptist context, drawing particularly on the debates within the British and American contexts where the issues have been most fully explored. This description will function to provide a theological background to the current Australian situation in three ways: firstly, by providing a heuristic understanding of how Baptist ecclesiology came under such influences; secondly, by demonstrating the influence of both British and American trends on Australian Baptist theology, and, thirdly, by providing specific illustrations as to how such influences were worked out in the Australian Baptist context.

This chapter will, then, provide a basis for understanding the particular roots and nature of the individualism which has impacted contemporary Australian Baptist churches, but also provide the basis for renewing the original Baptist vision for church communities gathered by and for God.

4.1. Early Baptist Ecclesiology

The motivation behind the founding of the Baptist movement was a specific view of Reformation theology in general and ecclesiology in particular. The English Puritans of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were deeply dissatisfied with the “via media” of the Elizab[898]ethan Settlement, perpetrating as it did a Protestant theology which was still framed within a Catholic polity and liturgy.\(^2\) From amongst the Puritans came another group, the Separatists who, having concluded that the Church of England was beyond hope of reform, separated from it “on the basis of a church covenant and congregational polity.”\(^3\) Separatist objections to the Church of England as laid out by Henry Barrow (ca. 1550-1593) in *Four Causes of Separation* included: that Anglican churches worshipped the true God but falsely because of their use of *The Book of Common Prayer*; that parish churches consisted of “a spiritual hodge-podge” since the whole population was baptised and made members; that clergy were called neither by God nor the local church but by bishops and patrons; and, finally, that the governance and discipline of such churches was by magistrates, princes and parliament, but should be by “pastors and doctors, elders and

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The covenantal form used by such communities served “as an instrument which separated true saints from the world and bound them together in corporate obedience to the ways of God.” It was from amongst such Separatists that the Baptist movement was to emerge.

4.1.1 Churches as Covenant Communities

John Smyth (ca. 1570-1612) epitomised such a route. Educated at Cambridge under Puritan influences, his Separatist leanings came to the fore in his fierce criticism of the state church. In 1607, Smyth wrote in defence of the churches of the separation that “a visible communion of Saint ts is of two, three, or moe Saint ts joyned together by covenant with God & themselves, freely to vse al the holy things of God, according to the word, for their mutual edification, & Gods glory,” and, further, that such a “vowe, promise, oath, or covenant betwixt God and the Saints” was the “outward part of the true forme of the true visible church.” The visible church thus consisted of an exclusively regenerate membership. Further, such churches were formed not merely around a sharing of similar interests or commitments but, based on the key text of Matthew 18:15-20, rather “they believed that their life together was created by the unifying presence and power of Christ, made known to them in and through the covenantal relationship they had embraced with one another in faith.” In this fashion, covenant agreements were used by Smyth and his Separatist colleagues as the basis for the formation of local churches, expressing “the two fold dimension of a contract made by the members both ‘vertically’ with God and ‘horizontally’ with each other.” The outcome was a blending of “Calvinist insistence upon the enabling grace of God and Arminian affirmation of ‘choosing’ Christ,” which affirmed

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11 Paul S. Fiddes, Tracks and Traces: Baptist Identity in Church and Theology, (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 2003), 29. Paul Fiddes has sought to tease out the range of meanings in Puritan, Separatist and Baptist uses of the term “covenant.” This range includes reference to a single and eternal covenant of grace between God and humanity; a covenant between the Father and Son concerning the redemption of the elect; a covenant made by God corporately with the Church or particular churches, and, finally, as discussed here, as the basis for the formation of local churches. Fiddes, Tracks and Traces, 24-27.
the freedom of both God and humanity. This stood in contrast to any state church, which by its “rites, prescriptions and theology,” was deemed to be idolatrous, usurping to itself the prerogatives which belonged to God alone. God’s freedom, thus asserted, must also be reflected in the freedom of human persons to respond to God’s calling. These two freedoms, divine and human, were not therefore, to be seen as pitted against one another, but rather as intimately linked, the latter dependent on the former, and both coming to expression in the covenants of local church communities.

In practical terms, the original covenant adopted by the Gainsborough congregation (Smyth’s fellowship prior to their departure for Amsterdam) took a very simple form. As the act was remembered by one of the participants,

They shoooke of this yoake of antichristian bondage, and as ye Lords free people, joyned them selves (by a covenant of the Lord) into a church estate, in ye fellowship of ye gospell, to walke in all his wayes, made known, or to be made known unto them, according to their best endeavours, whatsoever it should cost them, the Lord assisting them.

Yet, even such covenant based church-making could not withstand Smyth’s drive to follow through on his rejection of Anglican rites, most especially infant baptism in which “the cross signed upon the forehead... answered to the mark of the beast foretold.” Entry into the church, he concluded, must be by believer baptism, and infant baptism, as practiced by both the Church of England and the Separatists, was unscriptural and worse. On these grounds, Smyth’s church disbanded itself, and was then reconstituted on the basis of believer baptism, firstly by Smyth’s self-baptism, and then by his baptising of the remainder of the congregation.

After these separatist beginnings, formal church covenants fell out of general usage for a period during the seventeenth century amongst those who adopted believer baptism as

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11 Fiddes, Tracks and Traces, 39. This comment minimises the difference between the General and Particular strands of English Baptist life, but points to an underlying shared commitment which would finally draw them together in 1891 when the General Baptists of Dan Taylor’s New Connection joined the Baptist Union. McBeth, The Baptist Heritage, 290.
17 Whitley, "Biography," 1:xciii.
the basis of being church. On the other hand, the concept of covenant was preserved as being closely associated with, even subsumed into, baptism: “the covenant-promise between the Christian and his Lord was now made in baptism.” For Fiddes, in this way, “for most of the seventeenth century, then, Baptists clearly thought of the gathering of the local church in covenant terms, even if they did not have the ‘outward form.’” Such an outward form was, however, to be most prominently re-established by Benjamin (1640-1704) and Elias Keach (1686-1701) whose covenant of 1697 (examined in greater detail below in Section 4.1.4) attempted to give equal emphasis to baptism and covenant.

4.1.2 The Priesthood of all Believers

The sense of shared commitment and mutuality engendered by covenant making went hand in hand with the Baptist appropriation of the Reformation doctrine of the priesthood of all believers. Such an appropriation was not, however, straight forward, as becomes apparent in the discrepancy between the resulting ecclesiology of Lutheran and Reformed churches, and those of the Separatist and Baptist traditions. It is necessary, therefore, to examine the original Reformation forms of the doctrine, and then to explore the ways in which these were modified and taken up by the early Baptists. Two issues arise here: the relative significance of the work of Martin Luther (1483-1546) and John Calvin (1509-1564) for Baptist understanding of the priesthood of all believers, and the tension between individualism and community.

Luther’s personal experience of salvation as an individual matter between the believer and God, and his formulation of the doctrine of salvation by grace through faith which articulated it, made such salvation “normative for believers and not mediated by any church hierarchy – a reality that was available directly via the grasping of God’s word by Faith.” The outcome of such a radical reinterpretation of the nature of faith was that the role of the medieval church, with its elaborate sacramental and penitential systems, was

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18 Fiddes, Tracks and Traces, 30.
20 Fiddes, Tracks and Traces, 31.
significantly marginalised, and, in its place, Luther proposed a universal priesthood based on the fact that "we are all consecrated as priests by baptism." In its richest and most radical form in Luther's writings, found in Concerning the Ministry (1523), this common priesthood of all believers had seven functions: all Christians were called "to declare the wonderful deeds of God, which certainly is nothing else than to preach the Word of God;" both baptism and the administration of the Eucharist also belonged to all believers, together with binding and loosing from sin, "to proclaim and to apply the gospel... to withdraw the gospel and to declare the retention of sins;" offering sacrifice in the form of "prayer, mediation, and worship;" praying for one another which is "to go between and make intercession of God," crying out in spirit to God; and, finally, discerning, judging and passing on true teaching and doctrine.

In contrast, in John Calvin's writings in particular and in early evangelical Protestantism in general, there appears to be only passing reference to this form of the priesthood of all believers. The foundations of the doctrine as developed by Luther were, nevertheless, widely assumed and apparent in "the centrality of assurance, the immediacy of the believer's communion with God in Christ, the unmediated access of the believer to the Father through Christ and its corollaries in church practice."

Within this context, Calvin's emphasis, and Smyth's in following it, appears to have focused more distinctly on the "triplex munus Christi, the threefold office of Christ as prophet, priest and king," as the basis of a universal priesthood. As such, Christ was known as eternally present, both before the Father, presenting his sacrifice and making

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23 Trueman, "Reformers, Puritans and Evangelicals," 18.
25 Luther, Luther's Works, 40:21.
26 Luther, Luther's Works, 40:21.
27 Luther, Luther's Works, 40:23, 24.
28 Luther, Luther's Works, 40:27-28. Whilst Luther rejected confession as an ecclesiastical rule, he nevertheless thought it a gift of God which had sustained him. He states "nevertheless I will allow no man to take private confession away from me, and I would not give it up for all the treasures in the world, since I know what comfort and strength it has given me. No one knows what it can do for him except one who has struggled often and long with the devil. Yea, the devil would have slain me long ago, if confession had not sustained me." Luther, Luther's Works, 51:98.
29 Luther, Luther's Works, 40:29; 17:415.
30 Luther, Luther's Works, 40:30, 31.
31 Luther, Luther's Works, 40:31, 32.
intercession, and establishing his kingdom on earth through the work of his people.\textsuperscript{35} The same language is apparent in Smyth’s writings, in which, “a true visible church,” even if it only consisted of two or three people,\textsuperscript{36} came into being in “private persons separating from al synne, and joining together to obey Christ their king, priest and prophet.”\textsuperscript{37} The same underlying concepts and language are also reflected in both the Particular Baptist Second London Confession, and the General Baptist Orthodox Creed.\textsuperscript{38}

Thus, Luther provided the broad and fundamental context for the Baptist appropriation of the priesthood of all believers, whilst Calvin provided its particular lens and language.

On the second issue concerning the Baptist appropriation of the doctrine of universal priesthood - the tension between an emphasis on individualism and community - the issues are again most clearly visible in Luther’s writings. On the one hand, as was explored above, individual conversion and the priesthood of all believers certainly made explicit the unmediated and therefore personal nature of human relationship with God.\textsuperscript{39} On the other hand, however, Christian community was everywhere assumed in Luther’s writing: with salvation as a free gift of God, the human person was freed from selfish concern to build up moral credit, and freed for genuine acts of service to others within and beyond the community.\textsuperscript{40} To “the whole community” belonged the keys of the kingdom for

\textsuperscript{35} Yarnell, “Changing Baptist Concepts of Royal Priesthood,” 236. This, for Calvin, was the context within which he is able to state in reference to 1 Peter 2:9-10: “So what Peter intimated was this, ‘Moses called your father a sacred kingdom because the whole people enjoyed as it were a royal liberty, and from their body were chosen the priest; both dignities were therefore joined together: but now ye are royal priests, and indeed, in a more excellent way, because ye are, each of you, consecrated in Christ, that ye may be the associates of his kingdom, and partakers of his priesthood.” John Calvin, Calvin’s Bible Commentaries: Catholic Epistles, trans. John King (Forgotten Books, 2007), 65.

\textsuperscript{36} Matt 18:20.

\textsuperscript{37} Smyth, "Principles and Inferences Concerning the Visible Church,” 1:267. For Smyth, kingdom actions included “opposition, difference, plea, & strif: as in admonition, examination, excommunication, pacification, absolution, &c.,” whilst those of “the Preisthood [sic] of the Church” were “of concord or vniun, and in vniun spittall to offer vp one & the same spirtuall sacrifice to the Lord;” whilst “the workes of the priesthood are: prophesying, that is publishing the covenant of grace or the new Testament, wherto aperteyneth putting to the seales: praying: singing psalms of praise & thanksgiving vnto the Lord.” John Smyth, "The Differences of the Churches, of the Separation,” in The Works of John Smyth, ed. W.T. Whitley (Paris, AR: The Baptist Standard Bearer, 1915, Reprinted 2009), 1:274, 275, 314.


\textsuperscript{39} Trueman, "Reformers, Puritans and Evangelicals," 18. The revolutionary individualism of Luther’s beliefs is summarised by Paul Althaus: “God’s word speaks to me as an individual, and makes me an individual who is directly related to God. No other person or group stands between us. No one can take my place, no one can intervene and take away the grace and responsibility inherent in the fact that I stand alone and by myself before God. God’s word and that irreplaceable ‘I-myself’ belong together. The word makes me stand before God in absolute uniqueness and loneliness of my own self and summons me to a faith which, being entirely my own, is both genuine and certain. Understood in this sense, faith is an unconditionally personal act.” Paul Althaus, The Theology of Martin Luther, trans. Robert C. Schultz (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966), 53-54.

\textsuperscript{40} Althaus, The Theology of Martin Luther, 303, Luther, Luther’s Works, 25:512. As is apparent from the seven functions of priesthood listed above, mutuality, interdependence and even “mediation” are integral to such universal priesthood.
binding or loosing of sin, the understanding of Scripture, and the discerning of matters of faith. For Luther, Scott Hendrix points out, this did not mean that interpretation of Scripture had become private or arbitrary matter, but rather indicated a joint endeavour, belonging to the whole community, if still led by learned persons. The community was interdependent: the “goods” of Christ and the saints were held in common, and all their burdens, troubles and sins belonged also to one another. Such help for one another may not even occur consciously, but rather simply by living with struggle and suffering in the midst of the community. Christ was indeed believers’ only mediator, and yet, in interceding for one another, they were to “go between” those in need and God. In summary, Luther’s concept of universal priesthood, “expresses not religious individualism but its exact opposite, the reality of the congregation as a community.”

It was the synthesis of these concepts and tensions which were lived out in the teaching and practices of early Baptist church life.

4.1.3 The Worshipping Baptist Community

The worship of early Baptist communities was heavily informed by the vast array of Baptist writings and confessions which were produced from the outset of the movement. These varied in tone from polemical to irenic, and were certainly shaped by the perceived imperatives of their context. They were also written, however, for the most part, in order to affirm rather than to prescribe what was believed, to include rather than exclude, and always understood to be “merely human statements,” never approaching the status or authority of Scripture. On the one hand, confessions did provide guidance as to the doctrinal content of faith, and in doing so indicated the kinds of tracks along which Scripture was to be read, but, on the other hand, those who read them were invited to

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42 Hendix, "Luther," 46.
43 Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther*, 305. For example, “here we not only need the help of the community [of saints] and of Christ, in order that they might with us fight this sin, but it is also necessary that Christ and his saints intercede for us before God, so that this sin may not be charged to our account by God’s strict judgment.” Luther, *Luther's Works*, 35:53.
44 Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther*, 306.
46 Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther*, 314.
search the scriptures for themselves. On the one hand, they promoted careful teaching and adherence to what was understood to be true to Scripture at the time (even at the risk of life and limb), and, on the other, to remain open to what further truth God might choose to reveal. Such were the nuanced balances which these early Baptists sought to achieve.

The content of such worship varied considerably, but there was a consistent objection to the perceived formalism of the Church of England Prayer Book, which took the form of resistance to “any planning, order or liturgy,” and a rejection of the celebration of ecclesial festivals such as Christmas and Easter as “worldly and popish.” Overall the worship of the early Baptists was guided by the “regulative Principle” which had been outlined by the Calvinist reformers and ruled that worship must only comprise those practices which were included in Scripture. In all considerations of worship it was vital that the Holy Spirit should not be quenched, but rather that all worship was to be ordered by the Spirit.

As might be expected of “a primitivist religious environment,” the ministry of the word through reading, teaching and preaching of Scripture was preeminent amongst the ordinances practiced by early Baptists. Although there was some confusion and overlap in the way in which the terms “sacrament” and “ordinance” were employed, Stanley Fowler summarises the situation thus:

General Baptists tended to the former and Particular Baptists the latter, but the two terms were not regarded as contradictory. Their relationship is not that of opposites, but that of broader (‘ordinance’, which included at least the Word and prayer in

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53 Whitley, “Biography,” lxii. Such a commitment was repeated in the 1630 covenant of the JLJ church. H. Leon McBeth, A Sourcebook for Baptist Heritage (Nashville: TN: Broadman & Holman, 1990), 26. Such humility was an appropriate attendant to the flow of discovery which had resulted in the journey of many early Baptists from Anglican to Puritan to Separatist and, finally, to Baptist convictions.
54 McBeth, The Baptist Heritage, 687. See Section 4.1.1.
55 McBeth, The Baptist Heritage, 250.
56 James M. Renihan, Edification and Beauty: The Practical Ecclesiology of the English Particular Baptists 1675-1705 (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2008), 119. This is given written expression, for example, in the Second London Confession. “The Second London Confession of Faith,” 250, 380. The basic pattern of worship was similar to that of contemporaneous Puritans, and included reading of psalms, biblical exposition and preaching (preferably without notes), comments or exhortations by worshippers, extemporaneous prayer, offerings for the poor, and the Lord’s Supper. McBeth, The Baptist Heritage, 91, 92. Renihan, Edification and Beauty, 125, 126.
58 Renihan, Edification and Beauty, 128. In his drive to maintain the spiritual nature of worship, Smyth had protested against even the reading of translations of Scripture which, for him, bore the taint of human intervention, but this stance was not maintained by the Baptists who succeeded him. Smyth, "The Differences of the Churches, of the Separation," 1:291-292.
addition to baptism and the Lord’s Supper) and narrower (‘sacrament’, which described only baptism and Lord’s Supper). Preaching was “the high point” of Baptist public worship, and was, for some, considered to be an act of Christ himself when conducted in his name. Preaching was understood to edify the congregation, providing both knowledge of God’s word, and exhortation as to its practical and moral application. Baptism and the Lord’s Supper also, however, maintained an important place within early Baptist worship.

For both General and Particular Baptists, according to David Bebbington, “the belief that Christ is present at the communion service, spiritually rather than physically but in a way that he is not elsewhere, remained a part of the inheritance down into the nineteenth century.” The stance was one which, thereby, followed Calvinist “spiritual presence” rather than Zwinglian “memorial” lines. For Calvin, this spiritual presence meant that Christ was present and formed into one with the believers who received the elements. This presence and unifying was wrought by the Holy Spirit who “truly unites things separated by space.” Such a sacramental and trinitarian understanding of the Lord’s Supper, pointed to the connection between sacramentalism and a community grounded, not merely in human association, but in divine communion. Calvin could not have made this any plainer: “What stronger stimulus could be employed to excite mutual charity, than when Christ, representing himself to us, not only invites us by his example to give and devote ourselves mutually to each other, but inasmuch as he makes himself common to all, also makes us

59 Stanley K. Fowler, More Than a Symbol: The British Baptist Recovery of Baptismal Sacramentalism, Studies in Baptist History and Though (Carlisle: Paternoster Publishing, 2002), 19. The General Baptist Orthodox Creed of 1678 maintained the language of “sacrament,” whilst The Second London Confession of 1677 employed the term “ordinance.” Yet, regarding the Lord’s Supper, the content of the relevant articles is strikingly similar: the two Baptist confessions both deny transubstantiation, whilst the Orthodox Creed also explicitly condemns Lutheran consubstantiation. Despite the shift to the language of ordinance, the Second London Confession affirms that: “Worthy receivers, outwardly partaking of the visible Elements in this Ordinance, do then also inwardly by faith, really and indeed, yet not carnally, and corporally, but spiritually receive, and feed upon Christ crucified & all the benefits of his death: the Body and Blood of Christ, being then not corporally, or carnally, but spiritually present to the faith of Believers, in that Ordinance, as the Elements themselves are to their outward senses.” “The Second London Confession of Faith,” 293. And, similarly, in the Orthodox Creed, the Lord’s Supper is “the confirmation of the faithful believers in all the benefits of his death and resurrection, and spiritual nourishment and growth in him...applying it by faith, with thanksgiving to God the father, for so great a benefit...” “The Orthodox Creed,” 321.

60 Renihan, Edification and Beauty, 128, 129.

61 Renihan, Edification and Beauty, 129.


63 David W. Bebbington, Baptists through the Centuries: A History of a Global People (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2010), 185.

64 Bebbington, Baptists through the Centuries, 185. See also, Fowler, More Than a Symbol, 17.

65 John Calvin, Institutes of the Christian Religion, trans. Henry Beveridge (London: James Clarke & Co, 1957), IV:XVII:10. See Vander Zee’s comment that by “spiritual presence” Calvin “does not mean that Christ is present only in ‘spirit,’ or only through the believer’s exercise of imagination or faith.” Leonard J. Vander Zee, Christ, Baptism and the Lord’s Supper: Recovering the Sacraments for Evangelical Worship (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 178.
all to be one in him.”66 For Calvin, and those like the Baptists who followed his sacramental thought, it was in God’s sacramental activity that God acted to work reconciliation and community both between Godself and the believer, but also, and inevitably, amongst Christ’s body. As expressed in the Second London Confession, “the Supper of the Lord Jesus, was instituted by him... to be a bond and pledge of their communion with him, and with each other.”67

Regarding baptism, the focus of most of the early Baptist writers fell, not upon the sacramental nature of the rite, but rather, in response to paedobaptism, on its appropriate subjects and mode.68 It was, nevertheless, “a ceremony of great moment” which “could not be separated from entry to the church, for it was understood to be the biblical mode of Christian initiation... a distinct means of grace.”69 Baptism was not, it was clear from the confessions, believed to result in any automatic bestowal of God’s grace, but “there were various assertions in the confessions of some kind of instrumental value of baptism in the application of the benefits of Christ.”70 The outcome, as summarised by Stanley Fowler, was that, whilst there was a range of how strongly such views were expressed, “there was among them a recurring affirmation that the reception of the benefits of Christ is in some way mediated through baptism”: the Baptist writers of the seventeenth century “consistently asserted that God, by his Spirit, bestowed spiritual benefit through baptism. Christian baptism was for them a human response to the gospel, but this human act of obedience did not exhaust the content of the event.”71

In both baptism and the Lord’s Supper, it was thus anticipated that God, in God’s faithful freedom, was present and at work, in Christ and by the Holy Spirit, producing communion with God and amongst God’s people. These two sacraments were celebrated in the midst of the worshipping community as they read and sought to understand God’s word together.

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66 Calvin, Institutes, IV:XVII:38.
68 Fowler, More Than a Symbol, 12.
69 Bebbington, Baptists through the Centuries, 183.
71 Fowler, More Than a Symbol, 32.
4.1.4 The Mutual Life

Separatist polity of the type practised by early Baptists prioritised “the social bond of congregational life.” This was, Stephen Brachlow suggests, evident in three salient aspects of their life together; covenant making, the maintenance of social cohesion through congregational discipline, and the locus of authority in the gathered people. These three aspects of community life will form the basis of our discussion here.

One of the most frequently copied and influential covenants of the early Baptists was that shared by the churches of Benjamin and Elias Keach. The preamble of this document begins with a declaration of their need for God’s assistance in the person of the Holy Spirit, and with a sense of “serious humiliation for all our transgressions.” Their covenant-making was conducted with a solemn sense of God’s presence and of the commitment they were making to one another before God. The basis of the covenant was that “He may be our God and we may be His people through the everlasting covenant of His free grace,” with a view to being “as a holy spouse unto Him.” The following articles were both demanding and yet warmly relational in tone. The community members promised “to walk in all holiness, godliness, humility, and brotherly love, as much as in us lieth to render our communion delightful to God, comfortable to ourselves, and lovely to the rest of the Lord’s people.” They promised to “watch over” one another, not suffering sin in one another and being ready to “warn, rebuke, and admonish one another with meekness,” and yet also confidentially to bear “with one another’s weaknesses, failings, and infirmities with much tenderness.” They promised most especially to pray for one another and for the “the glory and increase of this church... and the pouring forth of His Spirit on it,” and to care for one another “in all conditions both outward and inward.” They sought both truth and unity, and promised to meet for Sunday worship “to serve and glorify God,” and “to edify one another.” The profound sense of community which church covenants represented was, thus, entirely in tune with their rich trinitarian tone. Such covenants, often modelled on others but usually modified by each church community, were made upon the founding

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72 Brachlow, "Life Together in Exile," 114.
73 Brachlow, "Life Together in Exile," 114.
75 Keach, "Covenant of Benjamin and Elias Keech," 177.
76 Keach, "Covenant of Benjamin and Elias Keech," 177.
77 Keach, "Covenant of Benjamin and Elias Keech," 177-178.
78 Keach, "Covenant of Benjamin and Elias Keech," 178.
79 Keach, "Covenant of Benjamin and Elias Keech," 178.
80 Keach, "Covenant of Benjamin and Elias Keech," 178.
81 Keach, "Covenant of Benjamin and Elias Keech," 178-179.
of a church, taken up by new members as they joined, and reaffirmed on a regular basis, often with fasting, prayer, thanksgiving and the re-reading of the covenant.\textsuperscript{82}

Brachlow proposes that the purpose of congregational discipline as it was practiced by the churches of the seventeenth century was “to strengthen social cohesion and preserve the organic, spiritual life of the covenanted community.”\textsuperscript{83} More theologically and fundamentally, however, the practice of congregational discipline was seen to be a mark of a genuine church, ensuring Christ’s presence with them in accordance with Matthew 18:15-20.\textsuperscript{84} There were generally three levels of church discipline - suspension, withdrawal and excommunication - and Renihan suggests that “the churches practiced these forms of discipline regularly, but seem to have done so often with a tender spirit and a genuine concern for the restoration of the offender.”\textsuperscript{85} Offences included laxity in attendance, neglect and/or abuse of family, failure to pay bills, drunkenness, attendance at either Church of England or Quaker meetings, inter-personal strife, and heresy.\textsuperscript{86} Records seem to indicate however, that the churches were far from being “overwhelmed with trouble and full of sinning members.”\textsuperscript{87} Such discipline occurred within the context of a community which met and was at pains, not to coerce, but, together, to examine and persuade so that consciences would be appropriately formed.\textsuperscript{88} It was expected that such discernment together “signified the Spirit’s active presence and blessing in their corporate lives.”\textsuperscript{89}

In addition to the practices of church covenant and discipline, the early Baptists, in contrast with both Anglicans and Presbyterians, placed the locus of authority in the gathered

\textsuperscript{82} Deweese, \textit{Baptist Church Covenants}, 29, 30.
\textsuperscript{83} Brachlow, “Life Together in Exile,” 119.
\textsuperscript{84} The sense, like that of the separatist Robert Browne, was that “the significance of congregational discipline was derived from its role in preserving the living presence of Christ within the covenanted community”: the church must be fit to host the word, the reign and the priesthood of Christ. Brachlow, “Life Together in Exile,” 120. See, for example, the First London Confession which, on the basis of Matt 18:16-20, states that “every particular member of each Church, how excellent, great, or learned soever, ought to be subject to this censure and judgment of Christ; and the Church ought with great care and tenderness, with due advice to proceed against her members.” "The London Confession,” 168.
\textsuperscript{85} Renihan, \textit{Edification and Beauty}, 56. The Baptists did not, generally, maintain the severe Anabaptist practice of “shunning,” but rather encouraged “a tender respect” towards those who sinned, in the hope of their recovery. Leslie James Ball, “Queensland Baptists in the Nineteenth Century: The Historical Development of a Denominational Identity” (PhD. University of Queensland, 1994), 12; "The Faith and Practise of Thirty Congregations, Gathered According to the Primitive Pattern," 183-184. Disciplinary actions which were undertaken were often accompanied by measures of support including days of fasting and prayer and pastoral visits. Haymes, Gouldbourneand Cross, \textit{On Being the Church}, 114.
\textsuperscript{86} Renihan, \textit{Edification and Beauty}, 56-57.
\textsuperscript{87} Renihan, \textit{Edification and Beauty}, 57. On the other hand, for a period in the seventeenth century, there was a great deal of angst around the issue of the prohibition of marriage outside Baptist fellowships. The outcome was “a plethora of discipline cases,” which “distracted the church from more important matters of ministry, led many to leave the fellowship, and caused no end of human misery among those who genuinely wanted to remain in the good graces of the church but found their domestic situation contrary to community expectations.”\textsuperscript{87} McBeth, \textit{The Baptist Heritage}, 168.
\textsuperscript{88} Yarnell, “Changing Baptist Concepts of Royal Priesthood,” 242.
\textsuperscript{89} Brachlow, “Life Together in Exile,” 121.
people. In accord with the reformation formulation of the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers, there was to be no priestly class amongst Baptist congregations, but for the sake of “good order” it was recognised that some form of leadership was necessary.\(^90\) Such ministers as were understood to be prescribed in Scripture (usually elders and deacons) were “appointed by Christ,” and “chosen thereunto by the common suffrage” of each local church,\(^91\) which, though they were to be led by such persons, by no means surrendered their churchly powers to them.\(^92\) Rather, the body of the church, as Christ’s spouse and queen, ruled under Christ her husband, so that the elders who “rule as the stewards of Christ the King, & of the church,” could by no means be said to rule over either Christ or his queen: the power of the elders was to be a “leading” rather than a “ruling powre.”\(^93\) For Smyth this had meant that, though when elders had been appointed they were to “lead and moderate them,” nevertheless, the church body did not become passive followers but maintained a “definition and voice,” and, in the absence of elders, retained the “power to Preach, Pray, Sing Psalms... to administer the seales of the covenant,” and “to admonish, convince, excommunicate, absolve, & al other actions eyther of the Kingdom or priesthood.”\(^94\) For Smyth, in summary, “in respect of Christ the King [the church] is a Monarchy, of the Eldership an Aristocratie, of the brethren jointly a Democratie or Popular government.”\(^95\)

In all three aspects of their mutual life, whether in covenanating, discipline or discerning together, early Baptist congregations thus “emphasized the communal nature of Christian discipleship.”\(^96\)


\(^{91}\) “The Second London Confession of Faith,” 287; "The Orthodox Creed ," 319-320. Bebbington clarifies that “the bishops, or overseers, of the New Testament were identified with the elders described there, and in later years they were often called ministers or pastors.” Bebbington, Baptists through the Centuries, 179.


\(^{95}\) Smyth, "Paralleles," 2:416. This complex relationship between the church body and its leadership was practised in a variety of ways, with varying degrees of ambiguity: “On the one hand, they possessed ministers; but on the other, they often denied that ministers held any particular authority or status. Some tended to maintain a higher view of the ministry not unlike that of the Presbyterians, but others upheld an altogether lower estimate, contending, for example, that there was no reason why a layperson should not preside at the Lord’s table.” Bebbington, Baptists through the Centuries, 178.

\(^{96}\) Brachlow, "Life Together in Exile," 114.
There is debate concerning whether the Reformation movement was inherently evangelistic, or primarily concerned only with, as its name suggests, the reformation of “Christian’ Europe.” It was generally understood that the Great Commission of Matthew 28:18-20 was limited to the Apostolic Age, but first the continental Anabaptists and then the English Baptists re-established it as the responsibility of all believers. The tone amongst Baptists was set by the work of Thomas Helwys who mounted a fierce apologetic for the necessity of presenting the gospel to one’s own country-men and women, even at risk of persecution. On this basis, the period of the English Civil War (1642-1651) and the continuing upheaval which followed it were ripe for the “zeal and increase of the Baptists.” Joseph Ivimey records various disturbances caused by the preaching of numerous Baptists throughout this period, which resulted in a rapid increase in their numbers: “Taking advantage of the liberty which the confusion of the times, if not the disposition of the rulers, gave them, they were not backward in asserting and vindicating their sentiments both by preaching and writing, and also by public disputations.” During this same period, both General and Particular Baptist churches committed significant resources to evangelism and the establishment of new Baptist churches in England and Wales.

With the restoration of the monarchy in 1660, a new period of persecution commenced, but with it, also, a period of continued evangelistic preaching, despite the risks involved. The commitment of those concerned is exemplified by the evidence of the records of

97 Ken Manley, “The Beating of the Baptist Heart": Mission and Baptist Identity," in Mission: The Heart of Baptist Identity, ed. Graeme Chatfield (Macquarie Park, NSW: Morling Press, 2009), 22. On the one hand, Scott Hendrix suggests that, for both the magisterial and radical reformers, the purpose of the Reformation was understood in missionary terms: “Christianity had withered almost beyond recognition, and now the faith, in its genuine evangelical form, had to be planted and cultivated once again.” Scott Hendrix, “Rerooting the Faith: The Reformation as Re-Christianization," Church History 69, no. 3 (2000): 561, 562. On the other hand, Bosch points out that the main Reformers considered that any right to evangelise in a territory outside that in which a minister was licensed to operate, was heavily circumscribed, and that the Great Commission of Matthew 28:18-20 was limited to the Apostolic Age. Bosch, Transforming Mission, 246.

98 Bosch, Transforming Mission, 246.

99 Bosch, Transforming Mission, 246. The Anabaptist view was somewhat paradoxical in that, in the midst of the promotion of personal evangelism, it also tended to stress a discontinuity between church and world which made other forms of engagement problematic. Wright, Disavowing Constantine, 44.

100 In accord with the thought of his time, Helwys’ argument was not based on the Great Commission, but rather on what he saw as a misapplication of Matt 10:23, and a sadly prophetic restatement of Matt 10:16-39. Thomas Helwys, A Short Declaration of the Mystery of Iniquity, ed. Richard Groves, Classics of Religious Liberty (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1998), 146, 149.


102 Ivimey, A History of the English Baptists, 154. The main “offenders” named in the anti-Baptist pamphlets which Ivimey cites, included such characters as “Greene the felt-maker, Spencer the horse-rubber, Quartermine the brewer’s clerk, and some few others, who are mighty sticklers in this new kind of talking trade, which many ignorant coxcombs call preaching.” Ivimey, A History of the English Baptists, 158.

Broadmead Church in Bristol. The persecution in view here was in fact the seventh which the church had undergone: their meetings were constantly intruded upon by informers, raided, and preachers and participants hauled before the magistrates. Three of their preachers had been imprisoned and one had died whilst incarcerated, but, nevertheless, they were committed to carry on their worship services for their own edification, and for the sake of those who needed to hear the gospel. Thus,

In order to which, at our owne Meeting, to prevent Spies that might come in yᵉ Roome as hearers,—and yet that noe strangers, or persons we knew not, might be hindered from coming into our Meeting, whether good or Bad, to hear yᵉ Gospell,—we Contrived a Curtaine to be hung in yᵉ Meeting place, that did inclose as much roome as above 50 might sitt within it, and among those men, he that preached should stand; that soe if any Informer was private in yᵉ Roome as a hearer he might hear him that spake, but could not see him, and thereby not know him.

The responsibility for the spread of the gospel was thus shared, with every member expected to live and speak in witness to it, but also in the sending of preachers and the shouldering, together with them, of the risks involved in order that Christ’s churches might increase. This deeply committed Baptist approach, like that of their Puritan forebears, was based upon a two-fold understanding of the relationship between church and mission: “in the first place, [the church] has been appointed to channel the truth, to preach the gospel. And, secondly, [the church] must grow by self-establishment.” Thus, for the early Baptists, the church had a “double mission character, as bearer of the message and as goal of the mission.”

4.1.6 Summary

Early Baptist ecclesiology thus adopted, but also modified, the doctrines and practices of the mainstream Protestant Reformation. Along with other Separatists, Baptist believers turned to covenant understandings of church, with the concept sometimes being expressed explicitly, and, at other times, understood to be an integral part of believer baptism. In either case, church membership was fundamental to becoming a disciple of Christ, and represented the integration of God’s work in calling and human response in

105“The Records of a Church of Christ in Bristol,” 77.
106“The Records of a Church of Christ in Bristol,” 78.
108The link is affirmed by Manley, “‘The Beating of the Baptist Heart,’” 23, 24.
110Rooy, The Theology of Missions in the Puritan Tradition, 319. See further discussion of this principle in Chapter 7.2.
joining. Such a covenanted community of regenerate members was intended to be the very embodiment of a community-focused doctrine of the priesthood of all believers so that in their worship, it was the Holy Spirit who must lead and coordinate, under the high priesthood of Christ, before the Father. Although each believer was urged to consider Scripture for themselves, this was to be thoroughly shaped and guided by the Spirit-led preaching and teaching of those gifted by God, and the confessions which together, and guided by God, they had prepared. In the other ordinances of baptism and the Lord’s Supper, also known as sacraments, God was at work in the midst of the church community by the Spirit, making, and sustaining them as, members together of Christ’s body, and thereby affirming the divine, as well as human, nature of their community.

In their mutual life, commitment to one another was viewed, again, as integral to being disciples of Christ. Mutual care was expressed in both material and spiritual fashion, with a particular concern to bear with one another, and to seek the restoration of those who fell into sin. In such a disciplined, and thereby, Christ-hosting community, God’s authority resided with the gathered people as a whole: they might be shepherded and taught by leaders appointed by Christ and elected through “common suffrage,” but authority and “ruling power” nevertheless resided with the whole people in whom, jointly, the Holy Spirit was at work. Finally, it was the members of such communities which despite significant persecution, severally and corporately, shared the grave responsibility for the spread of the gospel of Jesus Christ, both for the sake of others and for the growth of the church. The early Baptists did not always live up to such ideals, but the records indicate that they did attempt, with varying degrees of success, to do so.

All in all, Volf’s contention that the ecclesiology of the early Baptists, especially in their covenanting and christology, inevitably resulted in an overemphasis on individualism, cannot be sustained. In their covenanting, whilst valuing the place of human voluntary response, they understood very well that the initiatory and sustaining grace was entirely God’s. In their writing and practice, whilst rediscovering the concept of their priesthood under Christ and the importance of his constituting presence with them, they were deeply aware that their lives were lived before the Father by the power of the Holy Spirit. In their lives together as church communities, whilst deeply valuing the personal nature of salvation, their sense of community in God was consistently to the fore. Their capacity to understand, expound and balance these complex tensions was, I would suggest, an outstanding achievement, by which it appeared that the Baptists of the seventeenth century had laid a solid foundation for their churches’ continued life and growth into the
future. Nevertheless, an unconsidered accommodation to the vast movement which was the Enlightenment, and particularly to the individualism it entailed, was to bring this foundation under significant threat.

### 4.2. The Impact of Enlightenment Thought and Individualism on Baptist Ecclesiology

If such were the beliefs, as outlined above, of the early Baptists, Bebbington suggests that, in contrast, “by the early twentieth century, Baptists held almost uniformly low views on church issues,” and “the individual’s personal experience of Christ was what mattered to conservatives, liberals, and centrists alike.” Such changes occurred in the context of the increasing impact of Enlightenment thought. The purpose of this section is to trace how this alteration came about through the undermining of both local church covenants and the priesthood of all believers as the basis for Baptist church communities, and the impact of such a shift on their worship, mutual life, and sense of mission.

As outlined in the introduction to this chapter, the examples which will be given of such impacts, due to the variable clarity of the theological debates, will mainly relate to the British and American contexts. This, it is argued, represents a heuristic picture of how the impacts of Enlightenment thought worked upon Baptist forms of theology in general and ecclesiology in particular. The connection between what occurred in the British and American contexts and the Australian context is strengthened by the recorded nature of the close relationship between Australian and, in different eras, British and American Baptists. Manley notes that in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, “new arrivals from Britain gladly recognized the familiar when they entered most Australian Baptist churches,” which had “a fundamental British orientation,” but also that, by the mid-twentieth century, “Baptist life for the next generation was characterized by a conscious sense of turning to the United States for inspiration and church ‘know-how.’” Indeed, according to Manley writing in 1988,

> If one were compelled to isolate the major factor in changing Australian Baptist life since 1945 my vote would go to American influence.

> Baptists have shared in the dramatic Americanization (or ‘Californication’, as someone has called it) of our country. No other Protestant denomination has been

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111 Bebbington, Baptists through the Centuries, 190.
112 McBeth, The Baptist Heritage, 155, 172.
so clearly affected. It has seemed at times to be a case of ‘nearly all the way with the S.B.C’ [Southern Baptist Convention].

The impact of individualism on both British and American Baptist theology, therefore, has certainly been of general significance for the Australian Baptist context, and this is borne out by the evidence of individualism apparent in contemporary Australian Baptist churches as described in Chapter 2. Where possible, however, examples will also be given of Australian Baptist theological developments which directly represent the issues raised in this section.

### 4.2.1 From Covenanted Community to Voluntary Association

The form of local church covenant outlined in Section 4.1.1 certainly indicates that early Baptists understood themselves to be involved in a form of voluntarism, with their emphasis on joining together being formed, to some degree, “from secular models of contract.”

Such a stance, in light of the compulsion in religion which continued apace under the magisterial Protestant regimes of both Continental Europe and Great Britain, was profoundly courageous and, from a Baptist viewpoint, entirely necessary. Nevertheless, such voluntarism, as I have already explored and as Paul Fiddes argues, was considered to be only one aspect of the nature of a local church covenant: “The link, mysterious as it is, between the church covenant and the covenant of grace means that human consent is inseparable from the initiative of God in making the covenant in the first place, and in offering to re-make it when it is broken.” The freedom for which the early Separatists, and the Baptists who followed, argued was a freedom rooted “in the rule of Christ.”

Fiddes, however, also outlines the gradual undermining of such a covenant concept. Smyth himself had drawn a parallel (though this was not, for him, the whole picture) between the local church covenant and the type of corporation which was then becoming established as a means of business, and such voluntary associations had been increasingly present in the world of trade and commerce from the sixteenth century on. In 1689, in his *Letter Concerning Toleration*, John Locke took up this thread in support of the very religious freedom for which Baptists had argued throughout the preceding

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115 Fiddes, *Tracks and Traces*, 41.
116 Fiddes, *Tracks and Traces*, 42.
117 Fiddes, *Tracks and Traces*, 42.
century. In so doing, he wrote: “A church then I take to be a voluntary society of men, joining themselves together of their own accord, in order to the public worshipping of God, in such a manner as they judge acceptable to him, and effectual to the salvation of their souls.”

As this focus on voluntarism strengthened, the emphasis in theology, rather than resting on God’s freedom, came to focus on human religious liberty, and such a movement was representative of a shift throughout the nineteenth century from theology (and particularly ecclesiology) centred on God, to that which focused on human rationality and/or experience. By the early twentieth century, such a shift in the understanding of the nature of the local church community was also well underway in the Australian context, with the focus very heavily resting on voluntarism in church life expressed as democratic polity, and human freedom expressed as a pervasive individualism in theology. John Price, a Baptist pastor in South Australia in the late nineteenth century, identified such democracy and individualism in church life as two keys reasons for the appeal of Baptist churches throughout Australia: they had, suggested the *Victorian Baptist Magazine* in 1868, a special mission to the very kind of individualists who chose to emigrate to Australia. These same themes are reflected in the 1941 manifesto adopted by the assembly of the Baptist Union of Australia which declared “the recognition of the absolute liberty of the individual conscience,” and the 1947 publication *Champions of Liberty*, by the Australian Baptist Young People’s Board, which, as its title suggests, heralds such

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120 John Locke, “The Works of John Locke, 12th ed., Vol 6. Four Letters Concerning Toleration,” in *The Philosophical Works and Selected Correspondence of John Locke* (InteLex Corporation, 2010), 13. The gap between early bi-dimensional understandings of church covenant and such human market-place choice, was widened further by the thinking of high Calvinist Baptists, like John Gill, who maintained that the eternal covenant within the Trinity was the only true form of the covenant of grace: the local church covenant could therefore have nothing to do with covenant with God, but must be entirely of human form “like all civil societies, founded on agreement and by consent.” Fiddes, *Tracks and Traces*, 35; John Gill, *A Body of Practical Divinity* (1767), Kindle ed., The Baptist Faith Series (Paris, AR: Baptist Standard Bearer, 2010), Location 5206. In supporting such an emphasis, it was certainly Gill’s concern to preserve God’s sovereignty and freedom, and yet, in doing so, the covenant concept was further undermined and replaced by human voluntarism. Fiddes, *Tracks and Traces*, 43.


122 Although South Australian Baptist polity and theology tended toward the more liberal end of Australian Baptist theology, Manley suggests that on this point Price was identifying what “many Baptists thought constituted their appeal in the Australian colonies.” Manley, *Wooolloomooloo to Eternity*, 1.223.

freedom as the “main principle of Baptists.” In this context, voluntary association was prioritized as the only reasonable basis for church community.

4.2.2 From the Community of the Priesthood of all Believers to Individual Soul Competency

The further impact of the tendency towards individualism on Baptist ecclesiology is most clearly seen in the developments of nineteenth century American Baptist thought. The scene was set by the work of Francis Wayland (1796-1895) who, in the compilation of his influential writings, "brought certain emphases to the fore, reinterpreted some points, and helped to erase from memory many things in the Baptist heritage." Formed by both temperament and the prevailing culture, his view was that “every human being is a distinct and separately accountable individual,” who should live according to the gospel-supported principles of enlightened self-interest. Regarding the church, Wayland’s emphasis lay on the universal church as an aggregate of saved individuals which remained a largely abstract concept. Since “religion is a matter which concerns exclusively the relations between an individual and his Maker," church membership was optional, and entered into entirely on the basis of voluntary association. The church formed by such a membership had no particular qualities which set it apart, but rather Christian fellowship was “but one expression of the general interdependence of man in society.” The Bible was to be read and understood without reference to tradition, confession or teaching, and his tendency was, therefore, “to separate the right of private judgment from the context of the Christian community.”

E.Y. Mullins (1860-1928), President of the Southern Baptist Convention, its Seminary, and the Baptist World Alliance, whilst seeking to protect Christian faith from the negative

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125 This explains the process by which early Baptist doctrines and practices were eclipsed by what have come to be understood as “traditional” Baptist doctrines and practices but are actually Enlightenment distortions of original Baptist beliefs. Wayland was a moral philosopher with little training or knowledge of either systematic theology or church history, but, since he believed that Baptists rejected the authority of tradition, and that the Bible could be read and understood by any individual, his lack of knowledge apparently caused him little concern. Norman H. Maring, "The Individualism of Francis Wayland," in Baptist Concepts of the Church: A Survey of the Historical and Theological Issues Which Have Produced Changes in Church Order, ed. Winthrop Still Hudson (Los Angeles, CA: Judson Press, 1959), 138, 139.
127 Maring, "The Individualism of Francis Wayland," 146.
129 Maring, "The Individualism of Francis Wayland," 150.
impact of modernity, actually furthered the individualism promoted by Wayland. Mullins appealed to experience expressed in the form of personalism which “‘takes the individual and personal life of man as its starting point’ and ‘finds a personal God as the goal of its inquiry.’”\(^{131}\) This, suggests James Leo Garrett, governed his exposition of Christian doctrines, whilst the concept of soul competency “was the key to his reinterpretation of Baptist distinctives.”\(^{132}\) For Mullins, soul competency “excludes at once all human interference, such as episcopacy and infant baptism, and every form of religion by proxy. Religion is a personal matter between the soul and God.”\(^{133}\) In summary, the corporate and theocentric doctrine of “the priesthood of all believers” had become the individualistic and anthropocentric “priesthood of the believer.”

Walter B. Shurden’s small but influential book on the topic of *The Doctrine of the Priesthood of Believers* (originally published in 1946 but again in 1952, 1971, 1973 and 1987) summarises the whole range of these issues as they came to be expressed in Baptist theology. “Who Am I?” the doctrine asks. Its reply is that

> I am many things! I am biblical! I am Christian. I am Baptist. I am believers’ rights. I am your right of direct and immediate access to God through Jesus Christ... I am your right to choose Christ for yourself. Nobody else can choose Him for you. Nobody else can stop you from choosing. You must choose Him all by yourself... I am the very opposite of proxy religion. Stand-ins won’t work. Spectator religion is out. Personal participation is all that counts.\(^{134}\)

Shurden also affirms that the church is “the priestly community,” but by then the die has already been cast and, even in recognising this, the possibility of interdependent and mutual mediation cannot be contemplated.\(^{135}\)

In Australia, as in Great Britain, the language around these issues was less strident, but the concepts were very much in play. The outcome is apparent in Brian Winslade’s recent book written within the Australian Baptist context entitled *A New Kind of Baptist Church*, in which, as his starting point, he seeks to delineate the distinctive principles of Baptist


\(^{132}\) Garrett, *Baptist Theology*, 418.

\(^{133}\) E.Y. Mullins, *The Axioms of Religion*, Google ed. (Philadelphia: Judson Press, 1908), 27. This was, according to Yarnell, “a classic liberal move, using traditional language in a new way” with no biblical textual support, which turned the early Baptist “Christocentric and dynamic relationship between person and community on its head.” Yarnell, “Changing Baptist Concepts of Royal Priesthood,” 245.

\(^{134}\) Walter B. Shurden, *The Doctrine of the Priesthood of Believers* (Nashville: Convention Press, 1987), 10, 11

theology. He outlines how the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers implies that “every Christian has immediate and free access to God,” and that mediatory roles such as those played by an ecclesiastical priesthood, “are redundant.” Winslade goes on to describe the concepts of freedom of conscience, soul liberty and right of private interpretation, “emanating” from the doctrine of the priesthood of believers, but “also cradled in the religious politics of sixteenth and seventeenth century Europe”:

If all Christians are priests unto God, with equal and open access to him as befitting such a relationship, then each Christian is able to discern the Word and will of God for him or herself. There is no need for the church to arbitrarily dictate or control interpretation and belief. Soul competency suggests the right and responsibility of every person to deal directly and personally with God without human imposition or interference... Each Christian is competent to relate with God in personal devotion, study the Scriptures and determine appropriate moral and ethical responses... Moreover, God was to be recognized as competent to reveal himself to the conscience of each person without the mediation or interference of others.

This “traditional” (i.e., post-Enlightenment) Baptist soul competency and the “right to believe whatever one wants,” is qualified, therefore, not in terms of God’s presence and work by the Holy Spirit in the life and influence of the church community, but again, in the individualistic terms of “God’s ability to intersect with the conscience of any person in terms of his revelation.”

It is not, then, that these “traditional” Baptist distinctives in no way reflect scriptural teaching and narratives, but rather that they have been distorted through a particular cultural lens, specifically in the failure to “read” them in the context of community. The ways in which such losses in the communal understandings of covenant membership and mutual and joint priesthood came to be played out in the worship, mutual life and mission of Baptist church communities into the twentieth century is the concern of the following sections.

\[136\] Winslade, A New Kind of Baptist Church. My engagement with Winslade’s work here is on the basis that he describes the theological basis of the broad “traditional” (i.e., post-Enlightenment) Australian Baptist context and does so from a depth and breadth of experience. He has been a Baptist pastor and denominational leader (including National Director of the Baptist Union of Australia). He does not always agree with what he describes as being traditional Baptist positions, but it is his representation of these, rather than his more developed positions, with which I am concerned here.

\[137\] Winslade, A New Kind of Baptist Church, 34. In paraphrasing Alec Gilmore, Winslade appears to agree with him that the doctrine has been distorted, not in the way that I identify in this thesis, but rather in that “there has been a tendency to define the phrase too loosely and suggest that it means that all believers are equal and have the right to perform all functions of priesthood (i.e., of ministry)”; a view which, he suggests, “undermines the role of those called and ordained to such work.” Winslade, A New Kind of Baptist Church, 35. This issue will be taken up in Chapter 6.3.2.

\[138\] Winslade, A New Kind of Baptist Church, 36-37. We see here that God is “competent” to act in this particular way, but does not appear to possess a sovereign freedom to act through the mediatorial, priestly action of others/the church. The same point arises in the discussion of sacramental theology in Section 4.2.3. Human freedom appears to trump divine sovereignty.

\[139\] Winslade, A New Kind of Baptist Church, 38.
4.2.3 From Shared Worship to Individual Act

As was explored in Section 4.1.3, early Baptist worship was significantly shaped by the beliefs which were promulgated through Baptist writings in general and confessions in particular. These shared beliefs had provided the doctrinal and objective basis for joining together in worship. The difficulty of maintaining such a shared basis for worship in the face of the pressures of modernity is exemplified by the Downgrade controversy which shook English Baptists in the late nineteenth century. In 1873 the Baptist Union of Great Britain (largely of Particular Baptist churches), in reflection of its own changing emphases and in seeking to become more inclusive of General Baptists, modified its constitution away from a doctrinal basis to a more functional one; a move which “probably diminished the core of spiritual unity among Baptists and set the stage for the doctrinal debates a generation later.”

At the centre of these debates stood C.H. Spurgeon (1834-1892), who took issue with what he saw to be the down-grading of many doctrines, and a failure by the Baptist Union to address such issues. In Australia, Spurgeon’s sympathisers similarly attempted to use the Controversy to bolster their position against the local Baptist Union and increasing theological liberalism, but met with similar failure.

Comparable changes were also taking place in America, and Bebbington attributes them to the intertwining and mutual reinforcement of evangelical and enlightenment approaches which prioritised the saving of souls and resulted in a non-contemplative, pragmatic ecumenism. In summary, according to Winthrop Still Hudson, “because Evangelicalism stressed the primacy of personal religious experience, its appeal was directed more to the emotions than to the intellect, and the tendency was to minimize the importance of doctrine and intellectual structure.”

140 McBeth, The Baptist Heritage, 293, 294.
141 Garrett, Baptist Theology, 270-271. Spurgeon not only protested against those who actively supported the “downgrading” of doctrine, but was particularly vehement in opposing those who were complicit in “a conspiracy of silence,” C.H. Spurgeon, “Another Word Concerning the Downgrade,” in A Sourcebook for Baptist Heritage, ed. H. Leon McBeth (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 1990), 200. In Britain, the shift to a general evangelical position (with the inclusion of believer baptism) against which Spurgeon argued, was embodied in the Basis for Union adopted by the Baptist Union of Great Britain in 1904. The Baptist Union of Great Britain and Ireland, “Constitution: Declaration of Principle (1904),” in A Sourcebook for Baptist Heritage, ed. H. Leon McBeth (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 1990), 361.
142 In 1892, for example, an attempt was made to have the South Australian Baptists adopt a doctrinal basis, as had already occurred in Victoria, but this was rejected on the basis that it would “bind the freedom of those whose beliefs were found solely in the Bible,” and that doctrine was a necessary but strictly individual matter. This type of failure saw the Spurgeon tradition, rather than being maintained as a stand for doctrinal rigour “Australianised” and limited to “an unashamed, powerful and evangelistic preaching tradition.” Manley, Woolloomooloo to ‘Eternity’, 1:110, 111, 136ff.
143 Bebbington, Baptists through the Centuries, 187.
144 Winthrop Still Hudson, “Shifting Patterns of Church Order,” in Baptist Concepts of the Church: A Survey of the Historical and Theological Issues Which Have Produced Changes in Church Order, ed. Winthrop Still Hudson (Chicago: Judson Press, 1959), 198. Bebbington indicates that this was not initially the case with
favour of the pragmatic, experiential and individual. It is this particular trend which, Bebbington has argued, may be sheeted home to the growing influence of Romanticism within the Evangelical movement which, in general “stressed, against the mechanism and classicism of the Enlightenment, the place of feeling and intuition in human perception,” and, in regard to religion in particular, placed an emphasis on personal experience and “a heightened supernaturalism.”

Such influences were expressed in both the content and style of what took place when Australian Baptists gathered to worship. The major issues which were debated throughout the nineteenth and well into the twentieth centuries can, then, mainly be classified around two interrelated issues; the nature of “spiritual” worship, and the participation of various leaders and members of the church community. Regarding the “spiritual” nature of worship, there were some moves towards a more regular order of service, the inclusion of sung prayers and various other innovations, but many, both conservatives and progressives, saw such developments as part of a dangerous trend which would end in “popery” and/or stifling the Holy Spirit. The associated nature and levels of participation were also debated. Although in many churches the congregations began to say or chant the Lord’s Prayer together and to use responsive readings, for the most part they were “‘preached to, and prayed for,’” and, with the increasing use of choirs to bolster the music, seemed about to lose even their capacity to sing for themselves. There were also gradual changes by which “the older Baptist piety was modified by the revivalism of the Evangelical Revival, for which originally “reason, not emotion, had been the lodestar of the evangelicals.” The association of Revivalism with Romantic tendencies steadily increased, however, with, for example, the desire to see God at work in the world through spiritual gifts in the midst of the cholera outbreak of 1831-2. D.W. Bebbington, Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s (London: Routledge, 1989), 81, 91.

145 Bebbington, Evangelicalism in Modern Britain, 80, 81. Interestingly, Spurgeon is a uniquely enigmatic figure in this regard, being both influenced by the Romanticism of his time but also deeply committed to rigorous theological reflection. Mark Hopkins, Nonconformity’s Romantic Generation: Evangelical and Liberal Theologies in Victorian England (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2004), 2-3. The influence of Romanticism on Spurgeon can be seen, for example, in his reliance on prayer which ‘was idealistic and heroic when contrasted with the more prosaic and practical approach characteristic of the Enlightenment.” Peter J. Morden, ‘Communion with Christ and his people’: The Spirituality of C.H. Spurgeon (Oxford: Centre for Baptist History and Heritage, 2010), 160. On the other hand, his determined commitment to a rigorously held theology was exemplified in the Downgrade Controversy (see above). See further discussion of evangelicalism in Section 4.2.5,
147 Manley, Woolloomooloo to ‘Eternity’, 1:264., Victorian Freeman January (1894). Cited in Manley, Woolloomooloo to ‘Eternity’, 1:272. Bebbington traces the development of church music from an original prohibition of corporate singing due to its lack of scriptural warrant, through to “the revival that put hymnody at the center of worship.” Bebbington, Baptists through the Centuries, 80. The Romanticism of the period also had its impact, with a move to employ, among other things which reflected a heightened preference for ritual, church choirs which, despite considerable opposition, spread to the Nonconformists: “So even where there was no heritage of liturgical worship, no Prayer Book and no Oxford Movement, the form and setting of the service were swayed by the Romantic temper of the age.” Bebbington, Evangelicalism in Modern Britain, 148.
late nineteenth century,” with “subjectivity, a personal devotional note being fused with the old order.”\textsuperscript{148} But despite this, Baptist conservatism “extended into all areas of life.”\textsuperscript{149} By the mid-twentieth century, this was particularly expressed in Sunday morning worship services which followed a strictly set order, and were “solemn affairs,” which were almost exclusively conducted by the church leadership of pastors and deacons.\textsuperscript{150}

It was against this background that, from the 1960s, the charismatic movement began to have its impact,\textsuperscript{151} with, Manley suggests, the outcome being “an exciting participatory experience,” with “worship as a community experience... now at the heart of most churches.”\textsuperscript{152} The results, however, in terms of such worship being “participative,” were perhaps more mixed than this would suggest. Spiritual experience was certainly strongly reinforced, though this, as exemplified in the words of the songs which were sung, was largely in personal terms.\textsuperscript{153} Similarly, prayer was “spiritual” in the sense that it became almost exclusively extemporary and therefore, of necessity, was led by pastors/deacons rather than being spoken together. In both of these developments participation in communal terms was marginalised, with little acknowledgement of community life in song, and with the decline in communal use of the Lord’s Prayer and responsive readings.\textsuperscript{154}

These developments sat alongside those which impacted on perceptions regarding baptism and the Lord’s Supper. Firstly, the ecumenism which followed in the wake of the Evangelical Awakening\textsuperscript{155} meant that Baptists were simply willing to agree with the statements of their fellow Independents on a range of issues rather than maintaining their own grasp on “first principles.” Thus, when it came to their distinctive practice of believer baptism, the traditional issues of subject and mode monopolised their focus.\textsuperscript{156} Secondly, the Enlightenment-induced “change in the intellectual climate” from the eighteenth century

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{148}Manley, \textit{Woolloomooloo to ‘Eternity}, 1.261.
\bibitem{149}Parker, Ball, and Nickerson, \textit{Pressing On} 72.
\bibitem{150}Parker, \textit{Pressing On} 72.
\bibitem{151}The advance of the movement, and the Australian Baptist response to it, was very chequered, with significant, sometimes vitriolic, debate, and great variations in terms of how its practices were adopted or rejected by Baptist churches. Manley, \textit{Woolloomooloo to ‘Eternity}, 2.707-721.
\bibitem{152}Manley, \textit{Woolloomooloo to ‘Eternity}, 2:718.
\bibitem{153}Manley, \textit{Woolloomooloo to ‘Eternity}, 2:718.
\bibitem{154}Manley reports briefly on the liturgical movement which encouraged the use of congregational prayers and was active in the 1950s and 1960s. He then notes that the 1996 NCLS Survey indicated that only 6% of Baptists found such aids helpful in worship. Manley, \textit{Woolloomooloo to ‘Eternity}, 2:721.
\bibitem{155}As Michael Haykin notes, the impact of the rise of evangelicalism from the late eighteenth century also saw a shift from an equal emphasis on each of the three Protestant marks of the church which included the Sacraments, “duly administered,” to the prioritising of the proclamation of “the Word of God.” Michael A.G. Haykin, “‘His Soul-Refreshing Presence’: The Lord’s Supper in Calvinistic Baptist Thought and Experience in the ‘Long’ Eighteenth Century,” in \textit{Baptist Sacramentalism}, ed. Anthony R. Cross and Philip E. Thompson, (Milton Keynes, UK: Paternoster, 2003), 1:192.
\bibitem{156}Bebbington, \textit{Baptists through the Centuries}, 185, 186.
\end{thebibliography}
on, resulted in a pragmatism and rationalism which undercut any sense of mystery in the sacraments.\textsuperscript{157} There was “a tendency to minimize divine action in the event [of baptism],” and a defensiveness as to how God’s forgiveness and the bestowal of the Holy Spirit might by mediated through baptism.\textsuperscript{158} Finally, with regard to the decline of sacramentalism, Bebbington suggests that there continued throughout this period a profound suspicion of all things Roman Catholic.\textsuperscript{159} Any hint of the sacerdotalism and the “sacramentarianism” that went with it, was vehemently rejected, particularly in the wake of the nineteenth century rise of Tractarianism.\textsuperscript{160} Such anti-Catholic sentiment was particularly strident in Australia being “exacerbated by political overtones,” in both the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.\textsuperscript{161} When engaging in such polemics, Baptists were particularly concerned to deny “any magical or superstitious interpretations” (as they viewed the principle of \textit{ex opera operato}) of the sacraments/ordinances.\textsuperscript{162} The upshot, was a Baptist retreat to a Zwinglian memorialism and “much lower estimates of [the sacraments] importance.”\textsuperscript{163} There were isolated Australian voices which continued to raise the possibility that God was at work in the sacraments, but, for the most part, Australian Baptists followed British trends of the period in conceiving baptism as, “an 'ordinance' as opposed to a 'sacrament,' an act of human obedience as opposed to a means of grace.”\textsuperscript{164}

In summary, the basis and expression of Australian Baptist worship in the post-Enlightenment period shifted significantly from the theological, sacramental, God-centred and communal, to the experiential, rationalistic, anthropocentric and individual.\textsuperscript{165}

\textsuperscript{157} Bebbington, \textit{Baptists through the Centuries}, 186, 187.
\textsuperscript{158} Fowler, \textit{More Than a Symbol}, 53.
\textsuperscript{159} Bebbington, \textit{Baptists through the Centuries}, 188.
\textsuperscript{161} Various Australian Baptist writers railed against the Roman Catholic Church itself, and its perceived influence over Australian Anglicans, with Tasmanians being warned in 1901 against Jesuits in disguise who were corrupting the Anglican Church with their Roman rituals. Manley, \textit{Woolloomooloo to 'Eternity'}, 1:200, 204, 432ff.
\textsuperscript{162} Cross, \textit{Baptism and the Baptists}, 27.
\textsuperscript{163} Bebbington, \textit{Baptists through the Centuries}, 189.
\textsuperscript{164} Fowler, \textit{More Than a Symbol}, 87, emphases in original. This idea was particularly promulgated by William Whitley (1861-1947), first principal of the Victorian Baptist College, who, regarding the Lord’s Supper, went as far as to criticise \textit{The Second London Confession} for its “sacramentarian heresy.” Again, Manley notes, Spurgeon’s influence could not carry the day in Australia. Manley, \textit{Woolloomooloo to 'Eternity'}, 1:249, 285.
\textsuperscript{165} The juxtaposition of experientialism and rationalism is justified, I would argue, in that this section demonstrates that the former has become the major perspective on human engagement with the divine, whilst the latter has been the predominant perspective on the presence and work of God in relation to the sacraments.
4.2.4 From Mutual Life to Independent Existence

In Section 4.1.4 I examined the mutual life of the early Baptists in terms of the practice of their covenant life together, congregational discipline, and the locus of authority in the whole community. I now return to these three topics in order to further explore the impact of Enlightenment thinking and its attendant individualism.

I have already explored the way in which the divine dimension of local church covenanting was undermined by an emphasis on voluntarism (Section 4.2.1). This same emphasis was also apparent in the way in which membership of the community was no longer an assumed outcome of baptism, but rather, the choice to become a member became “a later and quite separate decision on the part of the individual and detracted from the initiatory aspect of baptism.”\(^\text{166}\) For Manley, this loss “was in part a consequence of the exaggerated individualism in much Baptist teaching about baptism at this time.”\(^\text{167}\) In fact, in the 1950s, visiting Southern Baptists were shocked by the Australian Baptist tendency to separate baptism from church membership, and the general lack of interest in the local church.\(^\text{168}\)

Similarly, the mutual care which those within Baptist church communities offered to one another was also impacted. The tone of the questions concerning “Church Relationship” asked of prospective members of the Harris Street Baptist Church in Sydney in 1869, provides an interesting contrast to that of the Keech Covenant (Section 4.1.4): for example,

> What particularly leads you to seek fellowship with the Harris Street Church?
>
> The Church is an organization for advancing spiritual life by means of ordinances and discipline. Will you attend regularly to the ordinances, (not forgetting the Weekly Prayer Meeting,) and will you submit to the New Testament disciplines?\(^\text{169}\)

The local Baptist church was now “an organization,” and the warmth of relationship with both God and one another had apparently been reduced to a formal set of requirements.

Regarding the practice of congregational discipline and the social cohesion it had engendered amongst the early Baptists, individualism also had a steady and increasing impact. Haymes, Gouldbourne and Cross, as was noted in Chapter 2.3.2, have traced the decline in a willingness to deal with disciplinary matters, whether in the church meeting, or in any manner at all.\(^\text{170}\) Prolonged absence from fellowship came to be seen as the main basis for removal from membership, and most other matters, with the exception of sexual

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\(^{166}\) Manley, *Wooolloomooloo to 'Eternity'*, 1:254.

\(^{167}\) Manley, *Wooolloomooloo to 'Eternity'*, 1:254.


\(^{169}\) “Harris Street Church Minute Book,” 23 September 1869 (in BUNSW Archives), quoted in Manley, *Wooolloomooloo to 'Eternity'*, 1:254.

misdemeanours, were regarded as beyond the church community’s concern.\textsuperscript{171} This trend through the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries can be linked, according to Manley, “with serous questioning about the church meeting in general.”\textsuperscript{172} Whereas, for early Baptists, such meetings had included a range of activities such as prayer and discussions around the formation of Christian conscience, by the early twentieth century they had come, instead, to reflect the expectations of “men of affairs,” and were more like business proceedings with rules similar to those of formal debates.\textsuperscript{173} Their aim was not so much “to reproduce the pattern of the earliest church but to imitate the methods of a modern corporation.”\textsuperscript{174} The same developments were expressed in Australia by the increasing use of rules of procedure to guide the frequency of meetings, the requirement for a quorum, and the use of motions and minutes.\textsuperscript{175} Attendance tended to be poor, with the most spiritually mature being most noticeable by their absence, and those who did attend being confronted with a preponderance of unimportant business which could have been handled by church officers.\textsuperscript{176}

Thus, in each of the three areas of mutual life - in mutual care, congregational discipline and the shared discernment of church meetings - there appear to have been significant losses to a more individualistic approach.

4.2.5 From Shared Mission by and for the Church to the Movement of the Alone to the Alone

As was explored in Section 4.1.5, early Baptists believed it to be their task to fulfil the Great Commission through preaching the gospel, seeing believers baptised, and discipling them within their communities. The church was to be “both bearer of the message and… the goal of mission.”\textsuperscript{177} The major movement which impacted on the nature of evangelism as practised by Baptists was the evangelical revivalism which sprang up on both sides of the Atlantic from the eighteenth century on.

The English revival is best known in its Wesleyan form, and impacted General Baptists particularly through Dan Taylor (1738-1816), who, “having less affinity for the ‘conservative customs’ and ‘liberal theology’ of many General Baptists and more affinity with the

\textsuperscript{171} Matters of sexual misconduct, in sensitivity to the pain of all those concerned, increasingly came under the purview of the church leadership rather than its congregational meeting. Haymes, Gouldbourne and Cross, \textit{On Being the Church}, \textit{On Being the Church}, 114, 115.

\textsuperscript{172} Manley, \textit{Woolloomooloo to ‘Eternity’}, 1:260.

\textsuperscript{173} Bebbington, \textit{Baptists through the Centuries}, 189.

\textsuperscript{174} Bebbington, \textit{Baptists through the Centuries}, 189.

\textsuperscript{175} Manley, \textit{Woolloomooloo to ‘Eternity’}, 255.

\textsuperscript{176} Manley, \textit{Woolloomooloo to ‘Eternity’}, 1:260.

\textsuperscript{177} Manley, “‘The Beating of the Baptist Heart’,” 24.
‘evangelistic fervour’ of the so-called Independent churches,” gathered together a group of congregations to form the New Connection of General Baptists in 1770.\(^{178}\) For the Particular Baptists, the rise of persons like Andrew Fuller (1754-1815) and William Carey (1761-1834), meant the moderation of John Gill’s (1697-1771) form of Calvinism both at home and abroad, with the formation of Baptist missionary societies and intense activity in various interdenominational bodies.\(^{179}\) In America, revivalism, and the evangelicalism which was established in its wake, “tended toward... indifference to tradition and inherited ecclesiastical institutions.”\(^{180}\) The revivalists believed that the extraordinary work of the Holy Spirit was vital to redemption and took precedence over the formalities of organised religion.\(^{181}\)

This “outpouring of undenominational evangelical religion” was one of the main features of this period in both English and American history, at the very time when Baptist work was beginning in Australia, and it was to be a continuing theme in the new colonies as they developed.\(^{182}\) The constitution of the first Baptist church in Australia, in fact, admitted “men” of different Christian denominations, and the nature of colonial pioneering necessitated “banding together for survival,” so that Baptists across the Australian states were enthusiastic members of their respective Evangelical Alliances.\(^{183}\) Manley suggests that they “happily confessed their evangelicalism” for four main reasons: it demonstrated a capacity for unity with other Christians; it enabled them to share in “vigorous Christian activity”; it bolstered resistance to forms of ritual and ecclesiastical power practised by some other denominations; and, finally, it promoted the adoption of widely held evangelical beliefs which formed the basis of many Australian Baptist statements.\(^{184}\)

Such evangelicalism, as described by Bebbington, arose in Britain from the 1730s and encompassed a movement across a variety of Protestant denominations which has been consistently characterised (though to varying degrees) by conversionism, activism, biblicism and crucicentrism.\(^{185}\) This fourfold framework has been generally sustained in the

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\(^{178}\) Garrett, _Baptist Theology_, 46.

\(^{179}\) Garrett, _Baptist Theology_, 173, 175; Ball, “Queensland Baptists”, 46.


\(^{181}\) Noll, _The Rise of Evangelicalism_, 138-139.

\(^{182}\) Manley, _Woolloomooloo to ‘Eternity’_, 1:10, 207.

\(^{183}\) Ball, “Queensland Baptists”, 65, 72; Manley, _Woolloomooloo to ‘Eternity’_, 2:445.

\(^{184}\) Manley, _Woolloomooloo to ‘Eternity’_, 1:204-205.

\(^{185}\) Bebbington defines these as “conversionism, the belief that lives need to be changed; activism, the expression of the gospel in effort; biblicism, a particular regard for the Bible; and what may be called crucicentrism, a stress on the sacrifice of Christ on the cross. Bebbington, _Evangelicalism in Modern Britain_, 1, 2.
more recent literature as providing a useful tool for understanding such evangelicalism.\textsuperscript{186} It is also relatively uncontested that this movement had much in common with, and that there was even “positive cross-fertilization and interaction” with, its Enlightenment milieu.\textsuperscript{187} This was demonstrated in its valuing of reason and scientific enquiry (of which “experimental religion” was thought to be an appropriate object),\textsuperscript{188} an optimism concerning human progress (albeit based primarily on God’s rather than humanity’s capacity),\textsuperscript{189} a pragmatism which emphasised social relevance,\textsuperscript{190} and a commitment to “human benevolence and philanthropy” which was translated into “Evangelical humanitarianism.”\textsuperscript{191} On the other hand, other scholars have contested and Bebbington has conceded, evangelical activism, especially in the form of evangelism, lay more in continuity with evangelicalism’s Puritan roots than Evangelicalism in Modern Britain had allowed.\textsuperscript{192} Even this brief overview would suggest that there was indeed much in common between many of the early Australian Baptists and others who regarded themselves as evangelicals. The very pragmatism which is noted above inclined such Baptists to band together with others, and, in this, there was a strong tendency to emphasise what was held in common rather than what was distinctively Baptist – particularly in the area of a highly valued regenerate ecclesiology, believer baptism and covenanted communities.

The difficulty attendant on such evangelicalism with regard to ecclesiology, as outlined by Stanley Grenz, was its “parachurchicity,” which was modelled on the Baptist missionary voluntary societies mentioned above. This development meant that “the evangelical ethos is embodied in a variety of organizations and ‘ministries’ that exist alongside of the ecclesiastical structures within which evangelicals hold membership”: the local church itself, although being paid lip-service, became almost entirely irrelevant.\textsuperscript{193} The emphasis on the personal experience of regeneration appeared to relegate the local church to a place of less importance than it had previously held, particularly in light of the fact that

\textsuperscript{188} Haykin, “Evangelicalism and the Enlightenment,” 40, 41, 43.
\textsuperscript{189} Haykin, “Evangelicalism and the Enlightenment,” 43-44.
\textsuperscript{190} Haykin, “Evangelicalism and the Enlightenment,” 44-45.
\textsuperscript{191} Haykin, “Evangelicalism and the Enlightenment,” 46.
\textsuperscript{193} Stanley J. Grenz, Renewing the Center: Evangelical Theology in a Post-Theological Era (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2000), 288, 289, 290, 294.
such converts experienced a more heightened sense of fellowship with those of similar experience from other denominations than they did with the nominal members of their own local churches.\textsuperscript{194} Membership of the entirely regenerate universal church was, in such a context, of far greater significance, than membership of the ordinary, earth-bound and flawed, local expression of it, which, at the extreme of this view, became entirely unnecessary. For Grenz, the outcome was that, in this context, “if the visible church is soteriologically irrelevant, participation in it can quickly become, at best, motivated more by pragmatic concerns than by a sense of necessity, and at worst, merely a matter of personal preference.”\textsuperscript{195}

The evangelism which is absolutely central to such evangelical theology came, therefore, to be carried out for the sake of the individual before God, with a secondary choice as to whether or not to enter into actual fellowship with other believers. It occurred, therefore, in great contrast to the efforts of the early Baptists, with little reference to its being either by or for the local church.

\textbf{4.2.6 Summary}

Enlightenment thought in general, and individualism in particular, had wide-reaching effects on Baptist ecclesiology in both theology and practice. Local church covenants, which had been understood to have both divine and human dimensions, came to represent, almost exclusively, a form of church based entirely on voluntary and, eventually, optional, association. The prioritising of personal judgment and soul competency over against the communal practice of the priesthood of believers, made, in the famous words of Hudson, “every man’s hat his own church.”\textsuperscript{196} Personal experience, rather than shared beliefs, came increasingly to shape worship. On the other hand, the experience of the shared mystery of the sacraments, founded on God’s active presence, was replaced by individualistic rationalism in the form of Zwinglian memorialism. The interweaving of belief and worship which had provided a firm fabric for church life was thus unravelled from both ends.

In their life together, Baptist churches from the eighteenth century on, found their regulating principle, not so much in Christian love and a mutual responsibility to maintain their churches as communities fit to host Christ in his three-fold ministry, but in respect for their own and one another’s rights as competent individuals whose judgement was

\textsuperscript{194} Grenz, \textit{Renewing the Center}, 291, 292.
\textsuperscript{195} Grenz, \textit{Renewing the Center}, 299.
\textsuperscript{196} Hudson, "Shifting Patterns of Church Order," 216.
sovereign. Formative teaching and discipline were heavily circumscribed in light of such a priority. Similarly, there was a failure to perceive the particular work of the Holy Spirit in the midst of God’s gathered people in the local church, and the authority of the discerning congregational meeting was either transmogrified into a democratic business meeting, or surrendered to a representative leadership. Finally, mission, rather than being by and for the church, became an end point in itself for the sake of saving individual souls who came into their own isolated relationships with Christ.

Conclusion

This is, of course, to significantly overstate the case, in at least some times and places: many Australian Baptist churches continued, and continue still, to practice the considered, passionate and warm tone of early Baptist ecclesiology. Nevertheless, it appears reasonable to suggest that an unconsidered accommodation to a whole range of Enlightenment “isms” (individualism, rationalism, experientialism, ecumenism, pragmatism and evangelicalism) has not only significantly modified Baptist ecclesiology as it was understood and practised in its first century, but has radically undermined the basis of that ecclesiology.  

The change is perhaps best summarised as a shift in emphasis from the theocentric to the anthropocentric, and from God’s sovereign yet faithful freedom to human religious liberty and competence. Such a shift has inevitably altered the very basis on which many Baptist churches understand themselves to exist and function, both in relationship with God and, within such communities, with one another. As has already been discussed in Chapter 2 (Community in Australian Baptist Churches), the individualism of Australians in general and Australian Baptists in particular is perhaps less vehement than that of their American cousins, and yet, in its own way, no less pervasive and persistent. The conclusions which have been drawn concerning post-Enlightenment Baptist ecclesiology here are consonant with the findings of that descriptive theology.

As was outlined in the introduction to this chapter, Miroslav Volf has argued that the seeds of such distortions were nascent in the very beginnings of Baptist ecclesiology. In contrast, I would argue that the case which I have outlined above indicates that the problem lay in a significant distortion of those beginnings which occurred under a constellation of pressures from the eighteenth century on. For the early Baptists, local church covenants expressed a

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197 I acknowledge that the Enlightenment had other impacts upon Christian belief and practice which lie outside the focus of this thesis, and which may be viewed far more positively. It is the adoption of the particular issues which I have identified here, without due consideration to the ways in which they fundamentally distorted Baptist ecclesiology, which is of concern in this work.
keen awareness that they stood both in relationship with a triune God and with one another, and that, whilst Smyth’s writings certainly focused on Christ’s headship of church communities, there was a keen awareness of the role of the Holy Spirit in creating and sustaining their fellowship with one another before the Father. In contrast, as Hudson puts it:

To the extent that Baptists were to develop an apologetic for their church life during the early decades of the twentieth century, it was to be on the basis of the highly individualistic principle. It has become increasingly apparent that this principle was derived from the general cultural and religious climate of the nineteenth century rather than from any serious study of the Bible.  

... Or, I would add, from any sense of their own Baptist heritage. On this basis, it appears that there is a rich seam of resources in early Baptist ecclesiology which stands ready for mining and application, in support of Scripture, to articulate the nature of Baptist church communities in the contemporary Australian context. The beginnings of such a movement are already discernible elsewhere; in the U.K., in the form of the discussion of local church covenants and sacramental theology, and in the U.S.A., after the fashion of the so-called Bapifesto. The vision of early Baptist ecclesiology, as it was formed according to the scriptural narrative of covenantal priesthood, will now be applied to the particular issues of the contemporary Australian Baptist context, thereby shaping the constructive work of the next part of this thesis.

198 Hudson, "Shifting Patterns of Church Order," 215.
Part D: A Systematic Practical Theology
Introducing Part D

The descriptive theology of community in contemporary Australian Baptist churches (Chapter 2) raised issues concerning four specific examples of the ways in which individualism is at work within those communities: a strong reliance on a demotic discourse of membership/belonging as destructured relationality; a deep ambivalence around boundary issues; a decline in influence of members on their community and of church communities on their members; and the loss of shared narratives, particularly concerning the nature of such communities. These issues exemplify a context in which individualism continues to be prioritised over community. The historical theology of Chapters 3 and 4, sought to provide a scriptural and historical-theological Baptist context in which to consider these issues. Firstly, in Chapter 3, a canonical narrative reading of Scripture reaffirmed that community is central to God’s purposes for humanity. Such a reading, it was proposed, might be expressed as God’s covenant calling to communities of God’s people to act in joint and mutual priesthood before both God and the world. Secondly, in Chapter 4, this particular narrative of Christian community was explored from a historical-theological Baptist perspective. This chapter identified the early Baptist commitment to such a form of community, but also encompassed its post-Enlightenment distortion and attenuation. The issues raised in the descriptive theology were identified as having their roots in this focus on individualism and the consequent loss of a sense of community.

We now come to the constructive part of this exercise in practical theology; the development of a “systematic theology” which seeks to bring together “the vision implicit in contemporary practices [Chapter 2] and the vision implied in the practices of the normative Christian texts [Chapters 3 and 4].”¹ In what ways, this movement asks, are current practices validated or challenged by such an informed reading of Scripture and the Baptist tradition? How are the issues raised in the descriptive theology of Chapter 2 to be addressed? And what old or new practices might be re/discovered or re/emphasised as a result? This section consists of four chapters which explore these issues in relation to worship, life together, the sharing of God’s blessing, and the way in which these come together in the sacraments of baptism and the Lord’s Supper. In this process, each of the issues raised in the descriptive theology (the dominance of the demotic discourse, ambivalence concerning boundaries, the decline in influence within the community, and

¹ Browning, A Fundamental Practical Theology, 51.
the loss of shared narratives of community), is addressed. Most centrally, the practical implications and applications of a shared narrative of community in the form of joint and mutual covenantal priesthood are explored and developed.
Chapter 5: Renewing Covenant Community in Joint Priestly Worship

The impact of an unconsidered accommodation to Enlightenment individualism on Baptist theology in general, and on Australian Baptist churches more specifically (Chapters 2 and 4.2), has, I have argued, resulted in the attenuation of the ecclesially grounded community life of those churches. There is no doubt that such churches strongly express a range of evangelical beliefs and engage in many practices relevant to these. In comparison with other mainstream protestant denominations, they also experience some success measured by both numerical maintenance/growth and levels of participation. Many of them promote a form of community which is relationally warm, welcoming and engaging. Yet, the normative scriptural text and the early Baptist engagement with this, suggest that such a broadly evangelical approach entertains individualism in a way which fails to grasp the primacy of the presence and action of God who makes and keeps covenant, and the significance of the local church communities which result from that presence and action.

This chapter seeks to explore how the scriptural and early Baptist understandings and practices around the worshipping community address these developments: firstly, how the scriptural concept of covenant might again be envisaged, as it was for the early Baptists, as providing the context for such communities and their worship; secondly, how such covenantal understandings inform issues around membership of and belonging to such worshipping communities; and, thirdly, how such understandings come to expression in the worship of these communities as joint and priestly practices, in both subjective and objective mode, encompassing past, present and future, and in corporate confession. In doing so, current practices which express and engender individualism over community are challenged, and possible responses to them are outlined.\(^2\) Throughout, issues relevant to discourses of membership/belonging, church community boundaries, and the loss of shared narratives of community are highlighted.

\(^2\) Worship in the forms of believer baptism and the Lord’s Supper is addressed in Chapter 8.
5.1. Covenant as Context

The community of God’s people as borne witness to in the canonical narrative of covenantal priesthood (Chapter 3), and as retold and practised by the early Baptists (Chapter 4.1), stands in sharp contrast to the ecclesiology and ecclesial practices (or lack thereof) which emerged under the influence of Enlightenment thought and its concomitant developments of individualism, rationalism, experientialism, ecumenism, pragmatism and evangelicalism (Chapter 4.2). At its heart, this contrast concerns whether Christian community is a purely human and social phenomenon expressed in voluntary association, or whether, though it is indeed human and social, it is primarily grounded in God’s own being as Father, Son and Holy Spirit, who calls, creates and sustains such community in the context of covenant. The response here is to affirm this latter proposition so that there is indeed a “spiritual bond” which, rather than being a side-effect of emotional connection, is the primary basis for the church community (Chapter 2.2).³

As was discussed in Chapter 4.1.1, for the early Baptists, the human freedom which was expressed in the principle of voluntary association was derived from and secondary to the freedom of God to call God’s people, without the constraints laid upon Godself or God’s people by the “rites, prescriptions and theology” of a state church.⁴ It was this subtle balance of freedoms which the early Baptists achieved in their ecclesiology: God, in God’s freedom, calls the church into being, and believers respond out of their human freedom, voluntarily joining themselves together in a particular local expression of that church, according to that call. By this account, voluntary association is a priceless human freedom, but it is unable to sustain the essential being of the church which, both scripturally and theologically, is firstly and foremostly constituted by God’s covenant calling.

Failure to recognise this ordering of priorities, and even more problematically, the complete elimination of the recognition of God’s initiative through an over-emphasis on voluntary association, poses three major difficulties for contemporary Australian Baptist church communities which must be countered by the re-prioritisation of God’s triune covenant calling and sustaining relationship with the church community.

Firstly, as was discussed in Chapter 2.1, with contemporary participation in the local church reduced to the level of market place choice in a pluralist, consumer society, such participation is, in Christian terms, significantly devalued. As a whole category, decision-

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⁴ Thompson, "Sacraments and Religious Liberty," 44.
making is degraded as an activity by the sheer quantity of choices to be made each day. Choices around belief and practice are then seen to be just one more form of choice to be made out of many legitimate possibilities. According to such cultural norms, such decisions are relatively unimportant and impact only upon those making them: they are simply matters of personal preference. On the other hand, if participation in the local church is a response to a personal calling by the God who is the creator, redeemer and sustainer of the universe, and who has a specific part for believers to play in such a church community, then the significance of such choices is entirely revalorised. The issue then becomes one of discernment and obedience – two of the central tasks of the Christian life of discipleship concerning Christ’s body, the church, for which he has given his life. Choices concerning participation in the local church thereby become matters of great importance, concerning the kind of radical discipleship obedience required by covenant with God, modelled by Jesus Christ, and enabled by the Spirit of God, and the individual thereby comes to know herself as “the summoned self, defined by covenantal community loyalties and relationships.”

Secondly, failure to recognise the covenanted church community as a participative expression of God’s very nature undermines the necessity that an actual, social, embodied and organised community should exist. The emphasis in such a case tends to devolve to the believer’s place in a disembodied conglomeration of saved souls, and the evangelical priority is membership of this abstract body of the universal church to the detriment and even elimination of the importance of the local church (Chapter 4.2.5). Yet, although the visible and invisible churches may be distinguished, they cannot be separated: a “person cannot be fully initiated into the Christian faith without being socialized into a Christian church.” The thrust of the scriptural narrative in general, and as it relates to Jesus’ incarnation, resurrection and ascension in particular, underline the embodied, local and socially situated nature of the appropriate human response to God’s covenant presence amongst and for humanity. God desires a community of people amongst whom God’s righteousness and compassion can be expressed, and by which God’s holiness can be

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5 Paul, for example, in 1 Cor 12:12-30, highlights the role of the Holy Spirit in placing and sustaining believers in Christ’s body, gifting them for the common good, and according to God’s decision to “put the body together” (1 Cor 12:24). See Chapter 3.3.1.
6 Eph 5:25.
7 Greene and Robinson, Metavista, 87, 103.
8 Volf, After Our Likeness, 173.
9 The issues around the rise of cyber-communities are beyond the scope of this project, but they are thoroughly examined by Adam Thomas who, whilst suggesting the need to remain open to finding God at work through all kinds of connections, nevertheless observes the many forms of false intimacy and isolation which vex digital "communities." Adam Thomas, Digital Disciple: Real Christianity in a Virtual World (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2011).
hosted (see 3.2.3 and 3.4.3). God chooses that God’s nature as holy, righteous and compassionate, is to be expressed in the lives of God’s people as they live together and, in new covenant terms, love one another. To be Christian, therefore, is to engage with and participate in a particular, embodied community of believers so that God’s life may come to expression in the world.

Thirdly, if Baptist church communities are solely expressions of voluntary association, then the links between those who form them will also be largely perceived to be human in nature. On this basis a church community is well positioned to provide companionship, and material and moral support, but, no matter how significant such aspects of church community life may be, reducing the church community to these does not adequately reflect the scriptural narrative concerning the nature of Christian community. The nature of the church as being grounded in Godself is thoroughly established in Scripture: it is God who calls a people for Godself in covenant, and it is God who, in Jesus Christ, justifies believers and reconciles them to Godself and one another, uniting them in Christ’s body. Then, most significantly for the current era, because both Father and Son send the Spirit, Christian community is grounded in the shared indwelling and action of that Spirit, who perichoretically bears the communion of the Father and Son into which believers are baptised. Thus, God grounds the very being of such communities in Godself; a concept, which as Greg Liston argues, is always in danger of being overwhelmed by the very obvious humanity of church communities:

The Church is not just irreducibly human (as is clearly evident) but also irreducibly supernatural (as is sometimes overlooked). The Church is not solely (or even primarily) a human institution, but exists substantially because of its pneumatological communion with Christ. The Church cannot be understood merely sociologically any more than Christ can be thought of merely historically... Talking or thinking of the Church’s human community independently of its connection with Christ through the Spirit is as nonsensical as talking or thinking of the human nature of Christ independently of its hypostatic union with the eternal Son by the Spirit.

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10 For Bonhoeffer, “it was only when life began to be conceived of in individualistic terms that the necessity for a congregation ceased to be regarded as reflecting the natural course of things and came to be thought of as psychological, the quest of the significance of the congregation then being raised in terms of its use and necessity for the individual. The question itself reveals a basic lack of understanding of the idea of the church.” Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Sanctorum Communio: A Dogmatic Inquiry into the Sociology of the Church (London: Collins, 1963), 156.
11 1 Pet 2:9, 10. See Chapter 3.2.3
12 Eph 2:11-22. See Chapter 3.3.
To recognise this afresh is to profoundly revalue the nature of the bonds which undergird the church community, and to enable access to the resources of God, through the Holy Spirit, in further enhancing those bonds for the sake of worship and service within and beyond the community.

God’s covenant initiatory and sustaining activity in grounding church communities in Godself certainly goes on despite those communities’ ignorance or apparent rejection of that activity: God does call; God does form actual communities; and God does ground their sociality in Godself. Yet, God’s intention as portrayed throughout Scripture is that the human, and especially ecclesial reality, should correspond, in word, passion and deed, as closely as possible to the divine reality: the indicative and eschatological reality is to be imperatively and proleptically pursued and “lived into” by the power of the Holy Spirit. Church communities are called, therefore, by God’s grace and the power of the Spirit, to explicitly imitate and participate in the life of God, in every aspect of their covenantal priesthood. With regard to all three dimensions of that priesthood (worship, life together, and sharing God’s blessing with the world), but here, especially in relation to worship, what is said and done, what is thought and experienced, what is enacted and embodied, must all reflect the spiritual realities of living as a community in covenant with God and with one another, as coherently and comprehensively as possible.15

5.2. Membership of the Worshipping Community16

Chapter 2.2 explored the Psychological Sense of Community and, as one of the dimensions of this, a sense of membership/belonging in relation to contemporary Australian Baptist church communities. This exploration concluded that there were indeed indicators that those attending such churches did experience a sense of belonging, but that the basis of this had shifted from the scriptural-historical-theological and institutional-denominational-constitutional to a demotic discourse of destructured relationality. This

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15 The significance of the explicit narration of these ecclesial realities is further pursued in Chapter 8.5.
16 This exploration of membership of the worshipping covenant community might be expected to fall under the heading of the next chapter concerning the mutual life of the covenant community. It is included here, however, on the basis that, as has been discussed above, membership of the church primarily reflects God’s initiatory calling, and then, and only then, the human response of joining. This balance, or lack thereof, in post-Enlightenment Baptist theology was recently reflected upon in the joint report by representatives of ABM (Australian Baptist Ministries) and UCA (Uniting Church in Australia) on church membership: “One perception that emerged in discussion was that the Reformed tradition over-emphasizes the prevenient grace of God (losing emphasis upon our human responses in faith), while the Baptist tradition over-emphasizes our human response to God’s redemptive initiative in Christ (losing emphasis on God’s prevenient work).” This balance is precisely that which, I have argued, early Baptist thought maintained and which this work seeks to re-establish. Representatives of ABM & UCA, Church Membership, 5. I will engage with this report throughout this section, and hereafter refer to it in the text as the Church Membership Report.
change is very much in line with general developments in Australian and Australian religious culture (Chapter 2.1): the theological and institutional are devalued in favour of “authentic” relationality, but this destructured relationality is based upon a through-going individualism which suggests that choices, even and especially around organised religion, are matters of personal preference and convenience. However, as this chapter has already proposed, neither form of human sociality, whether institutional or relational, can provide fully adequate grounds for either the existence of, or a sense of belonging to, the worshipping church community. In fact, reliance on these in the midst of an Australian culture in which “virtually all forms of church connection have become deeply countercultural,” appears extremely tenuous.17 Both the institutional and relational forms of human sociality have their parts to play in church community life, but these are derived from and dependent upon the scriptural-historical-theological narrative of God’s presence and work in the midst of the community. How are these issues of human sociality and divine groundedness inter-related?

Firstly, it must be established that there is indeed a place for the organised (even institutional, denominational and constitutional) aspects of Baptist church community life: “The church is both an organism and an organization and we dare not separate the one from the other.”18 According to Derek Tidball,

> There is naivety about community. The stress on relationships versus institution is understandable and there does need to be a recovery of the importance of people over programmes. But communities cannot maintain themselves on warm fuzziness alone... Communities have shared values, shared morals, shared objectives, shared boundaries and they have at least some elementary organisation.

He goes on to report the issues faced by churches which set out in the 1980s to practice being church without organisational structures, and the difficulties which they have encountered as they have grown and aged.20 Some sociological humility is required, he suggests, in recognising that “moves of the Spirit are always transmitted through human and social channels and therefore are never uncontaminated, ‘untouched by human hands.’”21 I would perhaps go further and suggest that this working out of spiritual realities in the midst of human life together is the very stuff of Christian life and witness.22 This organisational form of human sociality remains, despite the post-modern Australian dislike

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17 Representatives of ABM & UCA, Church Membership, 4.
19 Tidball, “Leadership and Baptist Church Governance,” 28, emphasis in original.
22 This last point will be discussed further in Chapters 7 and 8.
and disrespect for it, a vital human dimension of church community life in response to God.\[^{23}\]

Secondly, human sociality expressed in the current emphasis on destructured relationality also has a vital part to play as God forms and sustains community. Christian relational ethics are not based upon a code of conduct but upon love; God’s love for God’s people, which is then shared amongst them, and God’s love for God’s world which is then shared beyond them. This love, though it is formed by the discipline of discipleship, is not forced, but is rather the gift and fruit of the Holy Spirit.\[^{24}\] The “experientially-grounded deconstruction of denominational discourse,” of the late twentieth century, did indeed have something to address and correct in the arid rigidity of denominational structures and local church life of the preceding decades.\[^{25}\] The authenticity, intimacy and support, which are now so valued amongst Australian Baptist church communities, are vital and scripturally and theologically appropriate expressions (though they are not the whole picture) of God’s love shared amongst God’s people.\[^{26}\]

However, vital as these two forms of human sociality may be, they cannot, alone, provide the basis for church community. This must rather be established on the basis of the full range of scriptural narratival images which, whilst certainly attending to human sociality, bring the grounding of the church community in Godself to the fore (Chapter 3.3). Such narratives will include those of family and “body of Christ,” although attention will be required to recognise the tendency to deal with these in scripturally disembedded and individualistic ways (Chapter 2.3.1).\[^{27}\] But these will be set alongside those of, for example, “new humanity,” and temple, and, of particular interest here, joint and mutual covenantal

\[^{23}\] This significant reality is not the focus of this thesis, but this brief outline suggests that it could bear focus additional attention, particularly viewed as a further development of joint and mutual covenantal priesthood.

\[^{24}\] Rom 5:5; Gal 5:22.


\[^{26}\] See Chapter 6.

\[^{27}\] Regarding the “body of Christ” narratival image I would suggest that the Church Membership Report’s focus on christology might be most usefully complemented by recent pneumatological emphases, and the Report does, itself, leave room for this by its recognition that the Christian pattern of initiation “challenges contemporary understandings of ‘membership’ which sometimes suggest that the church is merely a human institution, rather than the ekklésia (assembly) of believers in communion with the triune God, and thus with one another.” Representatives of ABM & UCA, Church Membership, 2, 5, emphasis added. As is most clearly expressed by Volf, christology as the main focus of ecclesiology tends to play into the hands of the very individualism which denies that relationality in the church community goes beyond the social to an ecclesial relationality grounded in God. For Volf, “if personal faith plays a decisive role in the salvific experience, then this exclusive soteriological-ecclesiological concentration on Christ can, strictly speaking, ground only the salvation of the individual, but not the ecclesial salvific community itself. Each person stands directly under the dominion of Christ; what all together are to be remains unarticulated, emerging rather simply from that which each is to be in and for himself or herself.” Volf, After Our Likeness, 196-197. It is exactly this which becomes apparent in the individualistic gloss on the church community as the “body of Christ.”
priesthood (Chapter 3.3). Failure to attend to this full range of narratives of Christian community, the overall thrust of this thesis suggests, will result in the distortion of even those which are given expression.\(^{28}\) If Scripture provides so many narratival images in order to convey the whole story of church community, the contemporary Baptist church can hardly expect to grow and thrive on a limited diet of just two of these. Rather, a sense of belonging will be most deeply engendered as members of the community find themselves in the midst of this rich array of shared narratives of community which are grounded in the many forms of God’s covenantal presence and work in and through them.\(^{29}\)

According to the narrative of joint and mutual covenantal priesthood, such belonging is epitomised in the rite of believer baptism as entry into a particular form of membership of the Baptist church community, and this will be explored shortly. Firstly, however, it is necessary to place this particular form of baptised belonging into the context of the many other forms of belonging which are also, in reality, currently at work within Baptist church communities. Beyond the catch-all category of destructured relational belonging, Nigel Wright describes the local church “as a worshipping community embracing all manner of people who are not in formal membership but who feel themselves to belong.”\(^{30}\) These various ways of belonging, he suggests, include those who are fully involved in the church community but have not taken up formal membership;\(^{31}\) the children of the church community who are being raised with love and nurture in Christian teaching by the church community; those who are learning about faith and discipleship (in some cases, at least, in preparation for baptism); those who are “seekers after God”; those who are temporarily receiving the hospitality of the church community; those on the fringe of the community; and those engaged in even the most tenuous forms of “belonging” whether through disaffection, or simply through relationship with someone who does belong.\(^{32}\) Each of these forms of belonging must be acknowledged and valued amongst the whole church community, but their existence and their valuing does not and should not be allowed to

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\(^{28}\) So, for example in the case of voluntary association, in failing to tell the whole story of the nature of church community as based both upon God’s covenant call and the human response to that call, the natures of both that human response and the church community are misunderstood.

\(^{29}\) See Chapter 2.2 for the significance of shared narratives for building a sense of community. The narratives referred to here are shared, both in the sense that they are held in common and that they are about the very nature of the community itself. In addition to these, Nigel Wright suggests understanding church as “that community of believers which participates by the Spirit in the fellowship and mission of the triune God,” lends the stability of the relationships within the Trinity to those within the church community. Wright, *Disavowing Constantine*, 180.


\(^{31}\) The various reasons for this were explored in Chapter 2.3.1.

\(^{32}\) Wright, *New Baptists*, 77, 78.
undermine that belonging which, in Baptist terms, comes to full expression (in a pre-
eschatological and therefore flawed, provisional sense), in baptised-covenant membership.\textsuperscript{33}

The significance of this form of baptised-covenant membership has been heavily eroded
by the disassociation of baptism and covenant membership. The issues are thoroughly
summarised by Brian Haymes et al.:

...the separation of baptism from membership which we now experience all too
often developed over a long period and in various ways; in part through a growing
individualism, shaped by revivalism, which located Christian discipleship more
within the individual’s decision. A consequence of this way of thinking was to regard
commitment to a local congregation as itself a choice, rather than inherent within
the meaning of baptism, in part through the shift in the understanding of baptism
towards being simply and only a witness to personal faith, with little or nothing to do
with identity with the body of Christ. More recently the growth in ecumenical
awareness has led to a greater awareness of the church as more than the local,
and has in turn led to a diminishment in the perceived importance of committed
participation in the local congregation.\textsuperscript{34}

Believer baptism, as this suggests, is generally seen as an individual act of obedience
which, in many Australian Baptist churches, has indeed lost any sense of initiation into
Christ’s body, let alone association with covenant membership of a specific church
community (Chapter 2.3.4).

To re-emphasise such a committed form of membership which embraces both human
sociality and groundedness in God does, as the \textit{Church Membership Report} notes, fly in
the face of the Australian “weakening of the willingness to commit beyond culturally
defined limits.”\textsuperscript{35} Yet, on the other hand, “Christian discipleship may require a literal laying
down of our lives, so that it is not really available to those who resist making personal
commitments.”\textsuperscript{36} This is a point at which, therefore, the contemporary Australian rejection
of commitment in favour of destructured relationality needs to be acknowledged, and yet
resisted and countered by drawing upon the scriptural and theological resources which are
available with regard to believers’ commitment to both God and the church community.
Practices around Christian marriage, as the only form of covenant commitment which is
extant in many Australian Baptist churches, indicate that such a counter-cultural form and
level of commitment must be brought into being by a formal, spoken, enacted and public
declaration. It is as if the very importance and difficulty of such a commitment requires

\textsuperscript{33} The historical connection between baptism and covenant membership was outlined in Chapter 4.1.1. Its
contemporary significance will be explored further in Chapter 8.
\textsuperscript{34} Haymes, Gouldbourne and Cross, \textit{On Being the Church}, 88. Baptism itself will be discussed more
extensively in Chapter 8.
\textsuperscript{35} Representatives of ABM & UCA, \textit{Church Membership}, 21.
\textsuperscript{36} Representatives of ABM & UCA, \textit{Church Membership}, 21.
every possible human form of “bringing commitment into being” to respond to God’s initiative, and to bond the whole human person, body, will and passions, with God and God’s people. Vitally, unlike the once-off commitment of constitutional membership, such covenant commitment is annually repeated and thereby reaffirmed.

The very significance of baptised-covenant membership outlined here would appear to marginalise the other kinds of belonging which Nigel Wright identifies, thus highlighting the tension between boundary affirmation and boundary openness. This thesis proposes that both issues require careful attention; that the community is indeed gathered and so boundaried for worship and life together, but that it is also essentially open in order to share God’s blessing with God’s world. Are there practical ways in which this tension can be balanced in this specific context? There is no doubt that the inclusion of worship which celebrates covenant-membership in the midst of the wider church community is, in one sense, confronting and uncomfortable, clearly delineating as it does the boundary between those who are covenant members of the community and those who are not, and undermining efforts at the reduction of distinctions between formal members and other attendees. Sensitivity is therefore required to both celebrate the rich meaning and reality of this membership, and to carry along with this, the continuing openness and welcome to those who, for whatever reason, have not taken up such membership. All such forms of belonging may be acknowledged at various times and in various ways, but to avoid the issue entirely through distinction-reduction, and by failing to celebrate covenant membership would appear to miss the opportunity to acknowledge its gracious appeal to others to join in as God continues to draw them more deeply into God’s own life and that of God’s community (see Chapter 8.4).

Resources for such covenant undertaking are available from the Baptist Union of Victoria, “Covenant Membership”; and in The Baptist Union of Great Britain, Gathering for Worship: Patterns and Prayers for the Community of Disciples, ed. Christopher J. Ellis and Myra Blyth (Norwich, UK: Canterbury Press, 2005), 96-112.

See comments concerning this important difference in “Re-Imagining Baptist Church Membership,” in Baptist Union of Victoria, “Covenant Membership.”

This will be discussed further in Chapter 8.

One simple form of such inclusion might involve an invitation for those outside covenant membership to pray for those (rather than with those) who are engaged in covenant (re-)commitment.

Another related issue arises in larger churches when those who are covenant members are asked to respond and commit themselves to those who are joining the church covenant membership. Whilst the coherence of such responses and commitments might be readily perceived in relatively small church communities where all the members have some degree of social relation to one another, in larger church communities there may be considerable hesitancy to commit “to pray for you, to encourage and support you.” Baptist Union of Great Britain, Gathering for Worship, 77. Yet, I would suggest, this is to misunderstand the concentric nature of ecclesial relationality. Whilst such relationality is fully assured at the spiritual level by the shared presence of the Holy Spirit, even within the smallest fellowships not all social relationships within the community are of the same type or intensity; rather, to play one’s part in the life of any covenant member

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38 See comments concerning this important difference in "Re-Imagining Baptist Church Membership," in Baptist Union of Victoria, "Covenant Membership."
39 This will be discussed further in Chapter 8.
41 One simple form of such inclusion might involve an invitation for those outside covenant membership to pray for those (rather than with those) who are engaged in covenant (re-)commitment.
42 Another related issue arises in larger churches when those who are covenant members are asked to respond and commit themselves to those who are joining the church covenant membership. Whilst the coherence of such responses and commitments might be readily perceived in relatively small church communities where all the members have some degree of social relation to one another, in larger church communities there may be considerable hesitancy to commit “to pray for you, to encourage and support you.” Baptist Union of Great Britain, Gathering for Worship, 77. Yet, I would suggest, this is to misunderstand the concentric nature of ecclesial relationality. Whilst such relationality is fully assured at the spiritual level by the shared presence of the Holy Spirit, even within the smallest fellowships not all social relationships within the community are of the same type or intensity; rather, to play one’s part in the life of any covenant member.
It is not the expectation here that all Australian Baptist churches will reach the same conclusions concerning the ways in which they respond to these tensions in their own settings – some may choose to prioritise inclusivity, whilst others choose a clearer expression of boundaries - but it is hoped that the issues are made clearer, and the cultural trends toward deinstitutionalisation and the undermining of the concept of covenant membership might be appropriately challenged. As the *Church Membership Report* suggests, membership covenants offer a way forward in that they “promise to connect spiritual realities with ritual and legal [and, I would add, social] practices.”

Issues around boundaries, as the exploration in Chapter 2 suggested, are indeed complex, but may not for this reason be ignored. The appropriate response is not an ambivalence which evades the issues through distinction-reduction, but rather a thoroughly grounded commitment to both boundary affirmation and openness. Closer attention to the dual boundaried and open nature of Australian Baptist church communities, and a willingness to express and deal creatively with this tension, will engender increased maturity and appreciation of the richness of covenant life in God.

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of the community is fulfilled by playing one’s part in the life of that community according to one’s calling and spiritual gifting. One community member is able to commit herself to playing her part in the life of another community member by the recognition of the reality, yet different nature, of both spiritual and social forms of relationality. The spiritual sense of community is stable and consistent throughout the community, based as it is in the shared presence of the Holy Spirit; the degree of social relationality varies, and yet, even this can be understood to indicate that the quality of the relations members have with one another has an influence beyond that particular relationship to the rest of the community. The sense of this is captured by Fiddes who highlights the concept of “inter-relation” which produces “a maturity of interdependence”; “where the fact of relating between two or more people has a wider effect; it creates a new context of inter-relation which affects not only those directly involved but others as well. Particular relationships are always part of a wider sphere, a network of relationships whose edges we can never calculate.” Fiddes, *Participating in God*, 53, 54. The “I” and “Thou” of any relationship do not indicate a closed system, but rather one which, as with the Trinity, remains open to others. Fiddes, *Participating in God*, 54. It is not that church community members are constantly together, but that as fellow-members of the community, they are open to and prepared for mutual access and support. Kirkpatrick, *Community*, 143.

43 Representatives of ABM & UCA, *Church Membership*, 23.
5.3. The Priestly Worship of the Covenantal Community

As was established throughout Chapter 3 (see especially Sections 3.1.1, 3.2 and 3.3.1), gathering together to worship God as a priestly community is the central task of the local church community:

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.
Once you were not a people, but now you are God’s people;
once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

The very nature of the task of worship is, firstly, priestly: to worship is to enter, to have access into, God’s holy presence and to know and experience God’s complete otherness and transcendence. It is not, according to the New Testament, that God’s holiness is any less complete or dangerous now than it was under the Mosaic covenant, but that new covenant communities worship as those who have been both insulated and connected with the Father, in his holiness, at great cost by Jesus Christ, their high priest.

Yet, in this very event, in the midst of God’s holiness, the church community also knows and experiences the Father’s intimate nearness, his immanence, mediated by his incarnated and ascended Son, as he intercedes for his people, and by his Holy Spirit who makes both Father and Son present to them. Such Christian worship is not just about God, but is instigated, enabled and shaped by God, particularly as the Spirit enables the church community to take up its priestly role in Christ, its high priest before the Father: “Jesus not only presents our worship, he leads us into worship as our one true high priest. As we are in Christ, we ourselves minister to God, a holy and royal priesthood (1 Pet 2:5-9).”

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44 Frank Rees prefers to use the term “worship” in a more inclusive fashion than I have done throughout this project. He argues, with good grounds, that the New Testament speaks of worship both in the sense of the gathered remembrance and thanksgiving of the church community and the ethical response which believers make to such remembrance/thanksgiving (c.f. Rom12:1). I have demonstrated the close links between these two dimensions of the Christian life, but have chosen to distinguish between them, since, in my experience of Baptist church life, both require a level of attention which may be attenuated if they are conflated: either worship is taken to mean only that which happens in the Sunday service, with a failure to acknowledge that this should always issue in lives of service, or the emphasis is placed on Christian service in a way which downplays the significance of rooting this in remembrance/thanksgiving. Rees, “The Worship of All Believers,” 176.
45 1 Pet 2:9-10, emphasis added.
46 Heb 4:14.
47 Liston, “The Dynamics of Trinitarian Worship,” 45. Horton presses this point even further: “it is God who is the server. God comes to us in the Word (preached, read, sung, prayed) and in the sacraments, to convict and comfort, to kill and make alive, to judge and to justify, to bring about the effects of Christ's completed work: not only justification, but also sanctification; not only faith, but also hope and love.” Horton, People and Place, 3693, emphasis in original. This does not, as I will argue in relation to prayer (Chapter 6.2.2) indicate that the human contribution is marginalised, but rather that it is taken up into God’s life.
Secondly, such priestly worship is primarily a communal task. It is worship which defines the local church community as those who have taken God to be their God, and have committed themselves to be God’s people – not as individuals alone, but as a community.\textsuperscript{48} Focus on God does not result in an exclusive relationality between the individual worshipper and God, but rather always has a view, an openness, to others, as together they form the community which is proleptically the new humanity in Christ,\textsuperscript{49} and reach out beyond the community itself to the world which God desires to bring to blessing.\textsuperscript{50} Worship is the arena in which God both initiates and receives the human, communal, participatory response fitting to that which God has done, is doing and will do. This worship is orchestrated by the Holy Spirit and rendered through the joint exercise of the Spirit’s gifts shared amongst the community.\textsuperscript{51} In worshipping God, the communal imagination concerning all that God is, and all that God calls God’s people to be and do, is formed.\textsuperscript{52} In this communal context it becomes clear that such worship and the Christian faith it expresses “is not an inner matter, a subjective or private concern,” but rather, “the new people, the royal priesthood, the holy nation, are to act out their faith, to show forth the ways of God. This is a priesthood of overt, social and communal life-style.”\textsuperscript{53} “In the worship event,” as Frank Rees describes it, “the gathered community of faith locates itself within, and in response to, the continuing life and activity of God.”\textsuperscript{54}

\textbf{5.3.1 The Community’s Worship as both Subjective and Objective}

True worship of God therefore involves the participation of the whole worshipping person in the midst of the church community. In considering all the terms associated with worship in Scripture, Warren Wiersbe concludes that it involves both attitudes (awe, reverence, respect) and actions (bowing, praising, serving). It is both a subjective experience and an objective activity. Worship is not an unexpressed feeling, nor is it an empty formality. True worship is balanced and

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{48} Deut 6:4-5; 2 Cor 6:16.
\item \textsuperscript{49} Eph 2:15.
\item \textsuperscript{50} This openness is fundamental to trinitarian understandings of worship: “God himself is a community in worship. As we are drawn into the life of the Trinity, we become part of that community.” Liston, “The Dynamics of Trinitarian Worship,” 45.
\item \textsuperscript{51} 1 Cor 12. Personal acts of worship are, of course, vital to the life and formation of the believer, but, as this project has argued throughout, the emphasis on the individual and her beliefs and actions, without reference to the centrality of community to God’s work and plans, is scripturally and theologically unbalanced. Communal worship needs to be revalued as the context and source of formation for personal worship. Examples of how this occurs are given throughout the remainder of this chapter.
\item \textsuperscript{52} For Philip Kenneson, “it is not difficult to see in what sense the paradigmatic imagination is always social; that is, it is not something that individuals create for themselves, but is something that they largely receive.” Philip Kenneson, “Gathering: Worship, Imagination, and Formation,” in The Blackwell Companion to Christian Ethics, ed. Stanley Hauerwas and Samuel Wells (Carlton, VIC: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), 55, 56.
\item \textsuperscript{53} Rees, “The Worship of All Believers,” 180, emphases in original.
\item \textsuperscript{54} Rees, “The Worship of All Believers,” 184.
\end{itemize}
involves the mind, the emotions, and the will. It must be intelligent; it must reach deep within and be motivated by love, and it must lead to obedient actions that glorify God... worship is personal and passionate, not formal and unfeeling... it is our response to the living God, voluntarily offered to Him as He has offered Himself to us.\textsuperscript{55}

This catalogue points to the complex interweaving of the “objective” and “subjective.” Objectivity speaks of worship which focuses fully on the object of worship, aiming “at making some kind of effect upon the Deity or in some way communicating with him.”\textsuperscript{56} It also refers to aspects of worship which are focused on the mind of the worshipper, on belief and rationality, and may also be objectively observed through actions. Subjective worship, on the other hand, “seeks... to induce some desired mood or belief or attitude in the mind of the worshipper”;\textsuperscript{57} it has to do with human experience and feelings, that which is largely internal to the worshipper. The boundaries between these two aspects, however, are often far from clear. A physical action such as kneeling in prayer is certainly, in one sense, an objective act of worship, and yet, it is (or should be) inseparable from the subjective experience of personal repentance. A passionate worship experience of the three persons of the Trinity, on the other hand, may enable the worshipping community to grasp the relevant doctrine in ways which were hitherto unknown to them.\textsuperscript{58} As worshippers are led, in Christ, by the Holy Spirit, there is a constant interweaving and interdependence of what Jesus, in his conversation with the Samaritan woman at the well, refers to as “spirit and truth.”\textsuperscript{59} This section will therefore address the vital subjective dimension of worship, seeking to strengthen and broaden the communal vision for it, but will also seek to ground this in the perhaps currently underappreciated objective dimension of worship, which is particularly suited to engendering communal worship.

\textbf{5.3.1.1 Subjective Worship}

Discussion in Chapter 2 of contemporary Australian religious culture in general and of Baptist church communities in particular, suggested a heavy emphasis on the subjective or experiential aspect of Christianity. It is expected, both in corporate and private worship, that the feelings of the believer will be stirred as they encounter God as transcendent, but more especially, as they know God’s immanent love and care for them. Such experience is

\textsuperscript{55} Wiersbe, \textit{Real Worship}, 20-21. The ethical outcomes of worship (“obedient actions”) will be discussed in the next chapter and again in Chapter 8.
\textsuperscript{57} Pratt, \textit{The Religious Consciousness: A Psychological Study}, 290.
\textsuperscript{58} This movement from experience to belief probably best represents the development of this very doctrine from early Christian worship.
\textsuperscript{59} John 4:24.
engendered by forms of preaching, musical style, song lyrics and prayer which focus on the individual’s experience of God, and is clearly a vital aspect of Christian worship. For Gerald Borchert commenting on John 4:24, “no one genuinely knows God except through some form of revelatory encounter,” and such a stance is certainly at the heart of the Baptist understanding of the freedom of both God in calling and of the human person in making their response: regeneration is both personal and experienced. Part of the ever-present challenge for corporate worship, therefore, continues to be the movement “from a paradigm of knowledge as information to knowledge as relationship and communion,” which “suggests the need to curb our activism and to include much more specific elements of contemplation and spiritual focus in our lives.” Yet, the danger in this for Baptist church communities is a further privatisation of experience, even within the setting of communal worship. How then, may subjective worship be enhanced in such ways that it not only happens in proximity to others, but actually embraces the communal nature of the church community?

Three issues are of interest in this regard: the expansion of the range of worship experiences through the arts, the “spiritual” nature of Baptist worship, and participation by the whole community.

As was noted in Chapter 2.1.2, and will be explored more fully in Chapters 7.2 and 8.2.1, there is a tendency for many contemporary Australian Baptists to expect God to impact their lives in direct, unmediated, “spiritual” ways, which tends to preclude engagement with

60 I deal more specifically with preaching and song lyrics below in Section 5.3.1.2. With regard to musical style, Wiersbe proposes that “music confronts the whole person — mind, heart, and will — and demands some kind of response,” but that it is all too easy to confuse personal taste with “godly style.” Wiersbe, Real Worship, 135, 137. Of particular interest here is the amenability of the musical style that is employed to enable the whole church to participate and sense that they are indeed bringing their joint worship, if not on every occasion, at least on a frequent basis.

61 Gerald L. Borchert, John 1-11, Logos ed., The New American Commentary (Nashville, TE: Broadman & Holman, 1996), 208. Again, it is apparent that such revelation begins with God, not the human person.


63 A further danger in an over-emphasis on the subjective is the inclination to judge worship according to the outcomes for those who participate: as Wiersbe puts it, “If you worship because it pays, it won’t pay.” Wiersbe, Real Worship, 21. For most Australian Baptists, the benefits of worship are not usually emphasised as including a promise of financial prosperity, but some quality of life, particularly around issues of health and family relationships, may be, albeit subtly, expected outcomes. The issue is a difficult one, not only because of the intense experiences involved, but also because there is a sense in which increasing Christian maturity is expected to produce a wholeness which may be summarised, for example, as the fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22-23). Such tendencies come to light when hopes are disappointed, and adequate teaching of both Scripture and theology around issues of suffering are vital. At a church level, the issue of whether church growth is the by-product or actual goal of worship may also be a subtle form of such a focus on subjectivity. “Worship” may be practised in order to gain the benefit of growth. Again the issue is a subtle one. If God is worshipped in a manner appropriate to the surrounding culture, growth (preferably by conversion rather than switchers-in) may be a reasonable expectation. Such a connection is not, however, to be presumed upon, as it is God who calls. Worship which is shaped only to please people, even “seekers” rather than to offer pleasing worship to God, can hardly be claimed to be worship at all.
the arts (other than music) as a means of mediating the awareness of God’s presence and work in the communal worship setting. For many members of church communities, however, there is, therefore, the danger that the only “arts” to which they are exposed are those saturated in the sexualisation and violence of secular media/entertainment, so that they, and their church community as a whole, become “tone-deaf to God’s Word and colour-blind to God’s glory.”⁶⁴ It is, therefore, a particular task of worship to reorientate the whole community to a “theological aesthetic” which recognises “the role of beauty in the life of faith,” and thereby deeply reconnects “the true, the good, and the beautiful.”⁶⁵

Imagination of this sort is, far from being frivolous or optional, “serious imagination, imagination fuelled by reflection and prayer at the foot of the cross and before the empty tomb, imagination that will discern the mysteries of God’s judgment on evil and God’s reaffirmation, through resurrection of his beautiful creation.”⁶⁶ It is only through the experience of such arts within the worship of the church community, that the ugliness of much of what passes for “art” and entertainment in contemporary culture is exposed, and the community readied for its further formation in Christ.

Such worship practices imply a significant degree of planning, as opposed to “spiritual” extemporaneity. As has been explored (Chapter 4.1.4 and 4.2.4), Baptists have historically rejected what they regarded as formalism; set forms of worship which, as they understood them, precluded God’s freedom to be worshipped in the manner in which God, by the Spirit, leads God’s people, and their corresponding freedom to respond accordingly. Rejection of this particular form of formalism did/does not, however, prevent a slide into rigid orders of service which, in the case of some Australian Baptist churches, resulted in a notoriety for spiritual dryness (Chapter 4.2.3). The spiritual nature of worship for which the early Baptists hungered was not, and is not, guaranteed in spontaneous forms of worship, but rather in the manner in which worship, whether spontaneous or planned is carried out, with a scripturally and theologically formed openness to the working of the Holy Spirit.⁶⁷

Either planning or spontaneity may, similarly, help or hinder the participation of the whole community which is central to joint priestly worship. In planned worship with, for example,

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⁶⁵ For Vanhoozer, the modern separation of beauty from the true and the good has resulted in either the devaluation of beauty in the arts (it is an unnecessary luxury), or its over-valuation as the essential that makes life worth living. The three, rather, belong together. Vanhoozer, “Praising in Song,” 111,112.
⁶⁶ Tom Wright, Surprised by Hope (London: SPCK, 2007), 236.
⁶⁷ Rees draws a distinction between being biblically “informed” and “formed.” The Bible does not just offer “information which we may seek to discover, learn, teach and ‘apply,’” but rather it must “dwell... and do its work within us.” Rees, “Enabling Congregations,” 6.
responsive readings and prayers which are said together, it is clear that voices and persons are joined together to bring their worship. In such worship it is recognised that while all prayers are important, the disciplined practice of worship is about forming good prayers, prayers appropriate to God’s mercy and justice and to his people’s fragility and character... It is a corporate prayer, honed by the traditions of centuries into an orchestrated dance of practices that, over time, the believer learns to perform and inhabit. 68

Yet, such planned worship, if it fails to hold open spaces in which the Spirit may orchestrate the community’s worship in Christ, will also militate against other forms of participation such as spontaneous prophecy and exhortation. For some Baptist churches, particularly in the wake of the charismatic movement, these, and similar practices, are still relevant for new covenant communities. 69 Yet, on the other hand again, overemphasis on spontaneity may preclude participation which stems from careful planning for the worshipping church community to make its responses to God in ways beyond a tacked-on “amen.” The issues of “spiritual” spontaneity and participation are thus closely interwoven.

As was true in the nineteenth century, in the contemporary context of planned yet largely unparticipatory worship, Australian Baptist congregations are perhaps still - or again - in danger of being reduced to the level of spectators; sung and preached to and prayed for, with little sense of participation except at the level of private experience. 70 Participation in corporate worship may actually be either passive or active, but the significance of both forms needs to be re-established for the whole community. 71 My suggestion is two-fold: firstly that even “passive” participation requires a level of activity and intentionality which is best created when the members of the community understand that their full participation, even in this passive sense, is vital to the priestly task of worship by the joint community; and secondly, that some active participation beyond singing and saying “amen” is also desirable. Careful planning for participation by teams who seek the leading of the Holy Spirit in that planning, 72 but which is, nevertheless, lightly held so that it may be

69 Or as Rees suggests, to “tell brief stories or share the challenges they are facing... as a basis for prayer and also as a basis for articulating [their] life with God.” Rees, “The Worship of All Believers,” 185.
70 Manley, Woolloomooloo to ‘Eternity’, 1:272.
72 As Frank Rees has noted, those who plan and lead worship are almost exclusively chosen for their musical ability (or at least interest). This suggests a particular and perhaps limiting criterion for leading worship, when perhaps a team structure might enable the inclusion of those with other giftings. Rees, “The Worship of All Believers,” 175.
“interrupted” by members of the community as the Spirit leads them, will provide for the greatest range of both “spiritual” and participative worship practices.

Participation also comes in overtly physical forms which, alongside verbally articulated forms of worship, play their part in forming the communal worship experience. The worship of the whole person will come to physical expression which is visible to and therefore shared with the community. At its most basic, such physicality includes the believer’s very presence in the midst of her community, and, beyond this, physical expressions of worship will shape the experience of the worshipper herself, and those around her, to produce a fully-rounded sense of worship in community. Scripture makes reference to sitting, standing, kneeling, falling prostrate and lifting hands in prayer. “David and all the house of Israel” danced before the Lord, and such activity is associated with praise, and with gladness at what God has done after mourning. In Scripture, there is also a movement towards one another in greeting which is “a holy kiss,” and which may, in modern terms, be translated into a handshake or, as appropriate, an embrace. Such a greeting is not chiefly about friendship, though this is hopefully present to some degree, but about a loving unity which is given by God, and extends to new-comers as a concrete witness to the openness of this unity. The church is gathered by God for worship, and, in expressing this, is seen, both by itself and others, to overcome barriers of all sorts: “a new unique community is being constituted in a manner that both challenges, and offers a concrete alternative to, the story of [for example] race and racism.”

Here, then, the intertwining of the subjective and objective is evident. The subjective sense of unity which is both expressed in and engendered by the physical movement of passing the peace, expresses an objective spiritual reality which is both performed and observed. The nature of this interdependence with an objective focus now comes to the fore.

73 Turning up is a greatly under-rated form of participation. For Wiersbe the encouragement gained from others’ presence includes perceiving the commitment which their coming to a worship service entails. Wiersbe, Real Worship. Location 1971.
74 2 Sam 7:18; Luke 18:9-14; Ps 95:6; Eph 3:14; Mark 14:35; Matt 26:39; Neh 8:6; Ps 63:4; 1 Tim 2:8. Wiersbe, Real Worship, 101.
75 2 Sam 6:5; Ps 149:3; Jer 31:13. Wiersbe chooses not to include dancing in his discussion, and here, as in all things, discernment is required. Nevertheless, there is a certain tendency to movement, particularly when music is played, which it appears is entirely natural (in the positive sense) to bring to worship. It is a rebuff to the theological dualism of body and spirit which still holds sway at unconscious levels in some Baptist churches.
76 1 Cor 16:20; 2 Cor 13:12; Rom 16:16; 1 Thess 5:26; 1 Pet 5:14. Wiersbe, Real Worship, 114.
5.3.1.2 Objective Worship

Borchert’s comment on John 4:24 which was quoted above was, of course, cut short and referred only to the “spirit” or experiential aspect of what, for Jesus according to John, constituted true worship. Going on to encompass Jesus’ reference to truth, Borchert indicates that “such [revelatory] encounters should be enlightened through written or oral articulations in order that such encounters become defined to humans and not remain subjective experiences.” Beyond experience, worship must involve the mind, “it must be intelligent or rational,” it must, in short, have objective substance. This again was a balance which the early Baptists pursued with great diligence, seeking to constantly ground the lives of church communities in God’s word to them in Scripture, and to faithfully and coherently summarise what they found there in their confessions of faith. Such shared beliefs were key to maintaining their sense of community (see Chapter 4.1 and 4.2.3). Their concern was not so much to feel that they had worshipped God, but to know that they had been obedient, and therefore pleasing to God, in their worship. Such a balance of spirit and truth appears best able to counteract the cultural trend of an unbalanced focus on feelings: as media sociologist, Todd Gitlin describes it, “We have come to care tremendously about how we feel and how readily we can change our feelings.” Media, even in worship, can become the means to emotional indulgence which tends to be “mostly shallow, sentimental, and non-threatening... the affective equivalent of kitsch.” The truth, the objective, and the rational may be out of fashion but their role in worship is vital: “in entering this space, those who gather as the ekklesia are drawn out of their private and narcissistic worlds in order to enter the cosmic arena of God’s reconciling purposes.” The horizon is shown to be larger than that of the isolated individual, and, in this “age of distraction” the church community “gathers to learn to attend to the right things rightly.”

The foremost act of objective worship is that the church community hear God’s word to them in Scripture with the specific intent of being formed by and obedient to it:

The mode and purpose of liturgical gathering is neither artificial nor contrived, but deeply accords with the way in which the biblical texts themselves were produced,

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78 Borchert, John 1-11, 208.
79 Wiersbe, Real Worship, 20.
81 Budde, "Collecting Praise." 133.
deployed, preserved, and transmitted. An intimate bond is established, then, between the what of the address, the Scripture’s contents, and the way in which they are always to be received: openly read, proclaimed, and responded to worshipfully and obediently. Answering God’s "Qāhāl," in other words, means precisely to hear the Word of God that brings the faithful together, and, having heard the Word, to accept it in faith, collectively pledging obedience to it. At Mount Sinai especially, but at all subsequent renewals of the covenant too, the announcement of God’s Word constitutes the central and decisive means of forming a people of God’s own choosing, a people whose very identity and form of life are inextricably bound up with the practice of reading Scripture. Reading the Scriptures before the assembled faithful reminds those gathered that they are a people of the covenant, a people to whom God has vowed his fealty and love.  

Such reading cannot therefore, be considered an incidental aid to preaching, but rather preaching, although occupying more time in most Baptist worship, should retain its sense for the community as a secondary and derivative activity to the reading of Scripture through which God leads and encourages the community in their worship.

On the other hand, preaching also has a vital role to play in the development of the community and its people. It is precisely because in preaching in the midst of the community God’s word comes to believers from beyond the closed circle of their private reading of Scripture, that it has such power. According to Dietrich Bonhoeffer,

   In the congregation, moreover, I do not, as if I were communing alone with the Word, speak and hear at the same time. But there is someone else speaking, and this gives me an incomparable certainty. Someone completely strange to me is proclaiming God’s grace and forgiveness to me, not as an experience, but as God’s will... The fact that there is someone else promising me grace makes me certain of the church, and rules out any danger or possibility that I might be lost in illusions.

It is such teaching which also counters the not uncommon Baptist protestation that it is possible to “just read the Bible” without recourse to creeds, church history, biblical scholarship and theology. All reading of the Bible entails interpretation, and preaching is the main vehicle by which the community becomes aware that this is the case, and that there are appropriate tools and methods for its practice. This does not suggest a shift to an academic style of preaching which has no practical application for believers, but, rather, that appropriate practical application can only be achieved by way of careful and committed engagement with the biblical text. Such engagement, whether in sermon preparation, or in the reception of it in small groups which discuss both word and sermon,

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85 For Liston, “the Spirit is involved at every level of such preaching: inspiring the text, anointing the preacher, illuminating the audience and convicting the world.” Liston, “The Dynamics of Trinitarian Worship,” 43.

86 Bonhoeffer, Sanctorum Communio, 158-159.
is practised in community: the “right” of private judgment and interpretation are formed and moderated by the community of faith.\(^{87}\) Failure to provide biblical and theological teaching alongside worship “experiences” leaves the community without the means to balanced growth, and cedes the teaching role to others from outside the church community.\(^{88}\) Other forms of corporate worship, such as worship in song, must be similarly critiqued by the application of such communal practices.\(^{89}\)

Taken together, all this suggests that the tendency for subjective worship to become private and individual may be resisted by broadening the forms in which it is expressed; by paying attention to artistic expressions of worship in the midst of the worshipping community; by careful planning which nevertheless maintains an openness to the leading of the Spirit; and a renewed commitment to enhancing forms of participation. A strengthened focus on objective forms of worship, such as the reading and application of Scripture through the multiple lenses of canon, church history and theology, will further enhance the communal experience of such worship. Thus, by both subjective and

\(^{87}\) As was explored in Chapter 4.2.2, for Baptists the right of private judgment and interpretation, prior to Wayland et al, had been heavily moderated by communal practices of discernment (see also Chapter 4.1.2). Although refusing, for the most part, to dictate belief according to “creeds,” and seeking to remain open to God’s revelation and reformation of church practices, the early Baptists nevertheless laboured over “confessions” upon which they could agree and by which their faith and practices could be regulated (Chapter 4.1.3). The creeds of the ancient Church and Baptist confessions continue to provide a means of reading Scripture, not as isolated stories and teachings, but as the coherent covenantal action of God. Nicholas Adams, “Confessing the Faith: Reasoning in Tradition,” in *The Blackwell Companion to Christian Ethics*, ed. Stanley Hauerwas and Samuel Wells (Carlton, VIC: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), 212.

\(^{88}\) The void in biblical teaching, especially amongst the Millennials, is being filled by a range of Christian leaders, particularly from a Reformed perspective, whose teaching is available as podcasts. This is “producing a generation of Christians who think independently of their own churches and teachers, and who may not look to church attendance for spiritual nourishment.” Sweetman, “Church Trends,” 7. This is not to see all such teaching as problematic, but where such influence is ceded, it may become difficult to maintain a sense of community around shared beliefs.

\(^{89}\) This is perhaps nowhere clearer than in the case of song lyrics. One recent song, for example, has proclaimed that “God is with us, God is on our side, He will make a way,” and “And if our God is for us, then who could ever stop us.” (“Our God” by Chris Tomlin from the album, *Passion: Awakening*) Scripturally these words appear to be based on concepts such as God’s presence with God’s people (Isa 7:14; Matt 1:23), that God is “on their side” (Ps 124:1) and “for them” (Rom 8:31-39). But each of these concepts has a covenant context, and, particularly in the latter case, is centred on the cross of Christ. This may be quite obvious to some church community members, but there is a history at a communal level of combining this idea with nationalism and humanistic ideology – and claiming God’s divine sanction for all sorts of things which have nothing to do with God. God’s being on “our” side has been taken to mean that God is not on “your” side and this has been the claim of various groups down through the ages – from the medieval crusaders to the Nazis of the last century (*Gott mit uns*) – with appalling results. At a personal level, believers may also be lulled into a comfortable belief that they can claim God’s stamp of approval for their decisions about what they want and need – “I can be/have what I want because God is on my side.” The scriptural and theological truths behind such songs may indeed need to be sung and experienced, but great care must also be taken when, even unwittingly, song lyrics play into the hands of inclinations which attenuate and distort the broader meaning of the scriptural narrative. Careful teaching around such issues provides a good opportunity to protect and bolster the objective goals of worship. Wiersbe recommends assessing music for worship according to five criteria; Biblical content, technical excellence, spiritual motive, authenticity, and balance. This example suggests that theological and cultural awareness are also required. Wiersbe, *Real Worship*, 44.
objective means, worship may be offered as a joint priestly sacrifice by the whole church community.

5.3.2 Worship in Three Tenses

Such worship, both subjective and objective, is fundamentally shaped by, though not limited to the past tense: it is a grateful remembering of what God has done and who the community discovers God to be through those actions, particularly as they are recorded in Scripture. Such remembering will focus on the central and defining act of God’s saving power and grace in the life, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ, but also seek to place this within the larger context of God’s promises for humanity and all creation as they are revealed through the whole canon of Scripture, old and new: “worship is always about remembering all of God’s saving acts in history.”\(^{90}\) The scriptural narratives concerning these events, and those other scriptural writings which provide theological meaning to them, will, as was indicated above, therefore be read and examined within their canonical, historical and theological contexts, with preaching and teaching.

As this implies, such reading does not involve just receiving a set of data from a past and distant culture, but rather a sense that this has great meaning for the here and now: for church communities who engage with Scripture, “this is the story of our God, the God who has called us too, so this is our story.”\(^{91}\) For James McClendon, in particular, “Scripture in [the Baptist] vision effects a link between the church of the apostles and our own,” by means of a “shared awareness of the present Christian community as the primitive community.”\(^{92}\) The lives now lived in Baptist church communities are seen to be in continuity with those lived by New Testament believers in the churches of Rome and Corinth, complete with their strengths and challenges. Scripture continues to be “a two-edged sword,” not in terms of “a naive biblicism,” but rather as the reason for “intense biblical study by every intelligible means, since the biblical story has present, not mere antiquarian relevance.”\(^{93}\)

Two sets of resources which will undergird this movement from past to present are apparent; the “church” calendar based on the scriptural narrative, and church (even denominational) history. Both of these types of resources firstly, provide a bridge which

\(^{90}\) Again, the emphasis, as it was in Section 5.2 above, is on telling the whole story over time, and engaging with as many facets of God’s presence and work as possible. Robert E. Webber, *Ancient-Future Worship: Proclaiming and Enacting God’s Narrative* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2008), 44, emphasis in original.

\(^{91}\) Rees, “The Worship of All Believers,” 184.

\(^{92}\) McClendon, *Ethics*, 31, emphasis in original.

coherently spans the past two thousand years (and beyond), greatly strengthening the identification of the “here and now” with the “there and then” in one “continuous present,” and, secondly, broaden the vision of contemporary communities to recognise their place within the wider church and God’s story in its midst. As was noted in Chapter 4.2.3, the Baptist denunciation of all forms of formalism in the established churches, included the rejection of the various festivals of the church calendar (despite the Old Testament witness to the significance of the festivals of the old covenant), to be replaced by church anniversaries and their like. Australian Baptist churches now certainly do participate in Christmas and Easter celebrations to, respectively, a greater and lesser degree, and take these opportunities to make the relevance of the events of Scripture to present belief and practice clear. Yet, to enter in, in “real time,” to the other scriptural (e.g., Pentecost) and traditional (e.g., Lent) events would appear to offer a far wider and deeper range of possibilities for engagement in shared (both within and beyond the community) belief, action and experience. In doing so, it becomes clear that the local church community is joining in a continuation of “doing” all of God’s story which links them with the many other Christian (Baptist and non-Baptist) and Jewish communities who have worshipped over the past two thousand years and beyond. Informed exposure to the patterns of worship followed throughout these various historical and ecclesial eras and locations may well provide the capacity to critique late modern/postmodern forms of Baptist worship, the weaknesses of which may otherwise go unnoticed by participants. Australian Baptist churches, with their lack of interest in wider church/denominational theology and history, and without formal liturgy, are, as has been demonstrated throughout this project, particularly liable to an ad hoc ecclesial pragmatism which leaves them open to the winds of social change rather than those of the Spirit, and to a subtle arrogance that in this time

95 This thesis is, of course, focused on the development of community within the local church, but any such awareness is inevitably linked to the ever-widening circles of openness in which the local church finds itself both with other Christian communities, and the world beyond.
96 See Chapter 3.1.1)
97 For McClendon early Baptists were “right to retain the weekly rhythm of work and wonder, and wrong only to despair of any more extended Christian patterns in time.” He goes on to explore how entering into such patterns is exactly fitting to the Baptist understanding of contemporary church community life as being in continuity with that of the New Testament. James Wm. McClendon, Doctrine, Systematic Theology Vol. 2 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994), 408.
98 This does not necessarily require a formal liturgical approach, though, as the BUGB’s Gathering Together shows, there is great richness to be found in building upon church traditions from a Baptist perspective in this regard. Baptist Union of Great Britain, Gathering for Worship, 351-407. On the other hand, Charles Olsen’s The Wisdom of the Seasons explores, more broadly, how local church communities can be enriched by the parallels between church seasons and their own lives. Charles M. Olsen, The Wisdom of the Seasons: How the Church Year Helps Us Understand Our Congregational Stories (Herndon, VA: Alban Institute, 2009). An Australian Baptist approach to provision of such resources is exemplified by South Yarra Community Baptist Church, “The Laughing Bird,” http://www.laughingbird.net/LaughingBird/Welcome.html (accessed 25 June 2013).
and place, above all others, their faith and life offers the best possible reflection of God’s presence and work: it is a form of individualism writ large which remembering will counter.

Remembering thus provides a clear framework within which the new covenant spiritual dynamism of priestly worship in this time and culture can be explored and expressed, but even this does not exhaust the ways in which, according to the scriptural narrative, God inspires and is worthy of worship. Rather, God’s being and work also has a future tense so that the worship of the community is also a participation in what is to come. That which God is bringing about, just as much as that which God has already done, rightly forms such worship so that, in worship, the church community seeks, in the power of the Spirit, to make what will be true then, true now. Eschatology, as it is practised in worship, therefore becomes “God’s call in the present in the light of his future.”99 Just as retelling and enacting the events of Jesus’ life and death enable the church community to connect the past to the present, links to this eschatological vision of community are forged by the narratives of Jesus’ resurrection, and the nature of this as bearing in it the promise of resurrection life and the renewal of all creation.100 Re-establishing the centrality and significance of Jesus’ historical and embodied resurrection restores a sense of Christian hope and task which stands against the disillusionment with human “progress,” and the despair which such disillusionment engenders: “The resurrection is both the sign of hope for the world and the assurance that risky imitation of Christ’s way has ultimately redemptive power.”101 Christian communities worship because the future is not dependent upon them but upon God in God’s faithfulness. In God they have the opportunity and responsibility to participate in the work of kingdom-(community-in-love)-building in the present. The hope of resurrection, as it is narrated and performed in worship, provides encouragement and shape for this participation, which is a labour that “is not in vain.”102

Michael Horton, as has already been noted (Section 5.1), adds to this future note, the significance of Christ’s (past) ascension and his promised (future) return.103 These situate worshipping church communities in a time of both Christ’s presence by his Spirit, and yet

99 Grenz, Theology for the Community of God, 652, emphases in original.
100 Wright, Surprised by Hope, particularly comes to mind. It is written for a lay audience, but based upon scholarly work most fully represented in N. T. Wright, The Resurrection of the Son of God, Christian Origins and the Question of God, Vol 3 (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2003). More recently again, Ross Clifford and Philip Johnson have proposed that, in the face of evangelical crucicentrism, “The Cross is not Enough.” Their examination covers some of the same ground as Wright’s popular work but also goes on to deal with the resurrection in dialogue with culture. Clifford and Johnson, The Cross Is Not Enough.
101 Wright, Disavowing Constantine, 191, emphasis in original.
102 1 Cor 15:58.
103 Horton, People and Place, Chapter 1.
his absence in bodily form; a time defined “neither by full presence nor full absence.”

Church communities are encouraged, even in his absence, by the knowledge that he is carrying out his priestly duties on their behalf, as he makes intercession for them and makes their priestly approach and offering acceptable, and that he is nevertheless present with them by his Spirit. The comfort of all this, however, should not so overwhelm the sense of Christ’s absence that the church ceases to long in its worship for the conclusion of this, albeit mitigated, absence. Worship, in this sense, is also a joint expression of longing on the part of the church community for the return of its beloved Lord and Redeemer, and the consequent completion of its own exodus journey in the joining of the new heaven and the new earth.

Fundamentally, this future will encompass the community of humanity in full relationality with God and with one another. It will be a place where God, in faithfulness to God’s covenant promises, will be present with God’s people, dwelling, and “fully immanent” amongst them. God’s people, having been reconciled with God, will also be reconciled with one another, and the curse of sin and relational disruption will finally be at an end. Healing and blessing will prevail amongst the nations, so that “a great multitude... from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages” may worship together.

Ultimately, this eternal community will be a social reality, which must, therefore, be reflected in the worship of contemporary church communities.

Thus, in remembering, in anticipating, and in present participation in the whole of God’s story, the church community brings its priestly worship to the Father, in Christ, by the Holy Spirit.

5.3.3 Worship in Confession

In summary then, worship is first and foremost not just about God, but is instigated, enabled and shaped by God, and is performed by the gathered church community; it

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104 Horton, *People and Place*, Location 105.
105 Heb 7:25. As Horton explores Calvin’s teachings on this matter, he points out that failure to attend to Christ’s embodied presence at the right hand of God, results in a whole series of losses: “we are robbed of Christ's likeness to us; we lose the significance of the Spirit's role in uniting us to the ascended Christ, and the reality of Christ's bodily return is called into question.” Horton, *People and Place*, Location 186.
106 This, as the work of both Wright and Horton makes clear, has absolutely nothing to do with the culturally fuelled apocalyptic expectations of fiction such as the “Left Behind” series of Tim LaHaye and Jerry B. Jenkins.
107 It will also include the restoration of the whole of creation, “a new earth” (Rev 21:1), but this lies beyond the scope of this project.
110 Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God*, 647.
involves the whole person, body, mind and passions, both objectively and subjectively in the midst of community; and it spans past, present and future. This final section will examine how these various aspects of worship come together in the specific form of corporate confession.

Because of God’s transcendent otherness, worship is only able to grasp the a finite portion of God’s infinite holiness and worthiness, but this glimpse is enough to produce a sense, both subjective and objective, of the gulf which lies between God’s holiness and sinful human existence. Confession of sin is therefore understood as an appropriate human response to God as God is encountered in worship, and this response becomes incorporated into that worship. Confession comes to expression through physical postures such as kneeling and prostration. It may vary in the degree of focus which it receives, but it should be an integral aspect of corporate worship, a time for the church community of learning to think and “speak truthfully about its own waywardness, its own sinfulness and resistance to the purposes of God.” Having said this, many Australian Baptists might suggest that confession of sin is a predominantly private act with corporate confession being seen to be more generalised and formalised, and, therefore less personal and authentic. Neither of these assumptions, I will show, need necessarily be true, and there are several grounds on which I would suggest that corporate confession should, alongside the private practice of confession (to be discussed further in the next chapter), be understood as a significant act of corporate worship.

Firstly, as Neil Pembroke suggests, sin, particularly when this is understood in terms of sloth, “is associated with a penchant for finding very good – and usually quite subtle and imaginative – reasons why what may seem like sin is really not.” This pervasive and powerful form of self-deception may enable the individual believer to privately rehearse a particular set of petty sins in their personal confession to God, whilst avoiding the ways in which they have comprehensively failed to love God and others. To confront and address such failure requires therefore, the context of the community which, in its diversity of gifting and emphasis, explores both the full range of God’s holy covenant faithfulness, and the full range of human sinful self-centredness. The community needs to openly

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111 Isa 6:1-7; Luke 5: 1-8
112 Kenneson, ”Gathering,” 62.
114 Pembroke, Pastoral Care in Worship, 17.
115 Pembroke suggests that preaching which engages “the interplay between sin and grace,” both in the text of Scripture and in the contemporary world, provides one of the means by which this may be achieved. Pembroke, Pastoral Care in Worship, 23.
acknowledge that this full range of sinfulness is likely to be at work in its midst, and, as a whole, to take responsibility for this and makes its confession. A variety of wording for prayers from various perspectives will facilitate this. Each member stands in solidarity with all the others both on the basis that “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,” and that the members “bear one another’s burdens”: to refuse to stand in confession alongside others whose sins might vary in type or severity from the believer’s own, is to deny both the pervasiveness of sin and the believer’s place in, and debt of love to, the community.

Further, sin impacts not only individual lives but also the corporate life of the community (resulting in “enmities, strife, jealousy, anger, quarrels, dissensions, factions”), and, as the community fails to love as Christ has loved, it cedes its capacity to bear witness to God. It is vital to the life of the community, therefore, that sins of community members against one another are not glossed over or allowed to fester, but are dealt with as matters of priority. Without such reconciliation, the community’s status as God’s new humanity is compromised. Confession, together with the reconciliation which God promises as a result, brings restoration of both relationships and this status. The setting of communal worship may also then enable the discovery that the sin of the community goes beyond the personal and interpersonal: at local and national, informal and organisational levels, church communities may be complicit in structures of abuse and oppression, past and continuing, which must be acknowledged, confessed and redressed. To acknowledge this together is to remain in right relationship with God, one another, and God’s world, and to thereby maintain covenant community.

Confession, as with the whole spectrum of worship, also spans the temporal tenses in a way which reminds believers of their place in God’s story. They have each, on their initiation into the community through baptism, made a confession of sin which once and for all, by grace through faith, brought them into forgiveness of all sin, past, present and future. Ultimately, in this future, there will be an “eschatological confession of sins which

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116 See, for example, Baptist Union of Great Britain, Gathering for Worship, 308-315; and Terry C. Falla, Be Our Freedom Lord: Responsive Prayers and Readings for Contemporary Worship, 2nd ed. (Melbourne: Australian Church Resources, 1994), 131-155.
117 Rom 3:23; Gal 6:2; Rom 13:8.
118 Gal 5:20.
119 John 13:35.
121 See an example of this in relation to reconciliation with indigenous Australians in Chapter 7.3.2.
122 See Chapter 7.4.2.1 for further discussion.
each must make before the judgment throne of God,"\textsuperscript{123} and sin will finally come to an end.\textsuperscript{124} Yet, between these realities, the members of the community are simil justus et peccator. The continuing reality of “et peccator,” is affirmed through joint confessional prayer, and the declaration of “justus” is made by the church community in response to God’s faithful promise. This absolution, which is spoken by and to the community by its representative, may be indicative (“I absolve you”), or precatory (a prayer that God will absolve the congregation), or declaratory (a simple declaration that God forgives those who repent).\textsuperscript{125} Whichever the case, it is the church community which, as a whole through its representative, exercises its authority in Christ, to forgive in a manner which participates in the fullness of forgiveness which belongs to the community’s past and future.\textsuperscript{126}

\textbf{Conclusion}

As was outlined in Chapter 2, there is no doubt that contemporary Australian Baptist churches do many things well: they are often welcoming and vibrant communities of faith which seek to engender worship experiences which speak of God in culturally appropriate terms, and thereby invite people into relationship with God. As was also described in that descriptive theology, however, such communities are largely understood by those who participate in them in terms of destructured relationality, and their corporate worship focuses heavily on the experience of individual believers, each in their own relationship with God. This chapter has sought to value the strengths of such church communities (such as their inclusivity), and yet to fundamentally challenge the individualism which distorts even these strengths. Specifically, it has addressed the various discourses of membership/belonging, issues of boundary affirmation and openness, and the significance of shared narratives about the very nature of church community.

In summary, covenant has been proposed as the basis of understanding God’s vision for relationality with and amongst humanity, which God faithfully continues to pursue: it is God’s presence and action which take priority. Such covenant life comes to expression in communities of believers who, despite all cultural pressures to the contrary, are fully


\textsuperscript{124} 1 Cor 15:35-58; Rev 21:1-8; John 5:22-30.

\textsuperscript{125} For most Australian Baptists, this last form would be by far the most familiar and acceptable, but the practice of mutual priesthood which will be explored in the next chapter may open up other possibilities. \textit{The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church}, 3rd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), s.v. “Absolution.”

\textsuperscript{126} This issue will be explored at length in Chapter 7.3.1.
committed to both God and to one another. In this context, the priestly task of worship is found to be central, with the church community bringing its communal worship to the Father, in Christ, by the Holy Spirit; in its objective and subjective forms; remembering, anticipating and participating in God’s presence and saving work.

Many of the issues which have been addressed are matters of subtle balance, of the sort at which early Baptists excelled as they searched the Bible in order to understand appropriate forms of worship. The human sociality of the community is valued, but placed always within the context of its groundedness in Godself. In the tension of boundary affirmation and openness, such communities are indeed able to support a strong sense of belonging, celebrating the boundaries which embrace them, and yet also stand open for priestly representation and welcome.¹²⁷ All this is enabled by attention to the full range of scriptural narratival images of church communities, which includes that of joint and mutual covenantal priesthood.

From this basis, we now proceed to explore how the truths which are declared about both God and God’s people in worship come to expression in their life together.

¹²⁷ See Chapter 7.
Chapter 6: Renewing Covenant Community through Mutual Priestly Relationships

If the joint priestly worship of God is the central task of the church community, the quality of its life together, which is engendered by such worship, is a second, vital dimension of its existence. In bringing this life together to fuller expression, the communal existence which God intended from creation is re-established. Scripture attests that God has been, is, and will continue to be at work in this:

Most faithful Jews and Christians know that community is at the heart of their relationship with God and with each other. They also know that without God’s creative work, both in the original setting of the conditions of reality and in His interventions within human history, community could not be realized... its realization requires the power of God, and not simply human power alone.¹

Such community will come to full expression at the eschaton, but by God’s presence and work, in Christ and by the Holy Spirit, it also comes into proleptic existence in church communities of the present. God does not, however, act alone, and there is always a form of responsive cooperation which is required on the part of church communities in order for God’s power in community making and sustaining to come to fruition. Such cooperation may be understood in terms of both imitation and participation: God’s people are to “be holy as I am holy,”² acting in righteousness and compassion, and to participate in God’s presence and work, so that love of God and love of one another become a seamless garment - “And a second is like it....”³

With community with God and one another as both history and telos, the mutual life of church community members is reprioritised: it is to look, as much as is presently possible, like God’s eschatological promise of complete community. As such, the church community is neither an accidental nor utilitarian by-product of individual salvation, nor simply a means to a missional end: it is not, as indicated in one colloquial expression, “the change shed for the main game.” Rather than being only a means to an end, the church community is part of the vital movement of all that God will achieve as God works towards “a universal community for and with his human creation.”⁴

¹ Kirkpatrick, Community, 139.
² Lev 19:2.
³ Matt 22:34; Col 3:14. For Paul Fiddes, the term “participation” more nearly captures the sense which, as was explored in the previous chapter in relation to worship, that church communities are not simply called to observe and imitate God, but are rather drawn into God’s very life, Father, Son and Spirit, in all the dynamism of relational movement and activity. Fiddes, Participating in God, 12.
⁴ Kirkpatrick, Community, 138.
community the church *does* provide for the support and growth in discipleship of the persons who participate in it, and *is* a vital witness to the world concerning God’s mission towards it, but its significance, rather than being diminished by these outcomes, is heightened by them. Neither the discipleship of individuals nor the work of mission can be separated from the life together of the community, but rather they are dependent upon it.

This chapter will begin with an exploration of the priesthood of believers in this mutual mode, seeking to establish the validity of such an understanding as coherent with the concept of joint priesthood. It will then go on to look at the nature of such relationality, questioning the post-Enlightenment emphasis on the language of rights, and proposing that a mutual priesthood presupposes, not competing individual rights, but a deeply interdependent community shaped by love. Such a community practices righteousness in justice and compassion, and bears one another’s burdens through intercessory prayer and confession. Finally, and returning to issues raised by the PSOC dimension of influence, the expression of such mutual priesthood in discipline and discernment will then be explored, as the mutuality of priesthood again finds its context in the joint priesthood of the community.

6.1. The Mutuality of Covenant Priesthood

The proposal that the joint covenantal priesthood of believers also comes to expression as a mutual priesthood of community members to one another, appears to skirt two particular dangers; that priesthood becomes assigned to a particular class within the covenant community, and that each member of the community comes to perceive priesthood as their own possession in isolation from that community. As was seen in Chapter 4.1.4, early Baptists struggled with the tension between their commitment to the priesthood of believers expressed in congregational governance and the pressing need they saw for good order, including the necessity for the appointment of persons to specific offices. This tension came to expression in a variety of ways across times and places, but Baptists have not by any means entirely escaped the tendency to abdicate the mutual responsibilities expressed, for example, in the Keach Covenant (Chapter 4.1.4),⁵ to a specific group of office holders (pastors, elders and deacons) within the community. On the other hand, as was highlighted in Chapter 4.2.2, Baptists have also had a strong tendency to regard priesthood as a highly individual matter, a personal possession expressed most distinctively as “soul competency,” borne along by the language of

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⁵ Keach, "Covenant of Benjamin and Elias Keech."
individual rights: the priesthood of all believers, in the words of Walter Shurden, is “your right of direct and immediate access to God through Jesus Christ.”6 Any suggestion that one believer might play a role in the relationship between another believer and God has been understood as standing in contradiction to the principles of liberty of conscience, the right of private judgment and the denial of any mediation except that of Christ (Chapter 4.2.2; 4.2.4).

These two distortions of the priesthood of believers are not exclusive of one another, but rather tend to form an alliance whereby priesthood as the believer’s own right for themselves, and only themselves, actually requires that somebody else carries out the pastoral care of the community (when somebody is weak enough to require it because their own priesting of themselves has failed).7 This duty of pastoral care is then seen as most appropriately assigned to those who are appointed and paid to carry it out.8 This troubling alliance was most vehemently critiqued by the “renegade” Southern Baptist pastor, Carlyle Marney, in his 1974 publication, Priests to Each Other.9 In this work, Marney argued most explicitly against any form of priestly class, even and especially within Baptist church practice in which, for him in his time and place, believers had become overly reliant on their clergy. Such clergy were, in Marney’s view, in danger of becoming the very kind of “kept harlotry” of which Luther had complained.10 On the other hand, neither would he in any way countenance the “bastard individualism” of soul competency.11

With these dual dangers in mind, it might perhaps seem wisest to disallow any discussion of the joint priesthood of believers coming to expression in the mutual lives of members of the community. And yet, although the priesthood of believers is understood primarily as a joint priesthood, it is also entirely coherent, even necessary, to understand that all believers are called to act consistently with that collective priesthood in their relationships with one another: it is also, therefore, a mutual priesthood. As such, the priesthood of “each” believer only exists in this context and never becomes an individual possession. As

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6 Shurden, The Doctrine of the Priesthood of Believers, 10.
7 The difficulty is thus seen to be not only an unwillingness to serve others, but perhaps, more fundamentally, to be served oneself. The whole posture of “competency” suggests that the community member who needs help has failed in this highly valued, individualistic trait.
8 This tendency is perhaps most obvious in the complaint that most pastors will hear at some time that a sick community member has not been appropriately cared for by the church because the pastor has not visited.
10 Marney, Priests to Each Other xi.
11 Marney, Priests to Each Other xiv.
Rees puts it, and according to the Lutheran roots of the doctrine (Chapter 4.1.3), “every Christian has an equal part in the priesthood of the church.”

The priestly imperative of such mutuality completely countermands both “bastard individualism” and abdication of responsibility for care within the community to a priestly class. According to Marney, then, the priesthood of believers means that

you, you, take your priesthood wherever you are, to be whatever priests must be. There, where you and they are – you, all of you, are the ministry of the Word. This does not mean that you are competent to deal with God for yourself. It means rather that you are competent and responsible to deal with God and for the neighbour. It was a gross perversion of the gospel that inserted a bastard individualism here and then taught us that the believer’s priesthood meant that ‘every tub must sit on its own bottom.’

And again, “I do not priest me. I priest you and vice versa. On this the community of witness takes its rise. Without it no church exists at all.” Such mutuality, as Marney makes clear, is vital, and yet, as will unfold, finds itself at all points at home in the context of the joint priesthood of the local church.

6.2. The Nature and Expression of Mutual Priesthood

As has been noted, the language of the priesthood of believers and soul competency has tended to go hand in hand with the language of individual rights (above and Chapter 4.2.3). Such language, however, is a two-edged sword. On the one hand, at least in some forms, it has its roots in Christian ethics, and “at its best, the emphasis on human rights is commendable and entirely consistent with a Christian view of the dignity and worth of all people.” On the other hand, however, such language is also fundamental to “the modern fragmenting of the common good into irreconcilable, private goods and interests,” in which church communities tend to find themselves entangled. Without the guiding framework of corporate and personal responsibility, the language of rights, brought together with individualism and consumerism, “quickly deteriorates to a new level of selfishness that seeks to use the law as a weapon to be wielded by the powerful.” This is problematic enough in the “world,” but within the church an entirely different form of relationality is

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13 Marney, Priests to Each Other, xiv, emphases in original.
14 Marney, Priests to Each Other, xxii, emphasis in original.
intended to be at work.\textsuperscript{18} This relationality is love which comes to expression, firstly, as righteousness (justice and compassion), mutual care and self sacrifice \textit{within} the church community, and then, without pause, presses on to those \textit{beyond} the community.\textsuperscript{19}

The debate around the nature of this agapeic love is a complex one, but the scriptural narratives achieve a balance between the demands of self-sacrifice in the context of God’s love, and the mutuality of the community.\textsuperscript{20} In such terms, Christ’s priestly sacrifice is presented as a model for the church community’s life together: “Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus...”\textsuperscript{21} This mind was that of a person who knew himself to be held and sustained by the Father’s love, and who had the joy of his communion (both with the Father and the believing community) set before him.\textsuperscript{22} In the light of this love and joy, Jesus sacrificed himself, and Paul, in this context, enjoins such mutuality on the community, with members providing such care for one another that none would have need to “look... to your own interests.”\textsuperscript{23} Rather than demanding the negation of self, this then becomes a call to entrust themselves into the care of others in a way which reflects the truth of believers’ ecclesiastically related selves:\textsuperscript{24} “We live and move and have our being not in ourselves but in one another; and what rights or powers or freedom we possess are ours by the grace and favour of our fellows.”\textsuperscript{25} Such a possibility, as it was in Christ’s case, is underwritten by the ultimate care for each member of the community by the Father, the love of whom (both his for his children, and his children’s for him), relativises all other concerns including the believer’s own self/life (Chapter 3.3.1).

The community understood in terms of such interdependent love, cannot be sustained by human forms of sociality which point to a loose conglomeration of individuals who happen to come together when necessary to achieve particular ends, whether for the development of their own lives, or for the sake of some other cause. Rather, such gravity is far more adequately narrated as a mutual priesthood, with all the richness and grave responsibility attendant to this concept as it is unfolded in both Scripture and the practice of early Baptists. It is in this context of mutual priesthood that it is appropriate to explore specific expressions of this love in the New Testament injunctions concerning life together.

\textsuperscript{18} Paul acknowledges the existence of his rights as an apostle, and yet renounces them for the sake of others (1 Cor 9:1-23).
\textsuperscript{19} See Chapter 7.3.2 and 7.3.3.
\textsuperscript{20} See Anne Klose, "In Conversation with Anders Nygren: Towards a Narrative Theology of Love" (MTh Thesis, Brisbane College of Theology, 2009).
\textsuperscript{21} Phil 2:5. See Chapter 3.3.1.
\textsuperscript{22} Matt 3:17; 17:5; John 5:20; 10:17; 15:9; Heb 12:2.
\textsuperscript{23} Phil 2:1-8.
\textsuperscript{24} Kirkpatrick, \textit{Community}, 187.
6.2.1 Justice and Compassion within the Community

The New Testament churches were repeatedly challenged to respond to those within their communities who were in practical need, to attend with extra care to those who might otherwise be marginalised or go unheard (Chapter 3.3.2), and to reject distinctions of race, class and gender (Chapter 3.3.4). Both for these New Testament believers and the early Baptists who sought to follow in their footsteps, the strangeness and strength of their commitment to their new community, meant that they were heavily dependent upon one another: relationships with their previous support-systems were often disrupted, and the church became their primary community (Chapters 3.3.1 and 4.1.4). More profoundly than this, however, very particular attention to the marginalised appears to have been a continuing focal point of the gospel message, from Jesus’ teaching and example onwards. Children, in what was perceived to be their worthlessness, were held up as models of faith, the widow’s mite was preferred to the offerings of the rich, and the outcast prostitutes and tax-collectors were chosen as companions. The poor, hungry, and persecuted of every sort were pronounced “blessed,” the lepers and the unclean were healed and restored to their communities, and women were valued as conversation partners, witnesses, and disciples.

This pattern of care for the marginalised already comes to expression to varying degrees within many Australian Baptist church communities (Chapter 2.3.2). Even within the relatively affluent Australian context, there are still those within, as well as beyond, church communities in need of acute financial and material support, and longer term support, life-skill training and counselling, and many of these needs are being met (Chapter 2.3.2). Such persons may still, however, be seen as those within the community who are “normal” but have fallen on hard times, or will become “normal” with assistance, whilst others, such as those with disabilities, chronic illness, mental illness, and the ageing (including those with various forms of dementia), pose a deeper challenge to the church community which lives in the midst of the culturally pervasive and, in Christian terms unconscionable,

28 Church communities should beware, however, of assuming that such work, for example in relation to the full inclusion of women, is complete, and that further training/awareness raising and affirmative action is no longer required.
29 The recognition of this reminds the church community that it remains in solidarity with the world (Chapter 7.4.2.3), and that attending to the needs of those within the church community provides a necessary basis for meeting the needs of those beyond the community 7.3.3).
exclusive valuing of material wealth, physical and intellectual autonomy, youth, and particular forms of beauty.\textsuperscript{30}

Against just such a background in Corinth, Paul faced down various forms of superiority which were causing division amongst the church community.\textsuperscript{31} According to Paul, it is central to the gospel message that

God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, things that are not, to reduce to nothing things that are, so that no one might boast in the presence of God. He is the source of your life in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification and redemption, in order that, as it is written, “Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.”\textsuperscript{32}

The principle is explained by Richard Baukham:

At Corinth – and Paul certainly does not mean only at Corinth – God singled out the poor and the powerless, choosing to begin his work with them, not because God’s love does not extend to the cultural and social elite, but actually for the sake of the wealthy and the powerful as well as for the poor and the humble. God’s love has to reach the strong via the weak, because the strong can receive the love of God only by abandoning their pretensions to status above others. Only when they see in God’s choice of those without status that status counts for nothing in God’s sight can they abandon the arrogance and the vested interests that prevent their right relationship both with God and with others. God’s ‘shaming’ of the wise and the strong, in Paul’s words, is this redemptive contradiction of their values.\textsuperscript{33}

The marginalised are not only to be catered for on the basis of a responsibility to meet their needs, but because in serving them, the church community recognises its own place of complete dependence on the grace of God, and the nature of its service modelled after Christ.\textsuperscript{34}

\textsuperscript{30} The work of Stanley Hauerwas has been particularly fruitful in challenging such deeply ingrained patterns. See, for example, John Swinton, ed. Critical Reflections on Stanley Hauerwas’ Theology of Disability: Disabling Society, Enabling Theology (Binghamton, NY: Haworth Pastoral Press, 2004); and Stanley Hauerwas and Laura Yordy, “Captured in Time: Friendship and Aging,” Journal of Aging and Identity 3, no. 3 (1998). Facing such challenges also requires church communities to ongoing and prayerful dialogue around issues of suffering and death. See, for example, Fiddes, Participating in God, Chapter 5: The Vulnerable God and the Problem of Suffering.

\textsuperscript{31} James Dunn examines a whole series of tensions around social status amongst the Corinthians, such as those between the “strong” and the “weak,” the rich and the poor, and the wise and the foolish. The stresses of dealing with variations in social status explain, for example, the Corinthian church’s silence over sexual immorality, on the basis that “those involved were rich patrons, one or more of the powerful and nobly born mentioned in 1.26. It was the individual’s social prestige, and the degree to which less-well-to-do members of the congregation were dependent on this patronage, which kept the bulk of the Corinthian church silent.” Dunn, Beginning from Jerusalem, 797, 802, 814.

\textsuperscript{32} 1 Cor 1:27-31.

\textsuperscript{33} Bauckham, Bible and Mission, 50, emphasis in original.

\textsuperscript{34} Even here, care is required to avoid the objectification of the “marginalised” as a means to an end for the “real” church community which consists of everyone else. Bauckham is, I would argue, expressing the very opposite of this, in that the whole church community comes to see that, before God, they are in exactly the same position as the marginalised: there is no distinction between the two groups.
The world’s valuation of persons is, thus, countermanded and, in facing such challenges, church communities actually come to reconnect with the realities of the gospel, and the truth that the value of human life before God, in both creation and redemption, is not based upon human achievement or the establishment of the autonomous self, but is always graciously given and fulfilled by God – and finds its place, as does all human existence, in community. Such revaluation of the “differently-abled” may begin with the provision of the most basic forms of resources, but must press on to a fuller sense of welcome and inclusion. The gifts of the Spirit are distributed to all, so that persons with disabilities are “honourable and vital not because they function as those ‘others’ who are weaker, but because church becomes what it is through sharing lives vulnerably with one another, in humility and grace [so that] what appears weak according to normalizing standards is actually a strength, and vice versa.”

6.2.2 Praying for one another

The spiritual attentiveness which makes such vulnerability and revaluing of others and self possible, is engendered by the mutual priestly task of prayer for one another; representing one another before God in intercession, and thereby participating in the high priestly intercession of Christ. The pattern begins with Christ teaching his disciples concerning how they should pray. The prayer is plural in form; it is “our” Father to whom believers pray; commitment to the coming of God’s reign involves the community of pray-ers in kingdom attitudes and action towards others; the prayer for daily bread includes others in need; the prayer for forgiveness is the basis of reconciliation within the community; and it is all of “us” who need deliverance from the “time of trial” and rescue from the “evil one.”

In commenting on this fact, William Barclay reminds those who pray this prayer that...
it is not that Jewish thought either condemned or neglected personal and private prayer, far from it; it is simply that the Jew had a horror of selfishness in prayer, and, therefore, stressed the need of praying in and with the community, and we may well remember that the words, *me*, *my*, and *mine* never appear in the Lord’s Prayer.\(^{41}\)

From this foundational teaching, the intercessory prayer of Christian believers which is to be “ceaseless” is reported as of great significance from the very inception of the Church.\(^{42}\) The New Testament affirms that such prayer will enable God’s revelation of Godself and God’s power in others;\(^{43}\) inspire a thankfulness for one another;\(^{44}\) enable others to “lead lives worthy of the Lord”;\(^ {45}\) strengthen them in their witness for Christ;\(^ {46}\) result in healing and forgiveness for others;\(^ {47}\) and enable them to come to maturity in Christ.\(^ {48}\) The intensity and scope of such prayer on behalf of other members of the church community does not, it is clear, permit any sense that the lives of fellow members are strictly their own business as their own priests, but rather teaches an interdependency by which every element of believers’ lives before God are open to the constructive impact of others’ prayers for them.

In order for the practice of mutual prayer to play this significant role in the life of the church community, there are two vexing extremes which need to be addressed and overcome. On the one hand, community members may feel themselves to be over-burdened by the responsibility of prayer for others, particularly if they have been inculcated with the “inner transformation” theory of prayer. According to this, God primarily acts in response to prayer by changing those who pray – intercessors are transformed so that, in effect, they become the answer to their own prayers.\(^ {49}\) For Fiddes this theory points to a profound truth of personal transformation which must come to practical expression in meeting the needs of others (see previous section), but which is, nevertheless, insufficient to describe the whole of what occurs when believers pray.\(^ {50}\) In terms of the experience of prayer such an approach is liable to, firstly, limit the inclination to pray for people outside the scope of the believer’s own influence, and, secondly, to produce a cycle of effort, pride, fatigue and

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\(^{41}\) Barclay’s language which puts “the Jew” in the past tense jars, but his point is still helpful. William Barclay, *The Plain Man Looks at the Lord’s Prayer* (London: Fontana Books, 1967), 19, emphasis in original.

\(^{42}\) 1 Thess 5:17; Eph 6:18; Acts 1:14; 2:42.


\(^{44}\) Eph 1:16; Phil 1:3-5.

\(^{45}\) Col 1:9-10; Phil 1:9-11; 2 Thess 1:11-12.

\(^{46}\) Col 4:3-5; Eph 6:20; Phlm 6-7.

\(^{47}\) Jas 5:14-16

\(^{48}\) Col 4:12.

\(^{49}\) Fiddes, *Participating in God*, 124, 125.

\(^{50}\) Fiddes, *Participating in God*, 125. The New Testament churches practices ranged from holding all things in common (Acts 2:44; 4:32), to appointing those whose main task was to make sure the needy among them were cared for (Acts 6:1-6), and monetary provision for other church communities (1 Cor 16:3).
despair which comes when believers see themselves as solely responsible for building God’s kingdom. On the other hand, if intercessory prayer is understood according to the “two-cause theory,” “why should we make any requests to God at all if God is the final irresistible cause of events? If the divine will is fixed upon a certain action, it seems that our prayers of intercession cannot make any difference.”51

Fiddes and Liston, both seeking to frame the nature of intercessory prayer in trinitarian terms, come to different answers to these questions. According to Liston,

As we hear and obey the Spirit’s guidance about what to pray for and how to pray, we are reinforced in our obedience by seeing God act in accordance with those prayers. We have not changed God’s mind; God is only doing what he willed us to pray for. But neither are our prayers ineffective for by God’s own choosing they release his power.52

For Fiddes, however, whilst the sense of participation is somewhat similar, something more dynamic is understood to be at work. As believers intercede for one another, God makes room within Godself for the creative participation of God’s people. As a result, whilst the fulfilment of God’s suffering, persuasive love is sure (as demonstrated by Jesus’ life, death and resurrection, together with the promise of the eschaton), neither the route to nor the content of the future is predetermined.53 The pray-er participates through prayer in the life of God, and the general outcome of that prayer will be in accord with God’s way of being, but, the specific nature of God’s answer will been shaped and coloured by the pray-er’s own personhood before God.54 By either account, prayer for others begins with careful listening to both God and others, it continues as an act of priesthood which is a participation in the priesthood of Christ, and culminates in faith that God is at work. Such efficacious prayers, offered ceaselessly for one another, knit the church community together, by the Spirit, in God.

6.2.3 Bearing One Another’s Burdens

If members of a church community are deeply dependent upon one another’s prayers, Galatians 6:1-2 represents a further, profound challenge to the concept of soul competency and individualism before God.55 At their most vulnerable point concerning sin

51 Fiddes, Participating in God, 121.
52 Liston, "The Dynamics of Trinitarian Worship," 45.
53 For Fiddes, the risk that God has taken in staking everything on his persuasive love is “real, but not total.” God knows the power of such love, and its successful outcome in the resurrection stands in the midst of human history. Fiddes, Participating in God, 141.
54 I would argue that Fiddes’ account is more consonant with Baptist reasoning concerning the two-fold nature of freedom – both divine and human.
55 It is noted that Paul also enjoins that “all must test their own work,” and “all must carry their own loads” (Gal 6:4, 5). Interdependence is no excuse for failing to fulfil the responsibility of self-examination and
in the believer’s life, community members are made mutually responsible for one another. The context for this, according to Galatians 5:13ff. is the freedom in which they live, and which may be used as either “an opportunity for self-indulgence,” or to “become slaves to one another.” 56 Both the “works of the flesh” and the “fruit of the Spirit” are considered in almost exclusively relational terms, and it is in this context that “if anyone is detected in a transgression, you who have received the Spirit should restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness.” 57 The approach is not one of pride but of humility, in the knowledge that the one who seeks to help is equally liable to temptation as the one who has sinned. 58 The guiding principle is that of bearing the other’s burden according to “the law of Christ.” 59 It is Christ who bears the burden of sin before God, 60 and yet, in participating in his priestly work, believers are to follow his example: “He did not self-righteously say, ‘That is not my sin. It is yours.’ And neither must we. We may be wearied or discouraged or even angry because of our brother’s sin, but to follow Jesus we must care enough to help [the fellow believer] overcome it.” 61

The relational corollary of such burden bearing is confession, which, as was explored in the previous chapter (5.3.3), certainly has a place in corporate worship, but, perhaps more challengingly for Baptist church community members, might also come to expression as a person to person practice. 62 Such a practice was, despite their emphasis on overcoming the abuses of the Roman Catholic penitential system, upheld by the Reformers (Chapter 4.1.2), but has since fallen under suspicion and into disuse. Such suspicion is given voice by John Stott for whom the biblical principle is that of confession only to the party against whom one has sinned, with special caution against confessing “private sins” which might contaminate others: sin is an individual matter between the believer and God. 63 For Stott, the priesthood of the believer is undermined by person to person confession because it is “damaging to the penitent (since it at least confuses, if not contradicts, his God-given right

56 Gal 5:13.
58 Gal 6:1.
59 Gal 6:2. See Chapter 3.3.2.
60 Isa 53:4-5; 1 Pet 2:2-4.
62 “Confess your sins to one another” (Jas 5:16).
of direct access to Jesus Christ)... and it is derogatory to Jesus Christ (since it obscures His uniqueness as our only and absolutely adequate Saviour, Mediator, and Advocate).”

But, in stark contrast, Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s theology of confession, based upon the narrative of the cross and the community which results from it, highlights the losses which result from the shift in emphasis from community to individualism. Such individualistic self-sufficiency is incomprehensible to Bonhoeffer as he sets out his understanding of Christian community in *Life Together*. For him, life without mutual confession is barely Christian. Written within and for a Lutheran context, the work is throughout, and including the final chapter on “Confession and Communion,” Protestant in its presentation of the mutual priesthood of all believers; a priesthood which is of and for the community rather than a matter of isolationist personal possession and self-sufficiency.

According to Bonhoeffer, “He who is alone with his sin is utterly alone,” yet, despite this, the Christian community tends always towards basing its fellowship on the falsehood that its members are devout believers rather than undevout sinners, so confirming this isolation. The consequence is the concealment of sin and a denial of the gospel of grace. The “call to brotherly confession,” on the other hand, is the “call to the great grace of God in the Church”, and the means by which believers break through to Christian community based on the truth of their sinfulness and yet the reality of God’s grace. By confessing sin in the presence of a brother or sister, believers break the hold of self-justification, and the sin which has been revealed and judged loses its power to tear the community apart. Such confession also results in “breaking through to the Cross” and the dying to self which is necessary for Christian community to function. Without confession to a fellow-believer community members are able to maintain their pride and their capacity to consider themselves a law unto themselves, but, “in the confession of concrete sins the old man dies a painful, shameful death before the eyes of a brother.” It must be acknowledged that this is a specifically Christian practice rather than a general form of

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64 Stott’s comments here relate to auricular confession to a priest, but he indicates elsewhere that his objections also apply to confession to any other church member (see, for example, his argument in Chap. 5 that all the benefits of confession to one another are available directly from God). His final conclusion is that person to person confession is, at best, a temporary crutch that we should seek to do away with as soon as possible. Stott, *Confess Your Sins*, 68, 83.


68 Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, 112.


“accountability,” so that sin is named as such (rather than excused as “distress and weakness and failure”) and responded to, with neither “human censoriousness” nor “weak indulgence,” but with “divine severity and divine love.” The only qualification to hear the confession of others within the community is that confessors know for themselves what it is to live “beneath the Cross” and, therefore, the dreadfulness and pervasiveness of sin, and yet also God’s grace and mercy. In this way, the responsibility of hearing confessions is shared amongst the community, and it is clear that no-one within the community is beyond such accountability. Thus, the mutuality of the community’s priesthood is confirmed.

It is, thus, through interdependent prayer and this mutual bearing of burdens as making and hearing confession that the mutual priesthood of community members comes to expression.

6.3. Influence in the Priestly Community

The epistolary exhortations to mutual burden bearing and confession appear to describe a long relational pause at the very first step in the process of reconciliation outlined in Matthew 18:15-20 (see Chapter 3.3.2). At this first step of pointing “out the fault when the two of you are alone,” mutual responsibility and confession are clearly in sight, with the focus on the personal and mutual in the midst of community. The remainder of the Matthean process, however, describes a series of actions by which community members are called to account by the wider church community, as issues are discerned by that community, for community focused ends; what, in terms of the PSOC, was recognised as part of the bipolar nature of influence within the community (Chapter 2.4.2). This section will pursue the phenomenon of influence within the community from both perspectives; the influence of the community on its members through church discipline or accountability, and the means by which members might influence the wider community in communal discernment and decision-making processes. At this point, the mutual practice of life together within the priestly covenant community presses again towards being a joint practice of life together which is central to Christ’s constituting presence with it.

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73 Bonhoeffer, Life Together, 119.
74 Bonhoeffer, Life Together, 118.
75 There are many cogent reasons why such a practice has been deemed too problematic to consider, but Bonhoeffer convincingly mounts the case that it is worth attempting to overcome these, and in doing so to address fundamental issues concerning the very nature of the gospel and Christian community.
76 Matt 18:15.
77 Matt 18:15-20. See Chapters 4.1.4.
6.3.1 Accountability: The Influence of the Community on its Members

As was discussed in Chapter 2.3.2, the practice of “church discipline” as it is expressed in Matthew 18:15-20 and elsewhere, has become extremely problematic in light of contemporary individualism and associated Enlightenment developments within the church community. In fact, it is the point at which many of the issues which have been raised throughout this project come into particularly sharp focus. The aim of this section is to highlight the realities with which Baptist church communities currently deal, to describe appropriate church practices to which the scriptural and Baptist historical-theological resources point, and, having outlined these realities and ideals, to propose practical means by which to engage the former with the latter.

The first and most fundamental question which arises from the text of Matthew 18:15-20, is what is meant by “the church” to which the wayward member is to be referred (v.17). As was explored in Chapter 2, for many of those attending Australian Baptist churches, the church as a stable phenomenon exists mainly in its buildings and leadership, and barely as a set of loosely connected relational networks, tenuously held together by the fleeting sense of individual fulfillment which comes with voluntary association. On the other hand, as was established in Chapter 4.1, Baptist ecclesiology has a very clear and distinctive understanding which delineates the local church as the whole of the people, the joint people, gathered by God in the name of Jesus Christ (v.20) in that place, regenerated by the Holy Spirit and initiated through believer baptism into the body of Christ in its local expression. Such a church is, in Baptist terms, marked by the dual covenant commitment made by its people together, to God and to one another. This is the boundaried church by which members are to be held accountable.

If, on this basis and in these terms, the church community as a joint community might be envisioned to exist, a second question arises: does it matter that such a community is a disciplined community? Stanley Hauerwas suggests that the response which is impressed upon Western church communities by their cultural context is a resounding “no”:

The church seems caught in an irresolvable tension today. Insofar as we are able to maintain any presence in modern society we do so by being communities of care. Any attempt to be a disciplined and disciplining community seems antithetical to being a community of care...

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78 E.g., 1 Cor 5:1-13.
79 Chapter 8.2.2 suggests that recognition of the church in its joint existence may be promoted by, amongst other things, the acknowledgment of its role as a participant, through its representative, in the sacraments of baptism and the Lord’s Supper.
That the church has difficulty being a disciplined community, or even more cannot conceive what it would mean to be a disciplined community, is not surprising given the church’s social position in developed economies. The church exists in a buyer's or consumer's market, so any suggestion that in order to be a member of a church you must be transformed by opening your life to certain kinds of discipline is almost impossible to maintain. The called church has become the voluntary church, whose primary characteristic is that the congregation is friendly.\footnote{Stanley Hauerwas, "Discipleship as a Craft, Church as a Disciplined Community," http://www.religion-online.org/showarticle.asp?title=110 (accessed 19 Feb, 2013).}

The church community is, in these terms, called only to exercise grace and acceptance, to being “friendly,” whilst its nature as a disciplined community is deemed to be thoroughly outdated and unwarranted. In Zygmunt Bauman’s terms, the drive towards individual freedom and autonomy very much outweighs that towards the security offered by the cohesiveness of “stern obedience,” or, for that matter, any kind of obedience at all (see Chapter 2.3).\footnote{Bauman, \textit{Community}, 4.} Moreover, there is very little perceived gap between the culture without and within the local church: the local church is just supposed to express what are perceived to be the best aspects of the culture better and with greater consistency. According to Michael Budde, “the loose ecclesiology of most churches [in Western culture] presumes a smooth fit between Christianity and almost anything else; there is no need to change one’s life, or submit to disciplines of formation.”\footnote{Budde, "Collecting Praise," 130.}

In response to such objections, the narrative of church communities as covenanted priestly communities provides two affirmative answers as to why it matters that they should be disciplined communities. Firstly, the covenanted joint church community is called, albeit in a limited, penultimate sense (\textit{simul justus et peccator}), to practice the holiness of God in order to host the God of holiness, as befits its central task of worship (Chapter 5.1): the ethical or virtuous life to which Scripture (Chapter 3.2.2; 3.2.3; 3.4.2; 3.4.3) and early Baptist practice (Chapter 4.1.4; 4.1.5) point as the hosting of God in God’s holiness is not only to be embraced at a personal level but also \textit{by the joint church community}. Christ is not only saviour but, in both scriptural and early Baptist terms, king – and not just of the individual but of the joint church community as a whole.\footnote{See Chapter 4.1.2 and particularly the reference to John Smyth’s understanding of the church as “private persons separating from al synne, and joining together to obey Christ their king, priest and prophet.” Smyth, “Principles and Inferences,” 1:267.} Secondly, and as will be explored further in the next chapter (7.3.3), discipline is vital to the witness of the joint local church to the world. As Lesslie Newbigin notes, the decline of Christendom, and the fact that the local church finds itself in an increasingly non-Christian culture, only serves to highlight the disciplined community as a necessity without which “the Church’s witness to
the world becomes hopelessly compromised.” The discipline of the community, the accountability of members to the whole of the covenanted church, is therefore vital to the very nature of the joint tasks which are integral to its raison d’être; worship and witness. Its significance passes beyond the personal goal of growth in discipleship to a covenantal responsibility of the joint community before God.

If in terms of the priestly covenant community there are such good purposes for the influence of the community on its members in terms of discipline, a third question then arises concerning the existence and sources of the community’s authority to exercise such discipline.

The contemporary consumer society in which Australian Baptist churches are embedded appears to deny the possibility that the church community might possess any authority to practice the discipline of its members. Again, Hauerwas clarifies the issue:

One of the great problems facing liberal and conservative churches alike is that their membership has been schooled on the distinction between public and private morality. Liberal and conservative alike assume that they have a right generally to do pretty much what they want, as long as what they want does not entail undue harm to others. Individualism, especially in the form of soul competency, as was explored above, means that the conduct of individuals is seen as a private matter in which other members of the community have no “right” to interfere, and, as an escalation of this, any attempt to exert authority in discipline by the joint church community would be perceived as oppressive rather than caring: “in a ‘do what feels good’ and ‘be yourself’ culture, talking about obedience is hardly popular.”

The great fear within Australian culture is intolerance, and the great fear within Australian Baptist churches is a harsh and graceless rigidity: Australians are particularly attuned to any possibility that either “God’s police” or oppressive institutional structures are at work, and, in this light, grace and acceptance must, apparently, be endlessly emphasised (see Chapter 2.1). Post-Enlightenment authority is firmly grounded only in the individual self, and external authority therefore appears to be the enemy of personal autonomy.

On the contrary, however, the narrative of the local church as a priestly covenanted community, suggests that such authority is indeed present in the whole community as it

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85 Hauerwas, "Discipleship as a Craft." The whole church is, in both Hauerwas’ and Baptist terms, the whole local church.
87 Bader-Saye, "Listening," 158.
acts in its joint priesthood: “if salvation is genuinely social, then there can be no place for a distinction that invites us to assume, for example, that we have ownership over our bodies and possessions in a way that is not under the discipline of the whole church.” And that such authority comes from two sources. Firstly, the authority of those who are gathered in Christ’s name comes from Christ himself, in his presence with the community. For John Howard Yoder, the priestly work concerning “the keys of the kingdom of heaven” goes beyond the context of the strictly personal/human to the broader stage of the kingdom based on the church’s authority to bind and loose. The authority to forgive sins which Jesus (so offensively to certain Jewish authorities) claimed for himself, he then passed to his disciples. This has become, according to Yoder, “the scandal of the divine mandate,” which continues to shock Protestant sensibilities because, “reacting against the abuses of Roman Catholic penitential practice, Protestants have for centuries been arguing that ‘only God can forgive,’ and that the believer receives reassurance of forgiveness not from another person but in the secret of his or her own heart.” Concern for God’s transcendence, he suggests, and a failure to grasp the implications of the incarnation, leave community members unable to believe that God has committed such authority into their hands.

The second source of authority for the church to seek to influence the conduct of its members, is the consent of those members themselves given in entering into covenant membership. The very nature of Baptist ecclesiality is based upon this profoundly nuanced interweaving of the divine and human elements. Although covenant membership is initiated by God, nevertheless, it does indeed have a human, voluntary, responsive dimension to it. On this basis, the authority of the local church to either sanction or to proclaim forgiveness in response to the conduct of its members is entirely dependent upon the willingness of those members to stay within the community and submit themselves to such processes: “Existence as a freely-choosing and disciplined community is the authentic form of the church’s life.” A sense of belonging which fundamentally looks to its own comfort would find such submission unconscionable, whilst a sense of covenant membership which prioritises growth in discipleship for self and others within and for the

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88 Hauerwas, "Discipleship as a Craft."
89 Matt 18:20.
95 Wright, Disavowing Constantine, 180.
community, might possibly bear such a challenge – buoyed by the knowledge, both taught and practised, that the standards to which they are being held are mutually agreed and shared; that members undergoing such discipline are loved and supported by the community; and with a view to the two great aims (worship and witness) of becoming a discipled/disciplined community. In a very real sense, being a community which enables such staying and submitting is the litmus test that genuine covenant community does indeed exist.

Three fundamental questions concerning the influence of the joint church community on the conduct of its members have now been raised: does the community actually exist in any meaningful way with regard to discipline of members; does it matter that it be a disciplined community; and does it possess any authority to exert such influence? In response to each of these three questions the demotic discourse, heavily influenced by individualism and its other Enlightenment counterparts, answers in the negative, whilst the narrative of the local church as a priestly covenanted community affirms that (based upon both Scripture and the early Baptist appropriation of it) the opposite is true. Such a stand-off seems unlikely to be solved by simply averring the latter with more force; rather, what is needed is a set of practices which, whilst pressing towards the latter, are cognisant of and prepared to dialogue with the former. It is to such practices that we now turn our attention.

Firstly, it appears important that such a renewed concept of church discipline should escape the negative connotations which are genuinely raised by its past history. Older Baptist church members who took part in church “business” meetings (Chapter 4.2.4), and those who have been initiated into a corporate memory of such things, understand the misuse, even abuse, of such proceedings. Many of the issues for which members were disciplined at such meetings were later adjudged to have been more culturally than scripturally conditioned, and the responses made to have been “authoritarian, censorious and punitive.” The term “church discipline” has come to be heavily associated with such practices, so that it inescapably elicits a strongly negative response before discussion regarding its merits and challenges can even begin. Haymes, Gouldbourne and Cross suggest that, on this basis, it is useful to change the language used within church communities from that of “discipline” to “accountability.” This, they propose, is more familiar, being used in many work places and having more constructive connotations as a process by which employees are encouraged to “develop their full potential” in that work

Such accountability reaffirms, in their terms “discipline as a pastoral function,” which finds its context in “mutuality and commonality, [with an aim] to discipleship,” and assures members that the “authoritarian, censorious and punitive” will be avoided.

However, whilst their language of accountability is helpful, in other ways Haymes et al. appear to limit its use in ways which, in view of the issues raised above, are less constructive. They are very circumspect concerning the role of the whole church community: “Clearly,” they suggest, “this is a very delicate area, and, transferred as it was to the practice of the church meeting, we have seen something of how it can go wrong or become distorted.” Their preference is to “reinterpret the context,” and to call for a solely mutual, interpersonal form of accountability. In fact, they claim, it is the mutuality of accountability (rather than the involvement of the wider church community) which identifies such a practice as Baptist. As explored above, they have good reasons to reiterate the significance of “the long relational pause” of bearing one another’s burdens at a personal level, and to reject any move to the arena of the whole community, and yet, in doing so, they appear to lodge both the means and goals of accountability solely at the personal level. The means are interpersonal rather than community-based, and the goal is personal growth in discipleship rather than the development of the discipline of the community for the sake of its joint worship and witness. In contrast, the early Baptist tradition, as in other things, sought a balance in these tensions, attempting to minister deeply to one another at an interpersonal level and yet to place such ministry, with great commitment and consistency, within the context of the means and goals of the joint community.

In such a context, the teaching of the whole church community is a vital, though not unproblematic, starting point. Each of the three questions dealt with above needs to be raised and answered in the teaching practices of the church community. With regard to the first question, the existence of the community as a reality which co-exists with the persons

98 Haymes, Gouldbourne and Cross, On Being the Church, 116.
99 Haymes, Gouldbourne and Cross, On Being the Church, 116.
100 Haymes, Gouldbourne and Cross, On Being the Church, 116.
101 Haymes, Gouldbourne and Cross, On Being the Church, 117.
102 Haymes, Gouldbourne and Cross, On Being the Church, 117.
103 The contrast they make is with spiritual direction which is less Baptist in that it “involves work between only two people, and it is often (though not necessarily) one way.” I have extrapolated to make the point concerning the involvement of the whole church, but would argue that this is appropriate to the substance of their argument given their comments about reinterpreting the context away from the church meeting. Haymes, Gouldbourne and Cross, On Being the Church, 117.
104 This is expressed particularly in their account of accountability which focuses on personal development “it is a way of helping somebody develop their full potential in their work place,” and appears to neglect the fact that, especially in the work place, accountability holds employees responsible for their role in attaining goals which are not only their own but those of their employing organisation. Haymes, Gouldbourne and Cross, On Being the Church, 116.
of whom it consists is the starting point; a critique of theology which prioritises the individual and fails to recognise that this perpetuates sin as the separation of self from God and others builds upon this; and the call to covenant membership lays out the nature of such a community. Regarding the second question, the goals of the priestly covenant community must be set out alongside the personal goal of individual growth in Christ: the local church exists not only for its individual members but has very particular goals concerning its existence as a joint community of worship and witness. And regarding the third question, the authority of the church given by Christ and the member who willingly stays and submits needs to be asserted.

This said, Darrel Jackson raises a stumbling block in this, seemingly fairly obvious, first step. His findings suggest an unwillingness amongst pastors and leaders to swim against the tide and to engage with the task of challenging the demotic (destructured relational) discourse around membership, even in a more general and less threatening way than in dealing with accountability. For Jackson, whilst

one might expect this [teaching] to occur naturally within the context of Sunday worship and mid-week study, yet the ministers interviewed seemed reluctant to offer overly-directive advice in an area of congregational life and polity that an increasing number of attenders feel is of marginal importance. Consequently the practical theology of membership and belonging remains unexamined and reflexive activity takes place with reference only to the immediate context.\(^{105}\)

Whilst Jackson points to unwillingness as the cause of the lack of such teaching, I would question if a lack of awareness and resourcing amongst pastors plays an even more powerful part. Most pastors enter their biblical/theological training already steeped in the superficial and individualistic demotic discourse of modern Baptist ecclesiology, are themselves exposed to tertiary teaching which, in “traditional” (i.e., post-Enlightenment) Baptist theological terms, largely accepts this as a given rather than seeking to redress it, and consequently return to that same milieu in ministry without the resources they need to recognise, let alone counteract, such discourse. It is therefore possible that they are not unwilling but unequipped to provide a clearer and more definitive theology of membership and belonging that would expand the horizons of ecclesiality from the individual to the community, especially in relation to the challenging issue of accountability.\(^{106}\)

\(^{105}\) Jackson's comments are made concerning the general issues of belonging and membership, but seem particularly pertinent here. Jackson, “The Discourse of ‘Belonging’”, 176. A similar point is made by Rees for whom “there is much to suggest that pastors and local church leaders see theology, church history and many aspects of biblical studies as irrelevant to their concerns.” Rees, “Enabling Congregations,” 5.

\(^{106}\) My reasoning here is deductive rather than inductive. An analysis of current Australian Baptist training regimes in light of the issues raised by this thesis, would shed further light on this issue.
Next, and to really grasp the practical nettle, issues of accountability need to be put back on the agenda of the meeting of those who have covenanted together in membership; not in a particular, but in a general sense. In agreement with Haymes et al., I would support their point that the practice of discussing particular instances in which accountability is called for carries too much baggage, is too open to abuse, and beyond the pale of culturally conditioned expectations. Nevertheless, what is largely an interpersonal practice needs to be given its context in the joint community. It is this joint community which, in the midst of its considerations of being a covenant community, appoints those leaders to whom is given the task to act on behalf of the whole community in taking up the process of Matthew 18:15-20 when interpersonal efforts to restore and reconcile have failed. And it is to this joint community that such representative leaders report on the broad processes they are following and outcomes they are seeking. It is in the context of this meeting that the nature and goals of covenant commitment are discussed and reaffirmed by church members, and in which they come together to discern the basis and scope of the conduct graciously expected within the disciplined community. To be clear, the means of accountability may remain largely interpersonal, but the context and goals, the “public” nature of members’ conduct, and their responsibility to participate in building a community of worship and witness, are the significant concern of the joint community.

The findings of research in relation to the PSOC indicate that the capacity of a community to influence its members is vital to a sense of cohesiveness within that community (Chapter 2.2), and the exploration of this section has also shown that, more significantly in scriptural and ecclesial terms, it is central to the community carrying out its priestly tasks of worship and witness. The PSOC also indicates the significance of the capacity for community members to influence the decisions taken by their community. This, in the form of joint discernment and decision-making, is the area to which we now turn our attention.

6.3.2 Discernment Together: The Influence of Community Members on their Community

As was outlined in Chapter 2.3.2, Australian Baptist church communities which continue to practice congregational governance in the form it has generally taken over the past century, provide a very particular framework by which their members can influence the joint church community. This framework usually takes the form of meetings which follow the general rules of parliamentary debate; the keeping of minutes, the proposal and

107 This process is exemplified by the Model Covenant proposed by the BUV which sets general standards which may then provide the basis for such discussions. Baptist Union of Victoria, "Covenant Membership."
seconding of motions, speaking to those motions, and voting with specified margins for adoption or loss (Chapter 4.2.4). Such a process is designed to enable the deliberations of a meeting by moving through the agenda, the containment of conflict, the provision of an opportunity for anyone to speak, and the assurance that the will of the majority prevails.\textsuperscript{108} It should thereby ensure the avoidance of the domination of the community by particular individuals or interest groups (Chapter 2.2). The particular strengths of such a system are that, in its democratic form, it attempts to give expression to the shared priesthood of the joint community, and that, in including the administrative side of the church’s existence, the mundane realities of human labour in the midst of God’s work are shown due respect, and responsibility for them is, to some degree, shared. The attention of members is regularly engaged regarding matters of membership, the ministry of those in leadership (both staff and lay) and the financial status of their community. On the other hand, those who are “verbal, rational, and extroverted” tend to have the greatest influence, the system is fundamentally adversarial, and arduous decision-making can be detrimental to leadership morale and timely decision-making.\textsuperscript{109}

In seeking to overcome some of the difficulties associated with this form of governance, some Australian Baptist churches, as was discussed in Chapter 2.3.2, have changed to a form of governance which relies on an eldership, with most decisions being made by the leadership (elders and staff), and given general endorsement by occasional members’ meetings.\textsuperscript{110} In so doing, such churches seek to allow for greater flexibility and authority for leaders to pursue their tasks, but also to make allowance for the loss of interest in what are regarded as (uninteresting and non-spiritual) institutional matters, and to avoid the conflict for which Baptist business meetings have been notorious.\textsuperscript{111}

Nevertheless, neither the democratic business meeting, nor the more recent governance style, appear to overcome the issue that for many churches such processes have become “detached from word and sacrament and failed to express that basic covenant nature of the church.”\textsuperscript{112} Fundamentally, Baptist ecclesiology asserts that the church “is not a


\textsuperscript{109} Morris and Olsen, \textit{Discerning God's Will Together}, 189. Brian Winslade is particularly concerned about the impact of congregational decision-making on the capacity of churches to fulfil their, for him, primary task of mission. \textit{Winslade, A New Kind of Baptist Church}, 99

\textsuperscript{110} See Winslade, \textit{A New Kind of Baptist Church}, Chap 10, 12.

\textsuperscript{111} A detailed engagement with Winslade’s work is beyond the scope of this project. Whilst his objections to traditional (post-Enlightenment) Baptist polity largely match those raised here, his emphasis on mission without the balancing effect of attention to the joint worship and the mutual life of the church, lead, I would suggest, to a too easy dismissal of the significance of the gathered church.

\textsuperscript{112} Haymes, Gouldbourne and Cross, \textit{On Being the Church}, 51.
democracy [nor the autocracy of a pastor and elders], but a theocracy, and the purpose of the coming together of members is, through listening to the scriptures, prayer and listening to one another, to discern the mind of Christ,”¹¹³ and, in doing so, to seek to reflect the scriptural principles which were outlined in Chapter 3.3.2. This was the practice of the early Baptists who... would seek guidance for matters of faith and practice, discussing in this context what it was to worship, how their resources might be best used, who among the fellowship was in need of particular care and concern, who Christ had given them as ministers. This was the church seeking the mind of the Lord so that they might be his people. Such a vision has a high view of the people of God under the leading of the Lord, receiving together that Spirit-guided insight into the mind of Christ as he reveals it not only to the clever and powerful, but even to the simple and childlike (Matt 11:25-30).¹¹⁴

In the case of church meetings, as in matters of accountability, it is not that contemporary Australian Baptist church communities can simply reappropriate the practices of seventeenth century England, but that new practices need to be developed by paying attention to the scriptural and theological principles behind those original practices, in ways which converse with, without simply accommodating to, contemporary Australian culture.¹¹⁵ Such principles include the fact that the meeting is not a forum for personal opinion, but rather for the discernment of the ways in which God is calling this particular expression of Christ’s body to participate in God’s work; that whilst there will certainly be a place for some more mature or gifted voices to speak, God does speak to the church community by the Spirit through the many and disparate (and sometimes very quiet) voices of God’s people as they spend time together; that whilst administrative matters may appear disinteresting and non-spiritual, they deserve a measure of attention as the embodied, even incarnated, aspect of the church’s spiritual life; and that, as a function of the mutual and joint life of the covenanted community, the manner in which church meetings are conducted is vital to both the worship and witness of that community. The polity of such meetings is not a matter of pragmatic efficacy but of kingdom values and practices.

This in practice, I would suggest, will not take any one definitive form, but will always begin with a dual focus by the church community on God and one another. For the joint

¹¹³ Haymes, Gouldbourne and Cross, On Being the Church, 41.
¹¹⁴ Haymes, Gouldbourne and Cross, On Being the Church, 51.
¹¹⁵ For Derek Tidball there are five principles which should guide considerations concerning governance: acceptance of diversity between churches, the necessity of building trust, and the requirement to think theologically, to (critically) engage culturally, and to reflect sociologically. These, to varying degrees, have been the concerns of this project. Tidball, "Leadership and Baptist Church Governance," 42-48.
community, paying attention to God begins in corporate worship, by many and varied means in both subjective and objective modes (see Chapter 5.3). In this way the very nature of God is remembered and participated in, the broad outline of God’s movements explored, and the vital ethical imagination that is formed in worship is engaged: an imagination which is vital to “the continuing integrity of a Christian community [which is] capable of discerning and acting Christianly in the cultural ecology of contemporary capitalism.”

Following on from worship, Morris and Olsen suggest a ten phase process of spiritual discernment, which includes a clarification of issues around the specific discernment task and an attempt to understand the personal “baggage” which each member brings to those issues. The process of discernment also seeks out “biblical stories, themes and images,” other sources of Christian wisdom (theological and practical) from beyond the community which might also speak to the issues, and the voices of those who might be impacted by decisions that are made. Means are provided to hear from those with even the quietest voices: attention is paid to God, but also, with mutual love and respect, to God’s gathered people amongst whom God is at work by the Spirit.

The investment of time and energy demanded, particularly of leaders, by such a process might appear unwarranted, or perhaps more specifically it may be unwelcome because of previously frustrating or distressing experiences. But total surrender of the ground of joint discernment is not warranted. Whether in the context of exaggerated autonomy within or between Baptist church communities,

contemporary individualism, the stress on strong leadership and theological partizanship, are among the factors that have weakened the sense and reality of being members together. It is one way by which the individualism of the age has corrupted the essential corporate nature of the one church united in Christ.

The process outlined above need not be applied to the majority of decisions which are made within/by the church community, but to some it should be; for the sake of the ecclesial importance of the whole, joint community; because of the significance of a particular issue; because in working together in such a fashion the community is strengthened and matured; and because the process models appropriate means of spiritual discernment which also need to be applied at the personal level. When such a process of joint spiritual discernment by the whole community is not, in these terms, called

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117 See a summary of these phases at Morris and Olsen, Discerning God's Will Together, Location 1046 ff.
118 Morris and Olsen, Discerning God's Will Together, Location 1194.
119 Morris and Olsen, Discerning God's Will Together, Location 1281, 1297.
120 Haymes, Gouldbourne and Cross, On Being the Church, 53. The comment is directed at the lack of interdependence between churches but also applies within them.
for, an awareness of broad issues, processes and those involved in specific ministries (as with issues around accountability) should nevertheless be maintained at the joint church level. This is certainly to demand more of community members than is currently the case in a growing number of churches, but as both findings in relation to the PSOC and Australian statistics suggest, a higher sense of demand may also be associated with a higher level of commitment to community. Working towards the resolution of these issues does not simply involve removing such demands, but teaching and practising their significance for the life of the community, and attuning practices to actually match that significance. Fundamentally, as will be explored in Chapter 7.3.3, failure to practice a different form of “politics,” modelled after Christ, from those of the world, means that the church community surrenders its role as witness “before the watching world.”

Such attuning of practices around decision-making and discernment may produce a variety of results, and there will be particular challenges for larger churches. The debate about whether Baptist polity dictates a limit to the size of churches continues, but my proposal (see Chapter 5.2) is that all church communities exist as a network of relationships which are not all equal but which interconnect to maintain the whole. As such, all church communities, whether large or small, will need to be attentive to the means by which they include their membership in such processes. Morris and Olsen propose, for example, that discernment should be understood as a layered process occurring at the interconnected levels of closet (personal), house (small group) and sanctuary (whole gathering), and provide methods for even very large gatherings.

Winslade’s model whilst, I would suggest, placing insufficient emphasis on the joint and mutual features of church life, nevertheless also includes other means by which community members are able to both, in PSOC terms, exert their influence, and, in scriptural and Baptist terms, participate in the process of joint discernment. Without this as a priority, and without specified and regular means of practising it, the joint priesthood of the community as those who together discern the movement of God will be undermined.

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121 See Chapter 2.1.2; 2.3.2.
122 Yoder, Body Politics. See particularly Chapter 5, “The Rule of Paul.”
123 See Winslade, A New Kind of Baptist Church, 185 ff.
125 Winslade, A New Kind of Baptist Church, 194. For example, “visitation by pastors/leaders, suggestion box, occasional surveys, cottage meetings, non-decision-making forums.”
126 Martin Sutherland is not alone in perceiving that, as it seeks to discern the mind of Christ, the church meeting takes on a sacramental nature. Sutherland, “Gathering, Sacrament and Baptist Theological Method,” 46, 47.
Conclusion

The canonical narrative of joint and mutual covenantal priesthood, as outlined in Chapter 3, indicates that the joint priestly task of worship by the church community must inevitably come to expression in the life of its members together. Worship, as the hosting of God’s holiness, requires both imitation of and participation in God’s presence and work. The quality of this life together is also vital (see Chapter 7) to the church community’s capacity to participate with God in conveying God’s blessing to the wider world by witnessing to God’s nature. More fully, however, this life together stands at the heart of God’s intentions for creation – community with Godself and with one another. On this basis, as both means and end, despite the dual dangers of over-dependence on a priestly class and the under-dependence of soul competency, the joint priesthood of the community must also come to reality in the mutual priesthood of the community, as it was so richly affirmed in the covenanted life of early Baptists (Chapter 4.1.4). Crucially, it is the failure to understand and experience this mutual aspect of priesthood which has undermined the capacity of church communities to grasp the very nature of the concept of priesthood, let alone to practice their joint priesthood. Far from being an expression of the rights of each believer in competition with those of other church community members, mutual priesthood is summed up as love which, whilst always seeking mutuality, retains a capacity to choose self-sacrifice in light of God’s love. Such love comes to expression in an interdependent life together of prayer, burden-bearing and confession: intercessory prayer, whilst entering into what God has initiated, summons believers to play a real and creative part in what God is doing in the lives of others, whilst the mutual bearing of burdens and confession knit the community together in the reality of their lives before the cross.

Such mutual practices of covenantal priesthood, however, refuse to be separated from the context of the community’s joint priesthood, and this becomes particularly clear around issues of influence; that of the community on it members, and of members on their community. The accountability which is necessary to produce a community which is always seeking (though always failing) to be a fitting host to God and to represent God to the world, is found not only in interpersonal mutuality but also in the discipline of the community as a whole. In the same way, all the members together have something to bring, not only out of a human, psychosocial need to “influence,” but on the basis of the work of the Holy Spirit shared amongst them. Influence, in both its forms of accountability and shared discernment, drives the mutuality of life together back towards its context in
the joint priestly life of the community in covenant with God, and it is in the context of these practices the church community is assured of Christ’s presence with it.

It is on the basis of this form of life together that the joint priestly task of conveying God’s blessing to the world is undertaken, and it is this work which is the focus of the next chapter.
Chapter 7: Renewing Covenant Community in Joint Priestly Sharing of God's Blessing

This chapter continues to explore the ways in which the narrative of joint and mutual covenantal priesthood – as a particular means of drawing on the resources of Scripture and early Baptist ecclesiology - may be engaged to respond to the continuing, and largely unexamined, emphasis on individualism over community in Australian Baptist churches. The first two of the three key dimensions of priestly covenant community, concerning worship and life together, have already been addressed in Chapters 5 and 6. Here, the focus moves to the third dimension of such communities; their covenant responsibility to convey God’s blessing to God’s world.

Participation in conveying God's blessing to God’s world is fundamental to the covenant into which God calls God’s people. It was initially spoken to Abraham,¹ and, as was explored in Chapter 3.1.3, continued as an insistent though relatively minor theme throughout the Old Testament. By the intertestamental period, Israel’s role vis-à-vis the nations was usually understood “in terms of the world being brought into subjection to the divine rule, probably mediated through Israel and/or her Messiah.”² It was in this context that Jesus lived, died and rose again, and, in fulfilling the old covenant, stood as Israel’s representative. In so doing, he opened the way for the nations to enter into God’s blessing, culminating in salvation. It was then with redoubled imperative, and in fully active mode, that the same covenantal task was passed to the communities of the new covenant by Jesus himself.³

So fundamental to the nature of the new covenant communities called by God is this covenantal focus, that failure to participate in it will inevitably distort the nature of those communities: they risk becoming inwardly-focussed and self-absorbed, rather than remaining conscious that covenant with God entails a generous form of community with spiritual and ethical responsibilities, and an imaginative reach which constantly moves beyond their own boundaries and welcomes others in (Chapter 3.3.3). The community’s response to this challenge will therefore profoundly impact their capacity to truly worship God who is “always opening up the communion of the divine life for relationships with

¹ Gen 12:3.
and to live together as God’s people, practising righteousness in justice and compassion. In contemporary terms,

Concentrating on community there is often a tendency to drive a given congregation towards an unhelpful preoccupation with the quality of the community life such that the outside world becomes an inconvenient interruption. Mission becomes something we were going to do once we have established a high quality of community. Strangely though the day when we finally feel satisfied with our community life never arrives – paradoxically, an exclusive concern for community does not help with the very creation of the quality of community life that we seek.⁵

A dedication to sharing God’s blessing was clearly the intent of the early Baptist church communities who distinguished themselves by their commitment in resources and personal risk to the spread of the gospel (Chapter 4.1.5). Their approach was one which saw the local church as “both bearer of the message and... the goal of mission” (Chapter 4.1.5),⁶ and it is this sense of the “essential sociality of salvation”⁷ which provides the key to the way in which they did, and contemporary Baptist church communities may also, come to understand how ecclesiality and soteriology/missiology are integrally related. In exploring such possibilities, the issue of community boundaries is again raised: the boundaries which are necessary for the church community to function as both bearer and goal of mission are reaffirmed, and, yet, they are laid open for the dynamic movement of the church community in its priestly representative tasks.

Having established the fundamental aspects of the church community’s covenantal task as the sharing of God’s blessing through priestly representation (Section 7.1), and as a function of the whole community (Section 7.2), this chapter will go on to explore representation of God to God’s world in proclamation, blessing in action and living as a community of witness (Section 7.3). It will then address representation by the church community of God’s world to God as priestly solidarity with God’s world in both being and acting (Section 7.4). Such actions as confession of sin, intercessory prayer and suffering will highlight the ways in which all forms of isolationism and triumphalism on the part of the church community are precluded. Throughout, the priestly movements of the church community between God and God’s world which were outlined in Chapter 3.2 will be evident, and the narrative of joint and mutual covenantal priesthood shown to provide a means of comprehending and practising both boundary affirmation and openness. The unconvinced and unconvincing ambivalence of contemporary Australian Baptist churches

⁴ Fiddes, Tracks and Traces, 257.
⁵ Greene and Robinson, Metavista, 204.
⁷ Volf, After Our Likeness, 172.
in their uncertain efforts to maintain formal membership whilst engaging in a whole range of distinction-reduction strategies (Chapter 2.3.1), it will be shown, may thus be exchanged for a confident dual affirmation of their existence as both boundaried and open communities.

7.1. Sharing God’s Blessing: A Priestly Covenant Task

In both the Old and New Testaments, conveying God’s blessing to those beyond the community was integral to the priestly calling of the covenant community by God. To Israel, God had said,

You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles’ wings and brought you to myself. Now therefore, if you obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession out of all the peoples. Indeed, the whole earth is mine, but you shall be for me a priestly kingdom and a holy nation.⁸

And to the communities of the new covenant,

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.

Once you were not a people, but now you are God’s people;
once you had not received mercy,
but now you have received mercy...⁹

God’s covenant acts of gracious salvation, exemplified by the exodus from slavery in Egypt, and brought to fullness in redemption from slavery to sin and death through Christ, called and continue to call community into being (“but now you are God’s people”), and to summon such communities to their priestly task of proclaiming God’s mighty acts in both worship (Chapter 5.3) and in ensuring that God’s blessing is conveyed to God’s world (Chapter 3.1.3; 3.3.3).¹⁰

Such blessing, as was explored in Chapter 3.1.3, is God’s insistent intention which seeks to encompass the whole of creation in the reversal of the impact of human sin and divine cursing, pressing always on towards its apotheosis in complete salvation.¹¹ Such salvation was paradigmatically expressed in God’s covenant keeping, saving action in the exodus of Israel from Egypt, and was comprehensive in that it entailed liberation from political,

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⁸ Exod 19:4-6a.
⁹ 1 Pet 2:9-10.
¹⁰ As Christopher Wright affirms such a task is not, a form of “works righteousness,” but rather a “response of faith and obedience” to God’s gracious initiative. Christopher J.H. Wright, The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible’s Grand Narrative (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2006), 206.
¹¹ This chapter will use the language of both blessing and salvation, seeking as it does so to acknowledge that salvation is the culmination of blessing, but nevertheless also recognising a range of blessing which must not be ignored or limited to a particular, narrow understanding of salvation.
economic, social and spiritual oppression.\textsuperscript{12} Israel, nevertheless, was unable to maintain its response to God’s covenant action, until Christ as the nation’s representative perfectly did so, thereby inaugurating the full blessing of salvation (Chapter 3.2.2).\textsuperscript{13} This blessing which now even more completely embraces the whole of human existence (political, economic, social and spiritual) and promises its ultimate fulfillment at the eschaton, is given to those who receive God’s grace through faith and thereby enter into Christ’s body, expressed in the local church community.\textsuperscript{14} And it is to such communities of believers that the continuing task of sharing the full range of God’s blessing with the world is given (Chapter 3.3.3), both ontologically, in their very being, but also with an active sense of mission, until such blessing comes to its full realization at the eschaton: “the Church believes it exists not for its own sake but for the world. It hopes to inherit God’s words to Abraham: ‘in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed’ (Genesis 12: 3). It thus sees itself as a gift of God to the world.”\textsuperscript{15}

This covenant task is, secondly, a priestly task concerning representation: “it is intrinsic to the being-and-doing of the [covenant] community consciously and unself-consciously to represent God to others and others to God… [They] are set apart to hold the alienated and apparently rejected ‘other’ before God, and so within the sphere of God’s promised covenant blessings.”\textsuperscript{16}

This priestly representation, as it was explored in Chapter 3.2, requires a community which is set apart and made righteous by God through faith in Jesus Christ, and which seeks to live in this righteousness. Such righteousness is guarded by the community through its practice of justice and compassion, through intercessory prayer, bearing one another’s burdens, accountability and discernment (Chapter 6), so that they may fully enter into the presence of God, to whom they have access through Christ, their high priest. Together, they bring their worship to God (Chapter 5) and, in doing so, come under a priestly imperative to turn to “the nations,” and to represent God, who has revealed Godself in the midst of their worship, to the world (Section 7.3 below). And then, having been face to face

\textsuperscript{12} Brueggemann, \textit{Theology of the Old Testament}, 431.
\textsuperscript{13} This, with all of Christ’s work, is inaugurated but not yet fully realised. For Bosch this is a reminder that “for this reason Christians should never identify any specific project with the fullness of the reign of God we are, at best, erecting bridgeheads for the reign of God.”
\textsuperscript{14} According to Bosch, Christians therefore “stand in need of an interpretation of salvation which operates within a comprehensive christological framework, which makes the \textit{totus Christus} – his incarnation, earthly life, death, resurrection, and parousia – indispensable for the church and theology.” Bosch, \textit{Transforming Mission}, 409.
\textsuperscript{15} Hauerwas and Wells, “The Gift of the Church,” 21.
\textsuperscript{16} McDonald, \textit{Re-Imaging Election}, xvi, emphases in original. The fullness of this representation will be explored throughout the remainder of this chapter.
with the world in its plight and knowing that plight for themselves, in compassion, the community will turn again to God, representing and bearing the world before God (Section 7.4 below).

7.2. Conveying God’s Blessing: A Joint Priestly Covenant Task

Such representation addresses the “scandal of particularity” by which God reaches towards God’s universal goal of blessing by means of very particular acts and relationships which are summed up in covenant. This covenantal link between the universal and the particular, as it is explicated by Lesslie Newbigin, is one which fundamentally contradicts individualism. Individualism demands that, “my own identity and my own destiny are, in the last analysis, mine alone,” and that, as a “spiritual monad,” other people, and even the context of the created world, are superfluous to “my” salvation. Scripture, however, presents a very different narrative: according to Newbigin,

The reality is not so: God, as he is revealed to us in the gospel, is not a monad. Interpersonal relatedness belongs to the very being of God. Therefore there can be no salvation for human beings except in relatedness. No one can be made whole except by being restored to the wholeness of that being-in-relatedness for which God made us and the world and which is the image of that being-in-relatedness which is the being of God himself.

...if the truly human is the shared reality of mutual and collective responsibility that the Bible envisages, then salvation must be an action that binds us together and restores for us the true mutual relation to each other and the true shared relation to the world of nature. This means that the gift of salvation would be bound up with our openness to one another. It would not come to each, direct from above, like a shaft of light through the roof. It would come from the neighbor in the action by which we open the door to invite the neighbor in.

The fullness of blessing which is salvation comes, therefore, from God, through human relationality, for the sake of community with both God and others. Such relationality is not simply one individual voice speaking to another individual hearer in the presence of an “individual” God, but persons speaking from the midst of their church community, calling others into such community, before God who is triune and ontologically relational. There is, as Miroslav Volf proposes and as I have argued throughout this project, an essential sociality to salvation: “Salvation is communion with God and human beings. The self-

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\(^{17}\) Newbigin, *The Open Secret*, 66.


\(^{19}\) Newbigin, *The Open Secret*, 70.

\(^{20}\) A full excursus into trinitarian theology has been beyond the scope of this project but the basis of such a claim has been laid earlier in this project by an examination of both the scriptural grounds of trinitarian theology (Chapter 3.3.1) and the engagement with such theology by the early Baptists (Chapter 4.1).
enclosed individual is caught in the opposite of salvation." Community was God's original intention, and though that community is defiled and fractured by sin, God has continued to seek to restore community, through Israel, in Christ, and through the church (Chapter 3) as the prolepsis of the new humanity of the age to come. The means by which God seeks this end, are, as Newbigin argues, fully consonant with this end: both the means and end of salvation inevitably entail the relationality of the church community.

Such a conclusion is at home, as was explored in Chapter 4, in early Baptist ecclesiology (Chapter 4.1.5) which understood the local church as “both bearer of the message and... the goal of mission” (Chapter 4.1.5), but flies in the face of most post-Enlightenment Baptist/evangelical theology (Chapter 4.2.5). In this more recent theology, there is a strong tendency to see the church as having, at most, a minor role in sharing the blessing of salvation. Evangelism may occur through an individual who shares the gospel, or through a parachurch organisation, but, in either case, the salvation which is received is seen as largely unrelated to the church community. Rather, God is indeed envisaged, as decreed by Newbigin above, as dealing directly with the individual soul, and “the church [only] emerges through the addition of those who, as isolated individuals, have become Christians and now live as Christians.” By this account the church is therefore insignificant as a means of sharing the blessing of salvation. Yet, on the other hand, this same theology very much reduces the church community to a means; an optional means to the support and encouragement of individual Christians for the sake of their own growth or as they prepare for the “main game” of mission. The church community in this sense is only a very optional means to a lesser end.

In order to respond to this loss of the ecclesiality of the blessing of salvation, it must first be established, as Volf and McDonald insistently make clear, that the activity of the church regarding salvation is entirely secondary and derivative to that of Christ (solus Christus). It is not that persons receive faith “as a gift of God from the church,” but rather that covenant communities are “set apart to act precisely as secondary and dependent acting

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21 Volf, After Our Likeness, 172, emphasis in original.
23 There may be some very minor role for another individual who shares the gospel with them on the basis of the teaching they have received from the church, but any such involvement is seen as relatively insignificant and largely unrelated to the church community.
24 Volf, After Our Likeness, 162. Volf argues that this is John Smyth’s approach, but as with his claims concerning covenant and christology (see Chapter 4), the quotes he uses from Smyth do not appear to adequately reflect the full range of early Baptist teaching and practice concerning the role of the church.
25 Volf, After Our Likeness, 162, emphasis in original.
subjects in the outworking of God’s saving purposes." \(^{26}\) The role of the church community in conveying God’s blessing is secondary to that of Christ, but vital nevertheless: the church community is the preeminent \textit{means} of blessing through representation (the aspects of which are explored below). \(^{27}\) It is also, as Volf argues, and as I have maintained throughout this thesis, not only a means to an end but, albeit in an intermediate or provisional sense, an \textit{end} in itself: the church community is the prolepsis of community, both between God and God’s people and amongst God’s people, which is God’s eschatological intention. \(^{28}\) In being so, it is also, again, a \textit{means} to that fuller sense of itself. \(^{29}\) In order to reflect this and the relational nature of the transmission of God’s blessing in salvation, it is vital to recognise that the joint church community “is itself a dimension of the salvific experience”. \(^{30}\) the church is the entirely secondary and derivative agent of salvation, and yet, it is both a means to, and an end of that blessing/salvation, and cannot therefore be separated from it. As James McClendon writes in response to the story of the Spirit’s coming upon the \textit{gathered} disciples at Pentecost, “when the world mission of Jesus is launched, the disciples’ community is chosen as the ship’s company of the Spirit, and Christian community life (thus empowered) takes on a crucial role in history.” \(^{31}\) Each member of the ship’s company is differently gifted by the Holy Spirit, and it

\begin{footnotes}
\footnote{McDonald, \textit{Re-Imagining Election}, 149. See also Volf: “by contrast, one must insist that the church is not the subject of salvific activity with Christ; rather, Christ is the \textit{only} subject of such salvific activity.” Volf, \textit{After Our Likeness}, 164.}

\footnote{As Wright notes, “God’s mission is not confined to the church but the church, in particular the local church, exists as its sacrament, sign and instrument.” Wright, \textit{Disavowing Constantine}, 10, emphasis added.}

\footnote{I am conscious here of the concern over “excessive ecclesiocentrism” which is raised by contemporary missiologists such as Ross Langmead. I have already dealt with the issue of conflating christology and ecclesiology, and will address the temptation to an overly triumphant ecclesiology in Section 7.4 of this chapter. Further, however, Langmead protests that “incarnating mission is not about transforming the entire world into one universal church, but about invoking, in solidarity with Christ, the coming of God’s kingdom in and for the world.” Ross Langmead, \textit{The Word Made Flesh: Towards an Incarnational Missiology}. (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2004), http://repository.mcd.edu.au/73/1/2004_Book.Langmead_TheWordMadeFlesh.pdf (accessed 11 April, 2013), 281, 282. As I hope to make clear throughout this chapter, I would agree with him, and point to the wider concept of sharing of blessing in this. Nevertheless, I would also argue that whilst the building up of the church is not the only goal and not the final goal, it is indeed a \textit{provisional} goal of salvation: “the Church is both a means and an end, because it is a foretaste.” Newbigin, \textit{The Household of God}, 147. The overly heavy emphasis on ecclesiology which Langmead and his colleagues perceive as inimicable to mission, stems not from an appropriate ecclesiology (as I am seeking to present here) but from an inadequate (non) ecclesiology which always turns towards the needs of the self, even in collective form.}

\footnote{Volf, \textit{After Our Likeness}, n. 84, 174.}

\footnote{Volf, \textit{After Our Likeness}, n. 84, 174. Graham Twelftree finds a wider differential between salvation and the church in the Lukan texts. He argues that, although salvation is “inconceivable without the Church,” it is nevertheless, “prior to and distinct from becoming part of the Church.” His argument is based on the \textit{solus Christus} of these scriptures, but perhaps fails to recognise that, as I have argued here, there are different issues at stake: from \textit{whence} salvation comes, \textit{how} it is conveyed, and \textit{what} it entails. Conflating the issues perhaps leads him to see more distance between salvation and church in the texts than would otherwise be the case. Twelftree, \textit{People of the Spirit}, 50.}

\footnote{McClendon, \textit{Doctrine}, 433.}
\end{footnotes}
is in their cooperative participation with God that these gifts come together to enable the church community to play its priestly role in sharing God’s blessing\textsuperscript{32}

This ecclesiality of sharing blessing/salvation will become clearer as the means by which it occurs are explored in the following two sections - in representing God to God’s world, and God’s world to Godself.

7.3. Priestly Representation of God to the World

Representation of God to the world can be conceived as occurring in three modes; the proclamation or articulation of God’s blessing (with a particular focus on the blessing of complete salvation); the sharing of God’s blessing through direct action in society, and the demonstration of God’s blessing through the witness of the life of the church community. Such proclamation in word, sharing in action, and demonstration in life together, come together to convey God’s blessing by representing God to God’s world, and provide a foretaste of that blessing which will be fulfilled at the eschaton\textsuperscript{33}

7.3.1 Proclaiming Blessing to the World\textsuperscript{34}

Conveying God’s blessing comes to expression in the proclamation of that blessing as it is articulated in written or verbal form - and especially in the proclamation of salvation which is the apotheosis of that blessing. The blessing of salvation which is proclaimed is essentially relational, and concerns reconciliation, both with God and, indivisibly, with others (Chapter 3.3.2).\textsuperscript{35} Reconciliation is achieved through Jesus’ death as it is appropriated by those who come to faith.\textsuperscript{36} The most significant relationship of creature to creator which was previously broken through sin is now restored, and the outcome is

\textsuperscript{32} Martin Robinson has particularly identified the mix of gifting which is needed in a church planting leadership team. His approach exemplifies the recognition that it takes multiple gifting to enable mission. An exploration of church planting as a form of mission is beyond the scope of this work, but it is noted here that, in terms of this thesis, this is a particularly appropriate form of mission in both method and aim. Robinson, \textit{Planting Mission-Shaped Churches Today}, Chap. 5.

\textsuperscript{33} Frost suggests that the church “is to be like a [movie] trailer for the New Jerusalem, a taster, with all the best bits on full display.” Michael Frost, \textit{The Road to Missional: Journey to the Centre of the Church}, Kindle ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2011), Location 378.

\textsuperscript{34} I am using “proclamation” in its limited sense of the articulation of the blessing of salvation in this section, differentiating it from social action (Subsection 7.3.2) and witness (Subsection 7.3.3) Although, both proclamation and witness used in their fullest senses could include this whole section, I prefer to use the term “proclamation of blessing” rather than, for example, “evangelism,” because of my desire to express the continuity of the spectrum of activities which this whole section (Section 7.3) explores.

\textsuperscript{35} Reconciliation is certainly not the only metaphor by which Christ’s work (and the proclamation of it) may be understood, but it is both Scriptural and, according to Ross Langmead, a “dominant” metaphor or model for contemporary mission particularly in light of the pervasiveness of broken relationships (which in the terms of this project, are related to unhealthy forms and levels of individualism). Ross Langmead, “Transformed Relationships: Reconciliation as the Central Model for Mission,” \textit{Mission Studies} 25 (2008): 6.

\textsuperscript{36} Rom 5:10-11.
friendship and peace with God: “The central Christian affirmation is that in the birth, life, death and resurrection of Christ God has reached out in forgiving and reconciling love.”

Such reconciliation finds its context in the biblical narrative as a whole, “the story about reality,” which communities re-tell and allow to form them as communities (see Chapter 1). As strongly expressed by Colin Greene and Martin Robinson, past failure to do this has reduced the good news of salvation to

a Jesuology centered solely on individual faith and allegiance to Jesus, backed up by a bibliolatry that destroys the narrative flow of the biblical story, which then leads to an ecclesiology that is all but non-existent, [and] is a drastically truncated version of the story the Bible tells and cuts no ice when it comes to radical cultural engagement.

In contrast, the re-familiarisation of the church community with the formative narratival unity of Scripture, engenders a “discursive” form of Christianity which church communities may then, in humble confidence, share with others. This confidence is not in themselves, but in the story of which, by grace, they are a part, and in God who stands behind it. This “metanarrative,” it must be clear however, is not of the modern sort which is “a totalizing theory which aims to subsume all events, all perspectives and all forms of knowledge in a comprehensive rational explanation,” and, as such, may be employed as a tool of Western domination. Whilst the Bible does indeed have an over-arching and formative narrative, yet, within this, are many “not readily assimilable parts,” so that other cultures are not forced into a uniform conformity, but rather each find their own story in this story:

witnessed by the many cultural forms in which Christianity has been expressed, it is “cultural privilege, not cultural diversity” which is challenged by the scriptural narrative.

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38 Greene and Robinson, Metavista, 103.
39 Greene and Robinson, Metavista, 233. This issue and those raised in the following paragraph are canvassed more thoroughly in Chapter 1 (Methodology) of this project, but are raised here to reaffirm their specific application regarding proclamation.
40 Greene and Robinson, Metavista, 161 ff. The same point is made by Bauckham and Don Carson and is expressed by Newbigin as “proper confidence.” Bauckham, Bible and Mission, 12; Carson, Christ and Culture Revisited, 104; Lesslie Newbigin, Proper Confidence: Faith, Doubt, and Certainty in Christian Discipleship (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1995). A “discursive Christianity” is one with an organised and coherent discourse of faith based on the metanarrative of Scripture. In particular, it notes a shift from unconscious, practical reactivity, to a questioned, and therefore thought-through, analytical consciousness relating to ideas and activity: a “discursive consciousness means being able to put things into words.” Anthony Giddens, The Constitution of Society: Outline of the Theory of Structuration (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1984), 45.
41 Bauckham, Bible and Mission, Chaps 1 and 4, 90.
42 Bauckham, Bible and Mission, 93.
43 Bauckham, Bible and Mission, 110. The reality of this may only become apparent to church communities as they become involved in cross-cultural proclamation of the gospel. It is only in this setting that what is essential to the biblical narrative and what has been grafted on to it by culture becomes apparent. Milbi Dabaar explores such issues in an indigenous Australian context, seeking to recognise what aspects of European culture were inappropriately and coercively imposed on indigenous cultures in association with the gospel, and where such indigenous cultures express a world-view and values which both do and do not give
is this “metanarrative” which, especially in the midst of Australia’s cultural diversity, church communities must find creative ways to proclaim.

The proclamation of the blessing of salvation which takes place from this narratival context, rather than being made by an isolated individual, “always takes place through the multidimensional confession of faith of the communion fidelium.” Such proclamation occurs as the church community reads and teaches Scripture, and as it worships in song, prayer and sacraments, proclaiming God’s blessing not only as its own source of life, but as that which will bring life to the world. In continuation with this proclamation within the community, the gospel is proclaimed by community members who go out from, yet remain fundamentally part of, this community: they carry the church community, and the good news it proclaims, as they go. Their primary identity is that of church community members, and it is as such that they function in the midst of their other non-church communities. In their role as persons of significance in the lives of others beyond their church community (such as family members, friends and colleagues), they function as those whose lives and message are formed within that community, and so proclaim the blessing which is known and proclaimed by that community. In this, they are supported by the “remaining others,” who “create the plausibility structures for the mediation of faith.” Together, the lives of members of the community build a complete and coherent representation of what it is that God is doing in blessing and saving. It is also the church community which, in discerning God’s sending, joins God in sending those specifically called into missionary service, encouraging, dedicating, commissioning and supporting them, whilst nevertheless remembering that they too are “sent.”

The priestly work of the church community in proclaiming God’s work of salvation continues as it incorporates those who have received the blessing of salvation. For those who come to faith, this process begins even before any commitment is made by a prior, albeit “rudimentary” socialization to the church community, especially through “learning the

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appropriate expression to the biblical narrative. See for example, “Indigenous Pastoral Care” David Thompson, ed. Milbi Dabaar: A Resource Book (North Cairns, QLD: Wontulp-Bi-Buya College, 2004), 72-73.

44 Volf, After Our Likeness, 163.
45 Grenz includes the witness of the church by its life together and works of service to the gospel as proclamation, but I will deal with these separately below. Grenz, Theology for the Community of God, 423.
46 Rees draws attention to life of the church community in both its gathered and dispersed forms. When dispersed to their many and varied other activities “we act as individuals and we participate in many other communities and sub-cultures,” but “here too we are ‘the church.’” Rees, “Enabling Congregations,” 8.
47 Grenz, Theology for the Community of God, 427.
48 Volf, After Our Likeness, 167.
49 Volf, After Our Likeness, 167.
50 Grenz, Theology for the Community of God, 424.
language of faith.” This may occur at second-hand as that person relates to a church community member, but must, at some stage, in recognition of the ecclesiality of salvation, directly encompass the church community. For salvation to then occur, the person who has received such initial socialization must, of course, enter into faith for themselves, but this entering into faith is inseparable from being joined with, and entering into further socialization within the community:

Ecclesial membership is not merely the result of associative will added externally to one’s being as a Christian. The church mediated to this person the content of faith, led her to faith, and the faith given her by God placed her into communion with other Christians. Hence she does not merely join a concrete church; she is an ecclesiologically determined being, one destined to live in the church (see 2 Tim 1:5). This church community is not just one amongst many to which the new believer belongs, but rather is to become their primary “community of participation” which is to entirely reform both their identity and value system. The new believer comes to re-contextualise and retell their own life story, in light of God’s story (past, present and future), and, inseparably, in light of the story of God’s particular community with which they have joined. They also learn not only to give mental assent, but to embody “the meanings and values that characterized Jesus’ own life,” and are shared by the community. They too, like the rest of the community, come to know themselves as “defined by covenantal community loyalties and relationships.”

7.3.2 Blessing in Action for the World

Salvation, in its fullest sense encompasses the whole range of God's blessing which is “God’s provision for human flourishing,” and it is the role of the church to participate with God as this blessing is shared with God's world. Church communities exist, not only for the sake of those who will come to salvation, but for those who as yet have no knowledge

51 Volf, After Our Likeness, 163, 178.
52 Volf, After Our Likeness, 178, emphasis in original.
53 Grenz, Theology for the Community of God, 425.
54 Grenz, Theology for the Community of God, 426.
55 Grenz, Theology for the Community of God, 426.
56 Greene and Robinson, Metavista, 87, 103.
57 Bauckham, Bible and Mission, 34. Although I have chosen “blessing” as an integrative theme throughout this project, this concept, I would suggest, is entirely compatible with the term “reign of God”: blessing is that which attends the reign of God. I would therefore wholeheartedly assent to Michael Frost’s assertion that “mission is both the announcement and the demonstration of the reign of God through Christ.” I would however, as I have noted above with regard to Langmead, be more hesitant in affirming Frost’s claim that “mission is not primarily concerned with church growth.” Mission is not, I would agree, about church growth in a self-serving, inwardly focused sense, but the church is, as I have argued in the previous section, both the means and a provisional goal of mission. I think that this is not far from what Frost is suggesting when he goes on to suggest that “church attendance is not the primary goal of Christian mission,” but that it is “a secondary outcome.” Frost, The Road to Missional, Location 273, 1034, emphases in original.
that such a thing is possible, and even for those who knowing it will nevertheless reject it.\textsuperscript{58}

Church communities which are formed by the narrative of Scripture will understand that such blessing, “has a vital contribution to make in refounding the future of human society,”\textsuperscript{59} and will seek to be “socially aware and responsive.”\textsuperscript{60} Members of such communities,

envision a church that not only counters alternative cultures but also seeks sacrificially to serve the good of others – the city, the nation, common humanity, not least the poor. Salt does not confront; it enhances. Believers must be the best possible citizens (cf. Jer 29:7 cf. Also 1 Pet 1:1; Jas 1:1), and that means that Christians, who are taking their cue (and thus their worldview) from outside the dominant culture, not only shape and form a Christian culture recognizably different from that in which it is embedded but also become deeply committed to enhancing the whole.\textsuperscript{61}

Such a claim, it must be understood, does not involve an attempt to “[re-]create Christendom by stealth” by an appeal to a Christian heritage, nor the use of legislation to enforce Christian principles regarding “private morals,” nor the identification of Christianity with particular cultural expressions.\textsuperscript{62} Rather, the confidence of Christian communities in their capacity to convey this contribution will rest, as was noted in the previous section, on the proclamation of the biblical narrative with its capacity to speak with discursive authority into any cultural context,\textsuperscript{63} and in the actions of members of church communities who seek to bring about justice, liberation and reconciliation. The narrative, as Nigel Wright expresses it, is one of “participating without possessing.”\textsuperscript{64}

Again, here, through the lens of this project, the focus will rest on those activities which seek to restore community, in this case in the wider society through reconciliation. This vital expression of the church community as missional “stems from its nature as the first fruits and primary earthly means of reconciliation.”\textsuperscript{65} In the contemporary Australian cultural milieu the church community which is divested of the power with which Christendom had endowed it, has a particular role to play in that it “is often the church on the margins which seeks to rebuild the structures of community in a world where the glue of community has come unstuck in the face of an unrelenting individualism.”\textsuperscript{66} Langmead

\textsuperscript{58} Greene and Robinson, \textit{Metavista}, 220.
\textsuperscript{59} Greene and Robinson, \textit{Metavista}, 220.
\textsuperscript{60} Rees, “Enabling Congregations,” 6.
\textsuperscript{61} Carson, \textit{Christ and Culture Revisited}, 143.
\textsuperscript{62} Greene and Robinson, \textit{Metavista}, 212, 213.
\textsuperscript{63} See my note in the previous section about the (non-modern) nature of the biblical narrative.
\textsuperscript{65} Wright, \textit{Disavowing Constantine}, 9.
\textsuperscript{66} Greene and Robinson, \textit{Metavista}, 194.
suggests a variety of ways in which this may occur, including international peacemaking, reconciliation with creation, and reconciliation between indigenous and non-indigenous peoples. It is to this latter form of reconciliation that we will turn briefly here as an example of such work.\(^\text{67}\)

Reconciliation between indigenous and non-indigenous Australians, it must first be recognised, cannot be separated from the exercise of justice: it “does not alter the need for human liberation through radical structural change.”\(^\text{68}\) Injustice against indigenous Australians is epitomised by, but by no means limited to, the declaration of Australia as terra nullius with its subsequent loss of rights to land, and the systematic separation of aboriginal children from their families.\(^\text{69}\) On-going efforts to address and make reparation for such injustice are integral to any possible attempts at reconciliation.\(^\text{70}\) Indigenous Australians have learnt all too well that the truth of words, even the words of the Christian gospel, may be entirely un-truthed by actions. The point is starkly made by George Rosendale:

> Aboriginal theology was not renewed, strengthened or restored by the Gospel because the way things were practised were not according to what was taught. The Gospel is not bad news, but it looked bad because the way it was taught it was never practised by the whites.

> On the one hand, they taught us the love of God, forgiveness of God, and on the other hand, they shot our grandparents, our father’s father, in fact my grandmother and my grandfather was shot and that’s in the 1900’s.\(^\text{71}\)

Moves towards reconciliation, however, must also go beyond justice which requires punishment and reparation, to restored relationships, the context for which is provided by personal story-sharing and the creation of “a shared sense of history.”\(^\text{72}\) In order to engage in such sharing, two particular obstacles need to be overcome. Firstly, as Gerard Goldman points out, most Anglo-Australians need to grasp that whilst they are neither survivors nor

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\(^\text{67}\) Langmead, "Transformed Relationships," 12, 13, 16.


\(^\text{70}\) Langmead, "Transformed Relationships," 8, 9.


\(^\text{72}\) Langmead, "Transformed Relationships," 9; Goldman, "Reconciling Memories", 13. It is not coincidental within the wider context of this project that narrative as personal story-telling is significant here. Personal, local, particular stories are not obliterated by the biblical metanarrative but do find their fullest sense, in all their diversity, within that larger narrative. Significant experience and pastoral care is necessary to ensure, however, that story-sharing, whilst always difficult, does not (re)traumatise tellers/hearers.
perpetrators, they are nevertheless implicated as bystanders in the injustices which have occurred and continue to occur to indigenous Australians: they “have chosen not to participate in halting the violence and oppression that others have suffered. They benefit from what others suffer from.”\(^{73}\) Secondly, whilst such bystanders may, in one sense, be free from direct guilt, there is nevertheless a negative affect which Goldman (after Norman Habel) terms “shame” associated with this by-standing participation:

Guilt suggests that the person is directly responsible for another person’s hurt; this requires some act of repentance on the part of the wrongdoer. Shame, on the other hand, is the feeling that is experienced simply through being in some way connected to the hurts of people. We can be ashamed of the way our grandparents may have hurt others; we do not necessarily experience guilt for the actions of our grandparents.

The issue is made even clearer by Habel for whom shame is the opposite of pride: if a community or nation can take pride in its national heritage, it is inconsistent to deny the possibility of shame where this is also called for.\(^{74}\) However, either by way of denial of participation, or for the sake of avoiding the negative affect which attends the awareness of such participation, true reconciliation tends to be truncated by a preference for a “forgive and forget” mentality.\(^{75}\)

Moving past these obstacles is dynamically associated with story-sharing in that this process both enables and is enabled by recognition of participation and responsibility. Such story-sharing goes beyond story-telling, which may well leave the putative listener disengaged, to both telling and active listening. Telling and retelling enables the integration of the story-teller’s personal past into their present, whilst active listening recognizes the reality of the other’s story and seeks to relate it to the listener’s story.\(^{76}\) As Habel expresses it,

> Relating the stories and empathising with those stories are two different things. To help me empathise with what happened to my Aboriginal brothers and sisters I searched for a piece of history in my own past… I looked for a similar moment of my history that had been largely ignored because it too challenges our national ideal, our identity as mates, and the belief that we will always give people a fair go.\(^{77}\)

Such story-sharing is the basis, not for some manufactured sense of guilt, but for an appropriate sense of responsibility and connection, which in turn enables the further and more comprehensive process of reconciliation.\(^{78}\) Comprehensive processes, such as

\(^{73}\) Goldman, “Reconciling Memories”, 14.
\(^{74}\) Habel, Reconciliation, 122-123.
\(^{75}\) Goldman, “Reconciling Memories”, 292.
\(^{76}\) Goldman, “Reconciling Memories”, 13.
\(^{77}\) Habel, Reconciliation, 45.
\(^{78}\) Goldman, “Reconciling Memories”, 34, 306.
those encompassed by RAPs (Reconciliation Action Plans), are promoted and resourced by Reconciliation Australia and seek to build “respectful relationships that generate sustainable opportunities,” across Australian society.\(^79\)

In terms of the scriptural narrative, such reconciliation, at both the personal and social levels, begins with God’s prior act of reconciliation in Christ.\(^80\) For Goldman this is then taken up at a personal level by those who are oppressed, resulting in the forgiveness of perpetrators which in turn results in apology. At the social level this order is reversed with apology by perpetrators/bystanders leading to forgiveness, leading to reconciliation.\(^81\) It would perhaps seem more appropriate, however, to suggest that, as a task of the church community, reconciliation, whether at the personal or social level, begins with the one (whether perpetrator, bystander or survivor) who has been reconciled by/with God, and is thereby entrusted with the ministry of reconciliation.\(^82\) This is a form of representation of God which Australian Baptist church communities (whether predominantly composed of indigenous or non-indigenous Australians) may offer to Australian society. As those who know what it is to be reconciled by the grace of God in Christ Jesus, they are called and able to undertake the suffering and vulnerability exemplified by Jesus’ death, with the knowledge that such is the path to the hope and new life of reconciliation and resurrection.\(^83\) On such a basis, they are able to interrupt the self-perpetuating cycle of guilt, condemnation and enmity and, in doing so, to exemplify a means by which Australian society might gain entry into the process of reconciliation. As this process of reconciliation proceeds, much needed justice is in turn further enabled, and both of these forms of God’s blessing will be conveyed to God’s world.

### 7.3.3 Living as Witness of Blessing for the World

Proclamation (the written/verbal articulation of the blessing of salvation), and the sharing of that blessing in action cannot be separated: both are necessary forms for the conveying of the fullness of God’s blessing to God’s world. Proclamation as “the articulated declaration

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\(^80\) Goldman, "Reconciling Memories", 126. See Section 7.3.1 above.
\(^81\) Goldman, "Reconciling Memories", 121.
\(^82\) This is not, in anyway to shift the onus of reconciliation onto the shoulders of indigenous Australian Christians. I would strongly agree with Goldman that forgiveness can never be expected/demanded of survivors: “perpetrators and bystanders have no grounds to call on survivors to forgive.” If forgiveness is offered by survivors it is an act, like that of God, of sheer grace, and yet, for those within the church community, it is both fitting and empowered by God’s grace and Spirit. Goldman, "Reconciling Memories", 127.
\(^83\) Goldman, "Reconciling Memories", 124. This makes the point that, although the work of church communities may often look the same as non-Christian humanitarian groups, it starts from a different basis and brings to bear a different set of resources.
of the lordship of Jesus” is vital, yet proclamation without action fails to grasp that God’s blessing entails anything more than an individualistic and spiritualised salvation.\(^\text{84}\) On the other hand, actions which share God’s blessing do not stand alone either: blessing in action may well require some explanation, and church communities “need to be careful not to assume that unexplained action is evangelistic.”\(^\text{85}\) In Bauckham’s terms, “to be blessed by God is not only to know God’s good gifts but to know God himself in his generous giving.”\(^\text{86}\) This connection too, however, can be all too easily over-stressed when actions which seek to share God’s blessings are used simply as stepping stones towards opportunities to “share the gospel.” As Frost points out, “non-Christians see this ploy a mile off,” and it projects the sense that church communities are just more cynical and self-interested providers of goods for individuals to consume.\(^\text{87}\) The essential binding ingredient as church communities convey God’s blessing to God’s world through proclamation and action is the witness of such communities as they live their lives together in solidarity with Christ, offering “a ‘transformative example.’”\(^\text{88}\) Blessing must be announced in word and shared in action, but if that blessing is to be coherent and engaging, then it must also be demonstrated by the community as their witness to its reality: it is this witness, this demonstration, which in its integrity knits word and action together. The failure of this witness, and therefore of integrity, undermines the whole work of conveying God’s blessing to God’s world. According to McClendon, the danger is that

the church’s defining character becomes growth, its highest goal the making of converts, [so that the] church may be perceived as of little worth in itself: the church exists only as an extrinsic instrument, a means to something that it is not. Then the church preaches a grace it cannot honestly confess because it does not itself embody that grace. Put a little differently, if the goal is to win others who will win others who will win others, an infinite regress of mere recruitment has taken the place of any real (or realistic) understanding of the point of evangelism. Recruited to what?\(^\text{89}\)

On the other hand,

The vibrant life of a Christian community which is open at the edges has an evangelistic dimension whether or not its gatherings have an avowedly evangelistic intention. The extent to which the church lives as a sign of the kingly reign of God is the extent to which it points to God’s Good News. The church which is a foretaste of

\(^\text{84}\) Frost, *The Road to Missional*, Location 603.
\(^\text{85}\) Frost, *The Road to Missional*, Location 625.
\(^\text{86}\) Bauckham, *Bible and Mission*, 34, emphasis added.
\(^\text{87}\) Frost, *The Road to Missional*, Locations 378, 1115 ff. Frost mounts a well-grounded attack regarding the church’s inclination to buy into a consumer-based style of marketing itself in preference to following the teaching and model of Christ. Both here and in the following section I point to those aspects of the joint and mutual priestly narrative of community which counter such tendencies.
\(^\text{88}\) Wright, *Disavowing Constantine*, 74.
\(^\text{89}\) McClendon, *Doctrine*, 439.
the new community is good news and therefore speaks good news... By following Jesus together in community we are engaging naturally in mission. By living out a new set of relationships counter-culturally, roughly in the shape of God's Commonwealth, we proclaim the possibility of a new creation where love and justice rule and those on the edge are welcomed into the centre.90

One of the unfortunate benefits of individualism in Western societies for the mission of Australian church communities is that living as the kind of community to which the scriptural narrative points and which early Baptist ecclesiology affirms, is counter-cultural: in their distinctiveness from their surrounding culture, such communities act as witness to the God who calls them into community. The danger remains that churches themselves are so impacted by such individualism that they are incapable of such witness: for Greene and Robinson, to be a church where “a radical destructuring of communal life to the point where there is only the individual and never the community in any shape or form is to be over-influenced by an individualistic Western culture and under-influenced by the gospel.”91 This is perhaps nowhere clearer than in forms of governance which, as was discussed in Chapter 6.3.2, may be all too easily influenced by the pragmatics of running an “efficient” or even “effective” church. Rather that being formed after the patterns of the world, church communities are to provide an alternative model for the politics of the world.92

Some of the ways in which such counter-cultural church communities are formed and sustained as joint and mutual expressions of priesthood have already been explored in Chapter 5, and these together with proclamation and sharing blessing in action, fulfil the priestly representation of God to God’s world which was outlined in Chapter 3.2.93 As was suggested there, the next movement of the church community which comes under the imperative of priestly service is to turn again to God in order to represent the world in its plight before God.

7.4. Priestly Representation of the World to God

Just as the church community’s priestly representation of God to the world is entirely derivative and participates in the work of Christ, so too with their priestly representation of the world to God. It is Jesus Christ who fundamentally represents others to God, based, firstly on the complete adequacy of his high priesthood and its superiority to any form of

90 Langmead, "Transformed Relationships," 15, emphasis in original.
91 Greene and Robinson, Metavista, 185.
92 Wright, Disavowing Constantine, 11.
93 Nelson, Raising up a Faithful Priest, 40-46, 86, 87.
human priesthood (Chapter 3.2.2), and, yet equally vitally, also on his “priestly solidarity” with his “brothers and sisters.” This solidarity involves sharing a Father, being “like them”, having suffered, having sympathy with human weakness, having been tested/tempted, and having been subject to weakness himself. The church community’s representation of the world to God is based, as derived from this, on the access the community has to the Father through Jesus’ pioneering ministry, and also on its continuing solidarity with the rest of humanity.

For McDonald, this solidarity of those within the church community with those beyond it is grounded in the “perichoretic relationship between the elect and the rest of humanity.” She bases this claim on Stanley Grenz’s work in which he proposes that perichoresis can be applied to human personhood in its relationality. According to Grenz, “the trajectory of social psychology... opens the way to a perichoretic understanding of the construction of the self in relationship,” in which “the essential nature of personhood” is understood “as consisting of mutuality and interdependence.” McDonald acknowledges that this stretches the concept of perichoresis so that its use regarding human personhood must be considered only as analogical to its reality within the Trinity. Volf, however, argues convincingly that even this is a step too far: the giving of themselves by believers to one another may, at its best, result in the “mutual internalization of personal characteristics,” but human, even ecclesial, relationality cannot reflect the full extent of the mutual interiority of the divine persons. It is, rather, “the indwelling of the Spirit common to everyone that makes the church into a communion corresponding to the Trinity, a communion in which personhood and sociality are equiprimal.” This relationality as delineated by Volf is, of course, internal to the church community and does not provide a basis for solidarity between those within the church community and those beyond it. Contrary, then, to McDonald for whom such human perichoresis is “crucial” to the dynamic of representation, my suggestion is that the priestly representation by the church community of the world to God, is sufficiently grounded in the same solidarity which is claimed for Christ by the

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94 He is “a great high priest” who, unlike human priests, is able to perfect (Heb 10:14), sanctify (Heb 10:10, 14; 31:12) and cleanse the consciences of his followers (Heb 9:13-14), who serves in the “true tabernacle in heaven” ((Heb 8:2, 5), and who made sacrifice, not for his own sins but for the sins of others, “one for all” (Heb 9:24-28; 10:10). On this basis, Jesus has eternal access to the Father (Heb 1:3; 10:12). Nelson, Raising up a Faithful Priest, 146.

95 Heb 2:11. Nelson, Raising up a Faithful Priest, 143.

96 Heb 2:11, 17, 18; 4:15; 5:2 Nelson, Raising up a Faithful Priest, 144.

97 Heb 2:10; 10:12-25.

98 McDonald, Re-Imaging Election, 155.


100 McDonald, Re-Imaging Election, 117.

101 Volf, After Our Likeness, 211.

102 Volf, After Our Likeness, 213.
author of the Letter to the Hebrews, sharing a Father who, in human terms, is also Creator, being “like them” in shared creatureliness, suffering as they do, being tested/tempted as they are, and being subject to weakness and thereby enabled to sympathise.

The solidarity of those within the church community with those beyond it is also, however, extended beyond that of Christ who voluntarily bore the sins of the world (Heb 9:28). For the covenant community, its “continuing sinfulness... is both its reproach and also, through its sharing in the sinfulness of humanity as a whole, an aspect of its representational role.” In this fashion, the representation of the world to God by church communities, as it is explored below, shares similarities with and yet also differs (in quality and degree) from their representation by Christ.

### 7.4.1 Ontological Representation

Firstly, as was the case with Israel (see Chapter 3.1.3), and Christ (Chapter 3.2.2), the church community’s priestly representation of the whole of humanity may be viewed as ontological, and, in the case of Israel and the church, to a significant degree, unconscious. In its very being, the meaning and purpose of God’s covenant people “is to bear the rejection of the alienated other in the self before God.” This “bearing” does “not add anything to what is accomplished in Christ any more than Israel’s election ‘preempts’ it,” and yet, just as Israel’s high priest came before God, bearing in his breastplate a reminder of the tribes of Israel, and bringing Israel to “continual remembrance before the Lord” (see Chapter 3.2.1), the church community bears the world before God. In doing so, it does not compromise either the integrity of the church community as consisting only of those who have been saved by grace through faith, and who are thereby distinctively joined with Christ by his Spirit, nor those beyond the church by the oppressiveness of turning them into “anonymous Christians.” Rather, such representation is best characterised as “provisional”:

As through Israel the promises of God were to reach beyond the covenant people to the nations, so it is because there is a community of the new covenant - a people

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103 McDonald, *Re-Imaging Election*, 155.
104 Heb 2:11, 17, 18; 4:15; 5:2.
106 McDonald, *Re-Imaging Election*, 163.
107 McDonald, *Re-Imaging Election*, 149.
108 McDonald, *Re-Imaging Election*, 152.
109 Birch et al., *A Theological Introduction to the Old Testament*, 137. This bearing is the outwardly focused communal, if at this point unconscious, parallel of the mutual bearing done by church community members within the community (Chapter 6.2.3).
united to Christ by the Spirit, and so participating already in the salvation which has been wrought by God in him - that those who are as yet outside that community are also held provisionally within the sphere of God's promised blessings. In this way, the church community continues to represent the world to God much as Christian parents do their children, bearing them in their being until they accept salvation for themselves. And yet, also like such parents, they move beyond such unconscious bearing, in persistently, prayerfully and hopefully representing them before God.

### 7.4.2 Active Representation

Secondly, then, although representation in its ontological form does not require the conscious involvement of the church community, becoming aware of this dynamic and imaginatively engaging with it will further shape and enable the community in its representation of the world to God in forms such as confession, intercession and suffering. In each of these, a pattern emerges of a prefiguring of Jesus’ high priesthood in the cultic practices of Israel, the pre-eminence of Christ himself as the great high priest, practice within the church community, and, finally, expression in the priestly work of the community in representing the world to God.

#### 7.4.2.1 Confession

Reference to the work of Israel’s high priest points to this more conscious and active form of representation as he made confession of the people’s sin (Chapter 3.2.1). Christ as high priest fulfils this prefiguring in both offering and being the perfect sacrifice for sin (Chapter 3.2.2). Grounded in this high priestly work of Christ, such confession in the Christian community begins, as was outlined in Chapter 5.3.4, in the corporate confession of sin by the community in its worship. Here, firstly, the community deals with the fact that sin continues to impact its own life. Despite all that God has done in Christ and by the presence of the Holy Spirit, the community remains, in this age, simil justus et peccator.

Both individually and as a community, sin, in the full scope of its manifestations, continues to be at work. In making confession of such sin within the community, it has been suggested, the first lesson of solidarity is learnt, in that members recognise that they stand together and make confession of such sin as a shared burden. This concept is now extended to the world beyond the community, in recognition that the solidarity of sin (in addition to the other forms of solidarity which are shared with Christ) bridges any division between the church community and the world. In fact, sin is more comprehensible in the

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111 McDonald, Re-Imaging Election, 152.
112 Lev 16:21.
world than it is in the church community with all of God’s resources (grace, forgiveness, the transforming work of the Holy Spirit) at its disposal. The gap between the church community and the world is no longer one of judgement by the church community of the world, but rather one which provides opportunity for the priestly service of confession by the church community as the world’s priestly representative on the basis of shared sinfulness. Although seeking at every point to counter the power of sin within the church community and to live in accordance with God’s call to holiness, sin within the community, viewed from this perspective, provides the opportunity to wrestle with accountability, repentance, forgiveness - that is, reconciliation - before and on behalf of the world.

7.4.2.2 Intercessory Prayer

Such active representation of the world to God also comes to light in intercessory prayer. Again, Israel’s high priest provided a pattern (Chapter 3.2.1), which is fulfilled by Christ in his ongoing ministry as high priest who intercedes before God. As with confession, in its Christian form, the practice begins with intercession for others within the community (Chapter 6.2.2). Again, however, intercessory practice also presses on into priestly service of the world as the church community intercedes on behalf of the world which God loves: “by grace we are given to participate in [Christ’s] intercession for all humanity. So in our corporate worship we are called to be a royal priesthood, bearing in our hearts the sorrows and cares and tragedies of our world as our heavenly High Priest does.” Such prayers, as was explored in Chapter 6.2.2, are stirred by the Holy Spirit, and offered in Christ according to the Father’s will, as a creative participation in God. In this way, the church community “may represent others to God, not in place of or in addition to Christ, but in dependence upon and with Christ.”

The needs within the church community may provide some guide as to the needs of the world beyond that community, and yet it will also take an act of imaginative and Spirit-guided openness on the part of the church community to seek out the ways in which the world, from the local neighbourhood to nations in far off places, needs and suffers, and

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113 This does not mean that the church has nothing to say to the world concerning what it understands will result in human flourishing, but rather, as will be explored below, that such prophetic critique will come from a place of solidarity rather than isolationism and triumphalism.
114 It is difficult to express the tension between the horror that sin within the community should produce, and yet the understanding that such will always be the case to the end of the age. The hopeful and compassionate yet confronting process of reconciliation encompasses both aspects, the ideal and the empirical, and, from this reality, enables the church community's comprehensive witness before the world and confessing representation of it.
115 Ezra 6:10; Joel 1:13.
116 John 17; Rom 8:27.
117 Torrance, Worship, 73.
118 McDonald, Re-Imaging Election, 153.
therefore requires the church community’s representative intercession before God. From such intercession, as for that offered for those within the church community, a range of outcomes might flow, from further prayer to direct action, which will encompass the whole scope of God’s blessing from the meeting of basic human needs to the fullness of salvation.

7.4.2.3 Suffering

In slavery in Egypt, in exile in Babylon, and in being hardened and deafened so that the Gentiles might enter into salvation, Israel underwent suffering as part of the working out of her role before the nations in order that the nations might be brought to blessing.\(^\text{119}\) The more dominant Old Testament theme was certainly that God’s blessing was evident in the direct and positive form of prosperity and šālôm, and yet there was also some awareness that blessing might come through suffering.\(^\text{120}\) For Christ, with fully conscious intentionality, just such suffering was the means by which he took on and fulfilled Israel’s role, and represented the world before God as the innocent and obedient suffering servant: “Jesus therefore intended not only to share Israel’s sufferings, but to do so as the key action in the divinely appointed plan of redemption for Israel and the world.”\(^\text{121}\)

Despite this, as with the issue of sin within the church community, it would appear that the presence of suffering within the church community is a source of consternation and doubt for some, as if it is unexpected and unwarranted. Like Israel and the nations confronted with the suffering servant, many are astonished and startled when those within the church community suffer.\(^\text{122}\) Yet Scripture is clear that, despite God’s miraculous grace being offered to some by their faith, others, in and for that same faith, suffer.\(^\text{123}\) Suffering may come to members of the church community on the basis of their continued solidarity with the suffering of the whole world in its fallenness, in disease and distress. Although such suffering is involuntary, nevertheless, the way in which it is addressed in the member’s and their community’s life in honest struggle and lament, yet breaking through to trust in and worship of God, may turn such suffering into a representative offering on behalf of a suffering world. Involuntary suffering may also come more directly as a result of the world’s sin in the form of persecution, and again it is the loving response to it which will turn this

\(^{119}\) Rom 11.

\(^{120}\) Isa 42:1-4; 49:1-6; 50:4-9; 52:13 - 53:12. Wright, Jesus and the Victory of God, 602. Hanson, The People Called, 244.

\(^{121}\) Wright, Jesus and the Victory of God, 603.

\(^{122}\) Isa 52:14, 15.

\(^{123}\) Heb 11:29-40.
suffering to the world’s benefit. On the other hand, and as N.T. Wright proposes, in intentionally following Christ’s example, “the church must find out the pain of the world, and must share it and bear it.” Suffering is never sought for its own sake yet, in intercessory prayer or sacrificial service, it is a dynamic which, through participation in Christ’s suffering, works to bring about blessing: “By grace we are given to participate in the life, ministry, sufferings, death, resurrection and continual intercessions of him who is the Head of the Body.”

7.4.3 Representation of the World to God: Foiling Isolationism and Triumphalism in the Church

The whole suggestion of a priestly ministry of representation of the world through solidarity with the world, appears to go against the grain of much else which has been explored in this project: that is, the sense that the church community is indeed called to worship and to live together in ways which set them apart from the rest of the world. Yet, as was explored in Chapter 3 (Sections 1.3 and 3.4), this setting apart is, nevertheless, for the sake of God’s world which God wills to bring to blessing. Such is the perversity of sin, however, that even God’s people’s priestly service to that world may, as the history of both Israel and the Church indicates, be all too easily translated into sectarianism accompanied by various forms of isolationism and triumphalism. The danger is that God’s people see themselves, from their place of perceived covenant privilege, over and against the rest of God’s world: a world which they are tempted to continue to perceive as a threat, making impure that which is holy. Israel, as was explored in Chapter 3.1.3, struggled with this dynamic, Jesus was constantly criticised for ignoring such constraints, and the council in Jerusalem paradigmatically rejected such a stance in its acceptance of Gentile believers. The great reversal, which was brought about by Jesus’ death and resurrection, means that “no longer [is] the holy threatened, under siege, or on the defensive. The reign of evil [has] been broken, and the unholy [is] in retreat” (Chapter 3.3.3).

Not everything about God’s world in its fallen condition is good, and everything in it is certainly relativised before

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125 Wright, The Climax of the Covenant, 256.
126 2 Cor 4:7-12. Torrance, Worship, 73.
128 Acts 11:1-18; Gal 2:1-10. See Dunn’s analysis of this event and the similarities and differences between Luke’s and Paul’s account. Nevertheless, he finds, the two accounts agree that a “determinative precedent” had been set in the “Gentiles receiving the Spirit/grace of God without being circumcised,” and that it was not necessary for them to become so. Dunn, Beginning from Jerusalem, 464.
129 Hanson, The People Called, 442, 443.
God. God’s people must therefore constantly bring their Christ-minded discernment to it. But neither is it a hateful place from which they must withdraw. Their stance is rather to be one of wisely discerning yet faithfully hopeful openness, with the flexibility to place themselves along the spectrum of possibilities of relationship between Christ and Culture as circumstances allow and demand. Thus, according to Michael Frost, The God of Jesus reveals his holiness not by the avoidance of humiliation but by embracing it. This is the opposite of pietism (either the Christian or Muslim versions) where one’s holiness is revealed via separation. Cross-shaped holiness is the kind of godliness that is distilled and intensified by engagement, suffering, service, and sacrifice.

Beyond the rejection of isolationism, Paul’s writings also demonstrate a particular wariness of all forms of triumphalism. Those who are members of a church community have become so entirely on the basis of God’s grace rather than through any merit of their own, “so that none may boast.” If there is any boasting to be done by the community, it concerns the cross of Christ, which, counter to all human wisdom and potential for boasting, is the only source of hope. Moreover, membership in the community of the cross is not for the sake of members’ own privilege, but for the sake of “good works,” and, essentially, for others: members of God’s people are “bearers – not exclusive beneficiaries,” so that “election is for responsibility, not for privilege.” Even priestly service can, however, become a source of pride for church communities, but such a

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130 1 Cor 6:12-20.  
131 Baptist relations with the world as “state” have a mixed heritage. Some General Baptists followed more Anabaptist practices with regard to taking oaths, bearing arms, and allowing government officials to become church members, but Particular Baptists, and as time passed, Baptists of both kinds, “followed their Calvinistic heritage in giving high value to political loyalty and patriotic participation in civil affairs.” The “separation of church and state” for which they are renowned, has generally concerned the rejection of coercion in matters of religious belief and conscience, rather than rejection of and withdrawal from the world. McBeth, The Baptist Heritage, 83-86. This distinguished them from the form of “gathered church” practised by the Anabaptists according to the Schleitheim Confession, which defined their gatheredness by what they were gathered from (the world), rather than who (Christ) they were gathered to. Colwell, Promise and Presence, 68, 69, 70.  
132 Don Carson provides a helpful commentary on Richard Niebuhr’s Christ and Culture in relation to these issues. In light of a canonical narrative reading of Scripture, Niebuhr’s models cannot be held to be discrete alternatives but sit along a spectrum of relationships between the church and world with different emphases being high-lighted as circumstances demand. “We will be wise,” Carson suggests, “if we refrain from distinguishing discrete patterns or paradigms or models of the relations between Christ and culture, and think instead of wise integration [of these patterns/paradigms], with different aspects of the whole clamoring for more attention from time to time.” Carson, Christ and Culture Revisited, 62; H. Richard Niebuhr, Christ and Culture (New York: Harper & Row, 1951).  
133 Frost, The Road to Missional, Location 1493.  
134 Eph 2:8-9; Rom 3:27-28.  
135 1 Cor 1:23; Gal 6:14. As Bauckham notes, despite this, the modern metanarrative of progress and the “progressivist doctrines of mission,” are “triumphantist in tendency, apt to obscure the fact that genuinely Christian mission is witness to the crucified Christ.” Bauckham, Bible and Mission, 20-21.  
136 Eph 2:10.  
137 Newbigin, The Open Secret, 32.
possibility is ruled out by the example of Christ.\textsuperscript{138} It is God’s call to the church community to exercise its priesthood in representing the world to Godself \textit{after Christ’s model} which overcomes the constant temptation to isolationism and triumphalism which attends the particularity of God’s call:

The church represents the presence of the reign of God in the life of the world, not in the triumphalist sense (as the "successful" cause) and not in the moralistic sense (as the "righteous" cause), but in the sense that it is the place where the mystery of the kingdom present in the dying and rising of Jesus is made present here and now so that all people, righteous and unrighteous, are enabled to taste and share the love of God before whom all are unrighteous and all are accepted as righteous.\textsuperscript{139}

It is this non-isolationist, non-triumphalist representation of the world by the priestly community before God which would appear to offer the most appropriate basis from which the church might turn, now in prophetic rather than priestly ministry, to represent God to God’s world in constructive critique.

\textbf{Conclusion}

Sharing God’s blessing with God’s world begins in worship: it is only as the church community worships God and learns who God is and how God is intent upon blessing the world that it is able to embrace its priestly task of sharing God’s blessing. Sharing God’s blessing with God’s world is also dependent upon the church community’s life together, maintaining its capacity for its priestly service by constantly seeking to live in and according to God’s being, in righteousness, justice and compassion. Both worship and the life together of the church community are also, however, entirely dependent upon the community’s capacity to understand its priesthood in relation to God’s world. Without such understanding the church community turns inward upon itself, failing to recognise God as God is, and therefore unable to truly worship, and tending towards the isolationism and triumphalism which will inevitably corrupt their life together.

This task of sharing God’s blessing is perhaps the most dynamic of the three dimensions of the community’s priesthood. Having seen God in their worship, the community comes under a priestly imperative to turn to the world and together, in proclamation, action and witness, declare who God is, and in so doing, sharing God’s blessing which culminates in salvation. In this very act of facing God’s world, however, the church community is also reminded of the plight of that world, and is compelled to turn again to God, representing

\textsuperscript{138} Phil 2:6-8.
\textsuperscript{139} Newbigin, \textit{The Open Secret}, 54.
the world in its sin and neediness before God in confession, prayer and suffering. As this representation turns again to worship, the constant priestly movement of the church community before the Father continues, with every aspect of the church community’s priesthood derived from and secondary to that of Christ, and guided by the Spirit. In all this, the boundaried church community is revalued as both the means and (provisional) goal of mission, but at the same time, its boundaries are, in a sense, flattened, even trampled down, as the church community moves to and fro between God and God’s world in its task of priestly representation, and as all those whom God calls are welcomed in. It is the shared narrative of community as joint and mutual covenantal priesthood which holds these seemingly contradictory dynamics, not with deep ambivalence, but in creative tension.

These issues around sharing God’s blessing, together with those of worship (Chapter 5) and life together (Chapter 6), will now be re-canvassed and drawn together through an exploration of the joint and mutual priesthood of the covenanted church community as it celebrates in baptism and the Lord’s Supper.
Chapter 8: Renewing Covenant Community in Baptism and the Lord’s Supper

The previous three chapters of this systematic practical theology have developed the ways in which the narrative of joint and mutual covenantal priesthood shapes belief and practices concerning the three key dimensions of church community life; worship, life together, and sharing God’s blessing with God’s world. In doing so, the specific issues raised by the description of Australian Baptist churches in relation to the PSOC have been addressed: the re-emphasis of a scriptural-historical-theological discourse of membership/belonging has been advanced; issues and ways forward concerning both boundary affirmation and openness have been identified; the nature of influence of the community on its members, and of members on their community, as an ecclesial as well as psychosocial issue, has been addressed; and shared narratives of community have been highlighted, especially in the form of joint and mutual covenantal priesthood. It is this narrative, it has been demonstrated, which has the capacity to show that these dimensions of church community life are not in competition with one another, but are entirely and vitally interdependent. It thereby provides a comprehensive and coherent means of countering individualism and engendering community across the full range of church community life. This chapter explores how these various threads come together in a Baptist sacramental perspective on believer baptism and the Lord’s Supper.

As was explored in Chapter 4.1.3, whilst Baptists of the seventeenth century predominantly adopted and took for granted a sacramentalism after the pattern of Calvin, their particular focus was shaped by their ecclesiology of regenerate membership. Regarding both baptism and the Lord’s Supper their emphasis lay, therefore, on their distinctive approach to the appropriate persons to be involved in such practices (believers/members) and, for baptism, its mode (immersion). Nevertheless, it is clear that it was widely assumed that baptism and the Lord’s Supper were events in which God was primarily active, with responsive parts played by human persons – both corporately (by the administering church), and personally (as baptismal candidates and communicants). Over the next two centuries, however, a variety of pressures came to bear upon such Baptist sacramentalism, culminating in the reaction against Tractarianism and that movement’s forceful reclamation of baptismal regeneration (Chapter 4.2.3). In response to this, and as a rejection of the denial of the liberty of both God and human persons perceived to be
inherent in such a doctrine, sacramentalism came into general disrepute. In its place, there was an overwhelming trend towards Zwinglian memorialism with its heavy emphasis on obedient human response to the ordinances of Christ which, as time passed and the early Baptist heritage was eclipsed, was assumed to be “traditional” Baptist theology.

There did continue, however, to be Baptist theologians of significant influence, for whom memorialism provided an inadequate account of the meaning and significance of baptism and the Lord’s Supper. Whilst Spurgeon, in the late nineteenth century for example, rejected baptismal regeneration, he held a high view of its significance whereby it “could not be omitted without risking loss of divine blessing.”¹ More definitively with regard to the Lord’s Supper he could affirm that “we firmly believe in the real presence of Christ which is spiritual and yet certain.”² In the early twentieth century, H. Wheeler Robinson rejected the reduction of baptism to an act of individual obedience.³ For Robinson, baptism concerned the very nature of the local church and remained a means of grace by the work of the Holy Spirit.⁴ It was on the basis of the work of Robinson and his associates that, from the mid-twentieth century, there was a resurgence of Baptist sacramentalism among British Baptists led by George Beasley-Murray and R.E.O. White.⁵ The work of these latter theologians, however, did not look back to early Baptist sacramental roots but was rather based on current theological and exegetical concerns.⁶ For Stanley Fowler, the debates around this work (represented by a collection entitled *Christian Baptism*) on the part of both its critics and its proponents “illustrate the distressing tendency of Baptists to be both theologically and historically naive.”⁷ He goes on:

> The critics of [*Christian Baptism*] often naively assumed that all forms of sacramalism are roughly equivalent to traditional Catholic teaching and thus open to all the same criticisms, but the authors of the book can also be faulted for their failure to recognize that they needed to do a preemptive response to the

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⁷ A tendency towards this same forgetfulness was identified in contemporary Australian Baptist churches in both Chapter 1 and Chapter 2.3.4. Fowler, "Is 'Baptist Sacramentalism' an Oxymoron?", 1:150. Alec Gilmore, ed. *Christian Baptism: A Fresh Attempt to Understand the Rite in Terms of Scripture, History, and Theology* (Cambridge, UK: Lutterworth Press,1959).
predictable theological criticisms. If the critics had understood the history of Baptist thought, especially the formative period of the seventeenth century, then they would have recognized that ‘Baptist Sacramentalism’ is not an oxymoron, but the authors are equally guilty of failing to demonstrate the continuity of their perspective with their own tradition.\footnote{Fowler, "Is ‘Baptist Sacramentalism’ an Oxymoron?," 1:150.}

In more recent years this failure to recognize the history of Baptist sacramental thought has been redressed in the work of several British Baptist theologians upon whose work this chapter will draw. Most notable amongst these have been Stanley Fowler himself, and Anthony Cross.\footnote{Fowler, More Than a Symbol; Cross, Baptism and the Baptists. Anthony R. Cross, Recovering the Evangelical Sacrament: Baptisma Semper Reformandum (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2013).} Such developments have gained considerably less traction in the U.S.A.,\footnote{Stanley J. Grenz, "Baptism and the Lord's Supper as Community Acts: Toward a Sacramental Understanding of the Ordinances," in Baptist Sacramentalism, ed. Anthony R. Cross and Philip E. Thompson, Studies in Baptist History and Thought (Milton Keynes, UK: Paternoster, 2003), 1:83.} but the argument in favour of Baptist sacramentalism is also supported by such American Baptist theologians as James McClendon, Philip Thompson, Curtis Freeman and Stanley Grenz.\footnote{McClendon, Doctrine, 387-406. See the volumes on Baptist Sacramentalism co-edited by Philip Thompson, and his particular contributions to them. Thompson, "Sacraments and Religious Liberty"; Curtis W. Freeman, "To Feed Upon by Faith" Nourishment from the Lord's Table," in Baptist Sacramentalism, ed. Anthony R. Cross and Philip E. Thompson (Milton Keynes, UK: Paternoster, 2003) 1:194-210; Grenz, "Baptism and the Lord's Supper as Community Acts," 1:76-95; Philip E. Thompson, "Introduction: Practicing Sacramentality in Baptist Modality," in Baptist Sacramentalism, eds. Anthony R. Cross and Philip E. Thompson (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2008) 2:xvii-xxiv.} In Australia, as was noted in Chapter 2.3.4, the situation is perhaps less militantly anti-sacramental than amongst some American Baptists, but may be more accurately described as pre-contemplative, with apparently little attention being paid to baptism and the Lord’s Supper in general, and even less to any sacramental theology concerning them. The problem is more one of neglect than contempt,\footnote{Cf., Freeman, "To Feed Upon by Faith," 1:197.} and this makes considerable sense if it is recognised that sacramentalism (even in Baptist form) is simply not consonant with the way in which church community life is conducted within many Australian Baptist churches. It is, this chapter will demonstrate, only when sacramentalism is set within a coherent ecclesial setting, such as that provided by the narrative of joint and mutual covenantal community, that it becomes comprehensible and even essential.

If a renewed sense of sacramentalism (after the fashion of the authors noted above) restores a significant emphasis on God’s initiative, the importance of human response is by no means denied. In the sacraments, God’s initiative is met by the human response of obedient faith which will certainly be expressed in personal confession of faith and remembering, but will also take up a sense of worshipful participation in the life of the Father, Son and Spirit. In doing so, the human response is given even greater
significance, beyond personal confession and remembrance, as the sacraments are considered as events of ethical meaning, challenge and commitment, both within and beyond the church community. Such worship in the forms of baptism and the Lord’s Supper is, in summary, “an ordered series of activities that Christians carry out regularly together in obedience to Jesus's [sic] command, as a way of becoming more like him, and as a witness to God’s world.”

This chapter is, then, the culmination of this project: in the events of baptism and the Lord’s Supper, the themes of covenant, priesthood and community coalesce and come to expression in the joint and mutual priesthood of the local church as it worships, lives together and seeks to share God’s blessing with God’s world. It will firstly explore contemporary Baptist forms of sacramentalism as expressions of covenant and community. The implications of this theology for each of the dimensions of community life will then be examined; in worship, seeking out the participants, divine and human, in their various sacramental roles; in life together, being both affirmed and exhorted as a sacramental form of ethical reasoning is learnt and applied; and in sharing God’s blessing with God’s world, through priestly solidarity, preparation and witness. It will become clear through this exploration that the sacraments both serve to create/maintain the boundaried church community within the world, but are also events in which the boundary of the church community is held open to God’s world. Finally, this chapter will seek to outline the importance of the “narration” of the sacraments of baptism and the Lord’s Supper, through which they are fully retold, explored and explicated, scripturally, historically, theologically, and in the lives of contemporary participants. Without such narration, sacramental actions decline and fade from view, taking with them particular means of grace by which God has promised to be present and at work, through faith, in and through God’s people.

14 The scope of this work has required that I limit this exploration of Baptist sacramentalism to baptism and the Lord’s Supper, but I acknowledge that there are excellent grounds for broadening the concept to include, for example, the church meeting as an essentially Baptist form of sacrament. Fiddes, Tracks and Traces, 282, 283. John Colwell takes a broad approach by which he is able to include the Church, the Word, cleansing, healing, Christian ministry and marriage. Colwell, Promise and Presence.
15 In referring to “narration” and “narrative” here, I am drawing an intentional link between what is said to explicate the dramatic action of the sacraments of baptism and the Lord’s Supper, and the ongoing thrust of this project which seeks to place all that is said and done in/by the church community in the context of the priestly narrative of covenant community, and beyond that, in the wider context of the canonical narrative. The complex relationship between faith, narration, community and God’s presence and action in the context of the sacraments will be explored further throughout this chapter, and summarised in Section 8.5.
8.1. Sacramentalism for the Covenantal Priesthood

8.1.1 Sacraments: A Working Definition

Firstly, it will be helpful to outline a form of Baptist sacramental theology which takes its bearings from and builds upon the findings already established in this thesis. The features of this theology will be developed further as this chapter progresses.

Firstly, the scriptural narrative describes practices in relation to baptism and the Lord’s Supper which are significantly normative, but in the practice of which variations may and do occur. Baptism, as was explored in Chapter 3.3.4, belongs amongst a constellation of divine/human events the order and causative/correlative nature of which are somewhat fluid even within the biblical text. This said, it is the consistent Baptist witness, based on Scripture, that the appropriate human participants in both sacraments are believers who are able to express their own faith in God. In the presence of such faith, the sacraments of baptism and the Lord’s Supper are effective signs of God’s grace to God’s covenant people. Naming them as such does not counter God’s sovereign liberty, but relies with humble confidence on God’s loving covenant faithfulness in keeping God’s particular promises regarding such events. God, in gracious faithfulness, chooses, as in creation and paradigmatically in Christ’s incarnation, to mediate God’s own presence to God’s people through the material world which God created. God is thus the primary acting agent in baptism and the Lord’s Supper, being present and at work in Christ by the Holy Spirit. In addition to God’s activity, there are two human forms of participation in the sacraments: the church, as God’s gathered covenant people, represents God and administers the sacraments; and the baptismal candidates and communicants receive and participate in God’s presence and work through faith and in obedient discipleship. In this

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16 For McClendon, for example, the fact “that some do enter the eschatological community without [believer] baptism,” for example, does not reduce its status as an effective sign: “Though a gracious host stands at the door to welcome the guests, some may attend the party without receiving that welcome; perhaps they were in the house before the party began (cf. the first disciples); perhaps they mistakenly made another kind of entrance (cf. the infant-baptized believer). Neither sort obviates the front-door welcome.” McClendon, Doctrine, 389.


18 Grenz provides a brief summary of the scriptural, theological and historical issues involved. Grenz, Theology for the Community of God, 528-529.

19 Fowler, More Than a Symbol, 155.

20 Colwell, Promise and Presence, 30.

21 Colwell, Promise and Presence, 56.

22 Colwell, Promise and Presence, 71.

23 Regarding baptism, for example, “it is a triply enacted sign, a deed in which God and candidate and (through its designated minister) church all act to effect a turn in one life-story (the candidate’s) on the basis of Jesus’ crucified and risen life.” McClendon, Doctrine, 390.

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context, the sacraments act as effective signs and seals of entry into and subsistence in God’s covenant and the community thereof.\textsuperscript{24}

\textbf{8.1.2 Sacraments and Covenant}

For Calvin, after whom the early Baptists modelled their sacramental thought, the sacraments of baptism and the Lord’s Supper were, first and foremost, signs concerning God’s covenant promises to God’s people: “Signs are used to ratify the covenant producing greater certainty in the promise of God’s word.”\textsuperscript{25} God calls God’s promises covenants, and sacraments are signs of these,\textsuperscript{26} “that he might make [God’s people] sure and confident of the truth of his promises.”\textsuperscript{27} For baptism this connection is found in biblical comparisons of it to circumcision, which was the sign of initiation into the old covenant.\textsuperscript{28} But such a comparison also marked the point of departure for early Baptists from their Reformed forebears. Whilst for Calvin, such passages pointed to the appropriateness of infant baptism, the early Baptists argued that “those who do actually profess repentance towards God, faith in, and obedience, to our Lord Jesus, are the only proper subjects of this ordinance.”\textsuperscript{29} Jones summarises the situation thus: “one major difference between circumcision and baptism, and by extension the old and the new covenant communities, is that baptism is only for believers who have become Abraham’s spiritual children through their own faith.”\textsuperscript{30} Baptism, whilst it may be compared with circumcision as a rite of covenantal initiation, is not, in the sense of its applicability to the children of covenant participants, parallel with it.\textsuperscript{31} Any scriptural comparison is made only between physical baptism and \textit{spiritual} circumcision,\textsuperscript{32} and as such baptism is a sign of the new covenant made with each person who stands before God for him/herself in faith.\textsuperscript{33} According to Anthony Cross,

This, then, is the unequivocal teaching of the New Testament on salvation; there is no alternative soteriology which allows for others to believe on behalf of anyone other than themself, and that no one – neither Jew nor Gentile, slave nor free, male

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{24} As seal on the basis of the Holy Spirit’s presence who is the seal of God’s covenant with believers (2 Cor 1:22; Eph 1:13; 4:30; cf. Rom 4:11). Brandon C. Jones, \textit{Waters of Promise: Finding Meaning in Believer Baptism} (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2012), 134.
  \item \textsuperscript{25} Peter A. Lillback, \textit{The Binding of God: Calvin’s Role in the Development of Covenant Theology} (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2001), 244.
  \item \textsuperscript{26} E.g., Gen 9:9-17.
  \item \textsuperscript{27} Calvin, \textit{Institutes}, IV:IV:6,18.
  \item \textsuperscript{28} Rom 4:11-12; Gal 3:26-29; Col 2:11-12. Jones, \textit{Waters of Promise}, 133.
  \item \textsuperscript{29} “The Second London Confession of Faith,” 291.
  \item \textsuperscript{30} Jones, \textit{Waters of Promise}, 133.
  \item \textsuperscript{31} Cross, \textit{Recovering the Evangelical Sacrament}, 234.
  \item \textsuperscript{32} Col 2:11.
\end{itemize}
nor female - enters the new covenant community, the people of God, other than by personal faith in Christ.  

If baptism may thus be understood as the sign of initiation into the new covenant and its community, the Lord’s Supper is even more explicitly the sign of that covenant’s continuing and undergirding constitution of that community. According to Howard Marshall, for Luke, “the cup, i.e. its contents, symbolizes the new covenant, in the sense that the new covenant is brought into being by what it signifies, namely the sacrificial death of Jesus.” The whole context for Paul’s writing about the Lord’s Supper in 1 Corinthians 11 is that of covenant, with chapter 10 beginning with a reference to God’s people, Israel, in the wilderness, eating “spiritual food” and drinking “spiritual drink.” In this context, “sharing in the physical elements, which is to share in the body and blood of Christ, is to participate in the covenant.”

Baptism and the Lord’s Supper may also be considered seals of the new covenant. The terms “baptism” and “seal” were basically synonymous from the second century. Beasley-Murray argues that this association was based on the fact that firstly, the relevant texts speak of sealing as a past event at a definite point in time, which accords with the outset of their Christian life, and therefore with baptism. Secondly, that sealing is taken to indicate that “that which is sealed, whether object or person, is the property of him whose seal is affixed to it (or him)”; and hence the significance of baptism in the name of Jesus. Thirdly, that the seal is the Holy Spirit who is given by “‘baptism of the Spirit’ in association with the laying of the Name of Jesus on a believer in the rite of baptism.” This sealing is relevant both in the present and for the eschatological future so that “the believer thereof who has the Spirit is ‘sealed’ as Christ’s in the Kingdom that now is and for the Kingdom

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38 Clarke, "A Feast for All?," 2:103.
40 2 Cor 1:22; Eph 1:13; 4:30.
41 Beasley-Murray, Baptism in the New Testament, 173, 174. See comments on baptism in the name of Christ or the Trinity in Chapter 3.3.4.
that is to be.”⁴² The association of the term “seal” with the Lord’s Supper points to its generalisation, particularly by the Reformers, as the reassurance which the Spirit’s presence offered to believers.⁴³ Thus, for Calvin, a sacrament was “an external sign, by which the Lord seals on our consciences his promises of good-will toward us, in order to sustain the weakness of our faith.”⁴⁴ Such thought was taken up by the authors of the General Baptist “Orthodox Creed,” for whom the Lord’s Supper was “for the confirmation of the faithful believers, in all the benefits of his death and resurrection, and spiritual nourishment and growth in him; sealing unto them their continuance in the covenant of grace, and to be a band and pledge of communion with him.”⁴⁵

Thus, when received by faith, the signs of baptism and the Lord’s Supper may be trusted to be, not only objectively, but also subjectively effective.⁴⁶

8.1.3 Sacraments and Covenant Community

In both Scripture (Chapter 3), and according to the witness of the early Baptists (Chapter 4), the concept of covenant is inextricably linked with the existence of community: in establishing and keeping covenant, God calls people into relational community with Godself and with one another. The sacraments of baptism and the Lord’s Supper are certainly acts of personal obedience to Christ, but, in the communal gathering up of these personal acts, the formation and maintenance of the church covenant community is prioritised, and a sense of membership is strengthened.

The link between the sacraments and community was made for early Baptists through the concept and practice of local church covenants. As has already been explored (Chapter 4.1.1), such covenants expressed “the two fold dimension of a contract made by the members both ‘vertically’ with God and ‘horizontally’ with each other.”⁴⁷ To enter into covenant with God was, inevitably, to come into covenant with God’s people in the local church community. When, for a period in the seventeenth century, the explicit practice of church covenants fell into disuse, this was not because such covenants were regarded as unimportant, but rather because they were believed to be implicit in believer baptism:

⁴⁵ “The Orthodox Creed,” XXXIII, 321.
⁴⁶ This subjectivity is not in relation to some “experience” which may or may not attend the sacraments, but in relation to the reception of the spiritual reality by faith. See further discussion of this in Section 8.5 below.
“being knit vnto the LORD, & one vnto another, by Baptisme. I Cor 12.13.”⁴⁸ Such an intimate connection between baptism and church covenant membership was, in one sense, compromised with the move by Elias and Benjamin Keach and others to reinstate agreement with the membership covenant as a subsequent and, in later Baptist practice, an increasingly separate and even optional action apart from baptism (see Chapter 4.1.1 and 4.2.1).⁴⁹ Yet, on the other hand, and given the individualism which is often currently applied to baptism in the Australian Baptist context (see Chapter 2.3.4), the reality of entry into not only covenant with God, but also with God’s people, appears to require a significant and explicit acknowledgement associated with baptism. Jason Lee describes these dual imperatives:

Baptism serves as an outward sign of identity with Christ but also as a visible affirmation of the believer’s entrance into the body of believers. Therefore, it serves as an outward acceptance of the covenant with the Lord, given by grace through faith. Baptism also marks a common confession with, and a covenantal commitment to, the believers in the church from which the person receives baptism. Baptism notes an affirmation of the two foci of covenant - it is with the Lord and with fellow believers.⁵⁰

The appropriate response, as was argued in Chapter 5.2, appears to be the practical reestablishment of the closest possible links between conversion, baptism and covenanted church membership.

If baptism is the rite of initiation into covenant with God and with fellow believers in church community, the Lord’s Supper is the sign of the constant renewal and reaffirmation of that covenant belonging. As Brian Harvey traces it, from the late twelfth century, as the focus of sacramental theology came to rest almost solely on the sacerdotal action of the priest, “the corporate and social emphasis of the eucharist diminished... [and] it became a focal point for the subjective devotional life of the individual in the isolation of her or his own thoughts and affection.”⁵¹ Despite this general trend, the covenant ecclesiology of the early Baptists reemphasised the importance of community to the practice of the Lord’s Supper: it was “to be a bond and pledge of their communion with him, and with each other.”⁵² Even with the shift to more Zwinglian forms of memorialism, there remained an emphasis on the practice

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⁴⁸ “A Declaration of Faith of English People Remaining at Amsterdam,” 119. See also Fiddes, Tracks and Traces, 31.
of the Lord’s Supper as “the enhancement of the fellowship of love among believers.”

There is debate as to whether the loss of sacramental understandings of baptism and the Lord’s Supper inevitably result in the loss of a sense of community. For Grenz, both sides of the theological debate concerning sacraments and ordinances may “believe an underlying individualistic outlook.” According to Colwell, however, and as I have argued (Chapter 4.1.3), the loss of recognition of God’s active presence in the sacraments marks an inevitable accompanying loss of human community which is based in something beyond human sociality: “Our participation in Christ is both the possibility and the manner of our participation in one another.” A sacramental understanding of the Lord’s Supper (and also of baptism) may still become overly individualistic, but where God is understood to be present and active there is, at least, the possibility that a community exists which, rather than being gathered only on the basis of human sociality, is fundamentally grounded in God’s triune presence with God’s people.

Such community was expressed, for early General Baptists, in the close association of baptism and church membership with the closed practice of communion, whilst for some Particular Baptists such links were less rigidly held and access to the Lord’s Table was open to those who had undergone baptism in any form. There appear to be gains and losses on both sides of this debate. Closed communion is a celebration of a very particular form of community in which all the participants are in covenant relationship with one another. They are, therefore, held in communion by special bonds of joint and mutual priesthood and expectations regarding conduct which preserve the fitness of the community for the presence of Christ (see Chapter 4.1.4). These same restrictions, however, mean that church communities who practice closed communion are unable to participate in Table fellowship with believers who, for whatever reason, are outside these communities. On the other hand, open communion emphasises the openness and

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53 Fiddes, Tracks and Traces, 168.
55 Colwell, Promise and Presence, 177. Colwell’s remarks are made in the context of interdenominational unity, but apply equally to unity within the local church community.
56 This touches upon the complex relationship between faith, narration, community and God’s presence and action in the context of the sacraments. Just as one cannot say that God must be at work in the sacraments (see Sections 8.1.1 and 8.1.2 above, and 8.2.1 below), one cannot say God cannot be at work where a specific sacramental form of faith is absent. Nevertheless, it is possible to say that believers hope with assurance that God is present and at work in the sacraments because God promises to be so, and that a specific form of faithful imagination is, normatively, the receptive human state in which God draws people to participate in the fullness of God’s presence and work in those sacraments (see Section 8.5 below).
57 Fiddes, Tracks and Traces, 175. As time passed, it was the open communion stance which became more common, particularly in England with the rise of the ecumenical movement. Clarke, “A Feast for All?,” 2:93. Most Australian Baptist churches practice open communion (Chapter 2.3.1).
58 Even in church communities where the Lord’s Supper is generally open, there may be occasions when it is appropriate to celebrate the Lord’s Supper in a closed form, such as times of church covenant renewal.
welcome of the local church community to the wider body of Christ, and hopefulness that those who as yet stand outside the church community might join it. The losses of open communion are those related to a particular sense of community identity, and the accountability and cohesiveness which may attend it. Such tensions, as was noted in the discussion of the PSOC in Chapter 2.3, are not unexpected given that boundaries such as those around communion both include and exclude. As has been suggested previously regarding baptism and church covenant membership (Chapter 5.2), careful narration of the Lord’s Supper, may make it possible to hold these tensions in balance, or, as will be explored below (Section 8.4), to emphasise different aspects at different times.  

8.2. Sacraments as Worship

Contemporary Australian Baptist practices suggest that baptism and the Lord’s Supper are perceived mainly as events in which individual human persons express their obedience to God in response to Christ’s ordinances (Chapter 2.3.4). In this limited sense, baptism and the Lord’s Supper are seen as offerings of worship to God. As this project has sought to establish, however, priestly worship is significantly less anthropocentric than this understanding would suggest (Chapter 3.1.1; 3.3.1; and Chapter 5). In fact, first and foremost, Christian worship is not just about God, but is instigated, enabled and shaped by God, particularly as the Spirit enables the church community to take up its priestly role in Christ who is its high priest before the Father. The church in its priesthood, then acts as God’s representative in administering the sacraments, and it is only in response to both God and the priestly church community that personal, faithful and obedient response finds its context.

8.2.1 The Triune God as Primary Sacramental Participant

The etymology and use of the term “sacrament” is of significance in a preliminary understanding of the way in which the recognition of God’s primary role in the events of baptism and the Lord’s Supper has been compromised. In the post-Apostolic church,

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59 Fiddes, Tracks and Traces, 176.  
60 See further discussion of this train of thought in Section 8.4 below.  
61 As will become clear both below and in the next section (Section 8.3), obedient human response to the ordinances of baptism and the Lord’s Supper is not simply in response to some arbitrary order (“Do this because I (Christ) say so”), but because God desires to be at work through them, and because there is a far more significant form of obedient discipleship to be played out in the ethical challenges and commitments which the sacraments pose/require.  
62 The following brief summary of this one issue around the term sacramentum does not, by any means, encompass the many other tensions which bore upon the priority given to human over divine participation in the sacraments. It is rather provided as a paradigmatic example of such developments.
practices were firstly described by the use of the Greek term μυστήριον (or mystery) after its usage in the New Testament regarding God’s work in Christ. In turn, this was translated into the Latin as sacramentum, associating the practices of baptism and the Lord’s Supper with the secular oath of loyalty made by Roman soldiers. In either case, whether as “mystery” or “sacrament,” at this early stage it was generally held that it was God who was “the principal agent” at work in baptism and the Lord’s Supper. For both Luther and Calvin, the sacraments continued in this same sense to be entirely dependent upon God’s covenant promises expressed in Scripture, and this was initially affirmed by Zwingli for whom the oath or sacramentum which was active in the sacraments was taken by God, rather than by human participants. However, in seeking to strengthen the sense in which baptism and the Lord’s Supper demonstrated human loyalty to the established church, Zwingli later placed the emphasis in such covenantal oath-taking on the activity of the human, rather than divine, participant. This reactionary rejection of God’s role in the sacraments did not sit well with the other Reformers, or with the early Baptists, but, with the adoption of Zwinglian memorialism, particularly from the mid-nineteenth century, it became the predominant position amongst Baptists.

The question raised, therefore, by a contemporary reaffirmation that God is indeed at work in the sacraments of baptism and the Lord’s Supper is “how?”: by what means does God act in these events? The early Baptists affirmed, with Calvin, that God was at work in the sacraments by the Holy Spirit: it was the Spirit who was gifted to believers and united them to Christ in baptism, and the same Spirit who ministered Christ’s real spiritual presence to them in the bread and wine (Chapters 3.3.4; 4.1.3). The mediation of Godself in such a

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64 Grenz, Theology for the Community of God, 512, 513.
65 J. N. D. Kelly, Early Christian Doctrines (London: Adam & Charles Black 5th edition, 1977), 423, 424. The number of recognised sacraments has varied significantly across the Christian era. In the post-apostolic period, chrism (or confirmation) was sometimes included with baptism and communion, and with time, penance, marriage, ordination and extreme unction were also recognised as sacraments, increasing their number to seven, but the Reformers, after some consideration, reduced the number again to two. Alister E. McGrath, Reformation Thought (Chichester, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 162. Some modern Baptist authors have again sought to enlarge the concept to include other aspects of the Christian life. See, for example, the chapters of Colwell, Promise and Presence.
66 McGrath, Reformation Thought, 174.
67 McGrath, Reformation Thought, 174.
68 Both Luther and Calvin believed that Zwinglianism placed the emphasis in the practice of the Lord’s Supper too much upon what believers do for God rather than acknowledging what God does for them. Vander Zee, Christ, Baptism and the Lord’s Supper, 175.
69 Most Australian Baptist churches actually use grape juice in place of wine out of a concern for those who have “a problem with alcohol.” Hughes and Cronshaw, Baptists in Australia, 40.
limited and physical fashion is largely unfamiliar to the contemporary Australian Baptist mind on three counts.\footnote{This statement about the Australian context is largely made from silence in the various State Union documents concerning the possibility of the sacramental mediation of God’s presence and work. On the contrary, such documents affirm baptism and the Lord’s Supper as ordinances, with, for example, the QB Guidelines for Belief and Practice averring “We do not call them ‘sacraments’ because they do not convey Christ’ salvation which is conveyed directly by the Holy Spirit in response to the individual’s faith.” This immediacy of God’s work (thereby at least appearing to rule out that the Spirit’s work might also be sacramentally mediated) is also affirmed in the BUV statement of “Who We Are”: “The immediate work of the Holy Spirit in the regeneration of men and women, in their sanctification, and in their preservation to the heavenly Kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ.” “Queensland Baptists Guidelines for Belief and Practice,” emphasis added. Baptist Union of Victoria, "Who We Are," http://www.buv.com.au/about-us, accessed 4 May 2013.}

Firstly, it would seem that to expect God to be at work in a sacramental sense is to limit God’s freedom: it is to demand that God be present and at work at particular times and in particular ways.\footnote{Such was the line of reasoning followed by John Bunyan but rejected by William Kiffin. Thompson, “Sacraments and Religious Liberty,” 46, 49.} But, according to John Colwell, something far more dynamic is at work:

That which is mediated sacramentally is the presence and action of this one who loves in freedom; it is gratuitous; it is grace. It is not a ‘something’ at our disposal; it is not a ‘something’ we can manipulate... It is God’s presence and action that is communicated sacramentally and God cannot be manipulated; he is never at our disposal; he is not capricious, but neither is he subject to necessity; a sacrament may be the means of his presence, but it is never his prison; his is freely and graciously here, but he is not confined or controllable here or anywhere else.\footnote{Colwell, Promise and Presence, 28.}

From this vantage point, God’s presence and work in the sacraments may be received as God’s faithful fulfilment of God’s covenant promises in Scripture. It is under Christ’s ongoing high priesthood that believers “approach with a true heart in full assurance of faith... for he who has promised is faithful.”\footnote{Heb 10:22, 23 For Colwell, Hebrews contains allusions to the Lord’s Supper (in addition to baptism). Colwell, Promise and Presence, 160.}

Secondly, even Calvin in his time found it necessary to counter suggestions that such physical signs as were employed in the sacraments were unnecessary additions to the assurance of God’s word. His summary of his opponent’s argument uses terms which are not unfamiliar in the twenty-first century Australian Baptist context: “We either know that the word of God which precedes the sacrament is the true will of God, or we do not know it. If we know it, we learn nothing new from the sacrament which succeeds. If we do not know it, we cannot learn it from the sacrament, whose whole efficacy depends on the word.”\footnote{Calvin, Institutes, IV:XIV:5.} Scripture is thereby strongly preferred as the more “rational” means by which to receive God’s grace.
Yet, such objections to sacramental theology are, thirdly, based on a perceived fundamental dualism of the physical and spiritual, and a preference for the spiritual in unmediated, experiential terms: “Modern persons... tend to perceive Spirit as intangible, impalpable, numinous, lacking in reality and concreteness.”75 The Spirit’s presence and work may be sought, but these are generally expected to be manifested on an individual, internal, and experiential basis (Chapter 2.3), and are thereby removed from the sociality of the church community.76 Significantly, the lack of expectant narratives around the sacraments further reduces any sense that the Spirit might be at work in them, and there is, consequently, little faith by which the Spirit’s presence and work might be received.77 Under such circumstances, both the constitution of the church and personal assurance of Christian identity can only be grounded on “the vagaries of felt experience.”78

8.2.2 The Church as Sacramental Participant

If God’s role in the sacraments is, in this active sense, significantly underplayed in many contemporary Australian Baptist church communities, the sense that the church also participates is also significantly truncated. In baptism, little attention is paid to the role of the church being active (through its representative) as God’s priestly representative in the baptismal process. Neither is the church community, for the most part, seen to be constituted through baptism.79 The activity in baptism is largely ascribed to the baptismal candidate as they make their public declaration of faith. In the Lord’s Supper, the individual glasses and pieces of bread are often not even offered by the church (through its representatives), but are laid out to be “taken” (not “received”), by the communicants, who, again, commune with God, not in any mediated sense through sharing in the bread and wine, but rather in the privacy of their own devotional thoughts which should not be intruded upon.80 The church neither consciously gathers its people for the celebration, nor is it gathered by receiving God’s gracious “re-membering” presence together.81 In both sacramental events the church apparently participates neither in God’s giving of gifts, nor in the receiving of them.

75 The impact of this regarding the mission of the church was explored in Chapter 7.2.
76 Colwell, Promise and Presence, 72.
77 This issue is discussed further in Section 8.5 below.
78 Colwell, Promise and Presence, 72.
79 This is particularly evident in those churches in which baptism and church membership have become disassociated. Membership may be “closed” but its significance is minimised and is not closely linked with baptism in any coherent sense (see Chapter 2.3.4). Again, see Colwell’s comment regarding the prioritising of experience. Colwell, Promise and Presence, 72.
80 Harvey, "Re-Membering the Body," 1:106.
81 McClendon, Doctrine, 402. See further discussion on such re-membering below. The significance of the “consciousness” of sacramental actions is explored in Section 8.5 below.
In contradiction to this stands the early Baptist conception of the church community as those who together represent God to one another, and receive God from one another (Chapter 6). This joint-ness and mutuality are both present as the church community participates together in the sacraments. It is in its gatheredness that Christ is present to it and, in this gatheredness, that it humbly invokes Christ’s presence through the Holy Spirit in a particular sacramental sense through the baptismal water and in the bread and wine. It is the church community which, through its representative, acts to immerse and retrieve the baptismal candidate, supporting and enabling them to die and rise with Christ. So, according to Cross,

> In the actual act of baptizing the candidate is passive, in that they ‘are baptized’ – they are in the position of receivers – and the church, through its representative and the presence of the gathered community into which the baptized is being initiated, is active, in that they baptize ‘in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit’. It is also the church community which receives the believer who has been gathered to them by God. In this way the church community is constituted by God.

Again, with the Lord’s Supper, Christ is present by the Spirit with the community as they worship together, and in a particular sacramental sense, as they both offer and receive the bread and wine to/from one another. In a strongly trinitarian sense, and with reference to the derivative priesthood of the church community in its sacramental action,

> In and through its sharing in this supper the Church, by the Spirit, participates in the life, death, and resurrection of Christ. In and through its sharing in the Supper the Church, by the Spirit, participates in the relatedness of the Son to the Father, it participates in the Son’s priestly ministry of worship and intercession. And through its participation through the Spirit in the Son, the Church is renewed by the Spirit in the life of the Son.

The bread and wine are offered (both in the practical provision of them beforehand, and in the physical act of offering them at the time of communion) by representatives of the church community for God’s use amongst God’s people. Together, the church community confess their sins, and share the resulting reconciliation and peace with one another (Chapter 5.3.4), and in doing so enact “appropriate forms of the supper [which] provide

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82 As was explored in Chapter 7.2, the church’s activities as God’s priestly representative are entirely secondary to the work of Christ, but nevertheless it does have a role to play.

83 Matt 18:20; 1 Cor 10:16; 12:12-13. Calvin associated blessing and giving thanks for the elements with the effective presence of the Holy Spirit. Calvin, Institutes, IV:XVII:10. The various facets of the narrative around both sacraments will be explored below in Section 8.5.

84 The fact that John Smyth initially performed his own baptism (because he believed that there was no-one available to perform the rite who had themselves undergone a true baptism) was an issue of considerable difficulty for the early Baptists. McBeth, The Baptist Heritage, 36.

85 Cross, Recovering the Evangelical Sacrament, 280.

86 Colwell, Promise and Presence, 74.
appropriate acts of renewal of the covenant ties that bind us not only to the Lord but to our covenanting sisters and brothers.”

For McClendon, Christ’s presence not only ensures our union with God, but also the reality of believers’ union with one another: “Such union with Jesus is re-membering, it is reconstitution, being made part of the whole. In it we are re-united, we are re-membered one to another as his members.”

In the recognition and acknowledgement of its priestly representative role in administering the sacraments, the joint church community is thus re-dignified, according to its responsibilities and authority before God (see Chapters 4.1.4 and 6.3).

8.2.3 Community Members as Sacramental Participants

The primary role of the baptismal candidate or communicant is to obediently receive God’s gracious presence and work in the sacraments, administered by God’s people, the church community, through faith. Such receptivity is not passive, but an active exercise of obedient trust that God is uniting him/her with Godself in Christ, and with Christ’s body, the church, by the Holy Spirit. Such faith is neither gift nor work but simply grateful human response. As an expression of this trust, the baptismal candidate performs a series of verbal and enacted responses to God and the community. In most Australian Baptist churches, as described in Chapter 2.3.4, these primarily focus on a personal testimony of faith which will obviously vary in its content, but should include an indication of repentance, and a confession of faith that “Jesus is Lord.”

Such faith, it should also be acknowledged by the baptismal candidate in some fashion,

is no mere intellectual acceptance of a set of religious propositions. It has the Lord Christ as its object and calls forth a response of the whole man to Him. To confess Christ is to acknowledge the truth of the Gospel about Him, to turn from the world and self to the God revealed in Him for mercy and deliverance, and in grateful acknowledgement of the divine love, to make of obedience the total surrender of the

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87 McClendon, Doctrine, 403.
88 McClendon, Doctrine, 402.
89 The passive practices of infant baptism and receiving communion “kneeling with the bread placed in the mouth,” did indeed need to be superseded, but there is a balance between the rejection of such passivity and a complete reliance on human agency in the sacraments. Wright, Disavowing Constantine.
90 See Fowler’s rejection of faith as a meritorious work, and Cross’s rejection of faith as a gift. For Fowler, “the only apparent basis for interpreting such faith as a ‘work’ is the fact that it is the faith of this individual. But to say that my faith is not to say that it is meritorious, nor to say that it is possible apart from divine grace.”And for Cross, taking Eph 2:8 to mean that faith, like salvation is a gift from God, is to misunderstand its meaning. For both of them, faith is simply the grateful human response to what God has done. Fowler, More Than a Symbol, 207-208; Cross, Recovering the Evangelical Sacrament, 175.
91 These two components of the baptismal rite by no means carry its full import, and this may more easily be conveyed by the use of the type of questions and responses outlined in Baptist Union of Great Britain, Gathering for Worship, 70, 71.
self. Mind, heart and will are involved in the faith that turns to the Lord, even as the Lord redeems the whole man in his ‘spirit and soul and body’ (1 Thess. 5:24). This holism is reflected in the physical act of volitional entry into the baptismal pool, and willing submission to the church’s act, under God, of immersion in and retrieval from the water. Further action on the part of the baptismal candidate, although this has largely fallen out of favour in recent years, might also include the appropriately managed disrobing/re-robing which figures in Paul’s writings which allude to baptism, and a range of other actions.

At the Lord’s Supper, communicants similarly look to both God and to God’s people gathered around them. Firstly, they actively participate with the community in their confession of sin, and in sharing the peace which comes with God’s reconciliation with one another (Chapter 5.3.4). As with baptism, the Lord’s Supper cannot be a “self-service” event but, rather, by faith, communicants must receive the spiritual nourishment of Christ’s body and blood from the human hands of the church. There is, indeed, remembering to do, but this remembering does not primarily have an inward focus, which must rely on an individual summoning up of thoughts and feelings, but rather an outwardly focused hearing and seeing which results in participation in the ongoing presence and work of God amongst God’s people. In the repeated action of being united again with both Christ and their fellow covenant community members, communicants “metaphorically represent the character of faith as the ongoing reception of God’s gracious provision in Christ.”

In summary, as expressed by Volf, “the sacraments which no person can self-administer and yet which each person must receive personally, symbolize most clearly the essentially communal character of the mediation of faith.” These sacraments are “triply enacted” signs, in which God, the church, and each personal participant, all have a vital role to play.

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93 Rom 13:14; Col 2:11:12. See the examples offered by Cross, *Recovering the Evangelical Sacrament*, 279-298. Again, the importance of the narration of these actions will be explored below (Section 8.5).
94 If the peace is shared before the Lord’s Supper it recognises the imperative of coming to the Table as a reconciled people. If the peace is shared after the Supper, it recognises the indicative “given” of the reconciliation which is gifted in that Supper.
8.3. Sacraments as Ethical Life Together

Whilst it may be perceived that a sacramental approach to baptism and the Lord’s Supper must emphasise the spiritual nature of these rites to the exclusion of practical concerns, such anxieties are countered on the basis that sacramentalism results, not in the rejection of the physical, but in its hallowing as the very sphere in which God does indeed make Godself present.\textsuperscript{99} And, again, as was established in the previous section, the purpose of the sacraments is not to remove participants from the realm of community into their own private world with God, but to affirm and reaffirm their place amongst God’s people. As a result, it is unsurprising that baptism and the Lord’s Supper are laden with ethical implications: the life of the church community is empowered through the sacraments by the Holy Spirit, and God’s way of being, as Father, Son and Spirit, is reflected, taught and formed into the lives of God’s people by the words and actions of the church community as it joins together in its worship.\textsuperscript{100} As such, these forms of worship have the potential to operate as a profound form of influence by the community on its members. Such worship, offers ethics a series of ordered practices that shape the character and assumptions of Christians, and suggest habits and models that inform every aspect of corporate life - meeting people, acknowledging fault and failure, celebrating, thanking, reading, speaking with authority, reflecting on wisdom, naming truth, registering need, bringing about reconciliation, sharing food, renewing purpose. This is the basic staple of corporate Christian life - not simply for clergy, or for those in religious orders, but for lay Christians, week in, week out. It is the most regular way in which most Christians remind themselves and others and are reminded that they are Christians. It is the most significant way in which Christianity takes flesh, evolving from a set of ideas and convictions to a set of practices and a way of life.\textsuperscript{101}

On this basis, the sacraments of baptism and the Lord’s Supper are those church practices which epitomise the proclamation of those things which are already true for participants (indicatives), and the exhortation of participants to live according to those truths (imperatives). The indicatives of Christian faith which are associated with baptism and faith are “forgiveness and cleansing, union with Christ in his death and resurrection, and consequently the becoming a new creation in Christ, participation in the sonship of Christ, membership in the Body of Christ, regeneration, deliverance from the evil powers and the entry upon the life of the Kingdom of God,” and the gift of the Holy Spirit (see

\textsuperscript{99} See the discussion of sacramentalism as a rejection of the dualism of spirit and the physical above, and Colwell’s chapter on “Sacramentality and the Doctrine of God” in Colwell, \textit{Promise and Presence}, 42-61.

\textsuperscript{100} This is not to claim that there are no tensions between recognising the sacraments as acts of worship, and acts of human ethical response. Some of these become apparent in the discussion of the appropriate participants in baptism and the Lord’s Supper at the end of this section.

\textsuperscript{101} Hauerwas and Wells, “Christian Ethics as Informed Prayer,” 7.
Chapter 3.3.4). Similarly, the indicatives of the Christian life which are associated with the Lord’s Supper are union with Christ in his suffering servanthood and death and, thereby, union with Christ’s body, the church, participation in the eternal life of the Kingdom, both now and, in anticipation, at the eschaton, and membership of the new covenant. The events of baptism and the Lord’s Supper rehearse each of these indicatives in the power of the Holy Spirit, so that they are never just a remembering, but a participation in what is represented:

They are signs which enable us to participate in the drama of death and resurrection which is happening in the heart of God. We share in death as we share in the broken body of the bread and in the extravagantly poured out wine, and as we are covered with the threat of hostile waters. We share in life as we come out from under the water..., to take our place in the new community of the body of Christ, and to be filled with the new wine of the Spirit.

The imperatives which accompany these indicatives come in two forms. Firstly, they reflect, not specific ethical exhortations, but a sense that the whole foundation and nature of the life of believers and their community has been transformed. Being “in Christ” through the sacraments, means that “it is not simply that the believer following baptism is expected to obey a new moral law but rather the moral miracle of faith is the relationship with the triune God which finds expression in a new way of life in Christ by the power of the Spirit.” The same precept applies to the Lord’s Supper, except that the emphasis is not on a “new” but a “continuing” way of life. Neither is it just related to the individual, but calls the church “to be a different kind of community.” This life is grounded, not in some obligatory moral code, but in a participatory relationship with God, empowered by the Holy Spirit. Rather than responding to isolated ethical dilemmas, the believer is called to be shaped within their community according to an entire way of being that forms their character, and enables discernment in accordance with it.

Secondly, specific examples of how this character forming participation in God’s life is worked out within the church community are also provided in Scripture, and, in relation to baptism, include overcoming human prejudice and division, and, in relation to the Lord’s

104 Fiddes, *Participating in God*, 281.
Supper, the equitable sharing of resources (see Chapter 3.3.4). More recent work has also sought to take the principles which are bodily enacted in baptism and the Lord’s Supper and to seek to apply them in contemporary ways. For Frederick Bauerschmidt, being baptised speaks to the issue of bodies and abortion; an issue which he is not content to allow to rest on a contest of human rights, or even on the basis of the sanctity of life, but rather seeks to reason about through the lens of baptism which is “nothing but a reflection on ‘body-space.’”

Baptised bodies viewed from a baptismal perspective are not theoretical individual possessions but rather concretely embodied persons, who are also part of the social body of Christ. On this basis “the baptismal ‘body-space’ is not a self-inclosed [sic] private domain. It is something shared because it is something surrendered to the Spirit of God.” A human body is marked as such by the welcoming touch of the church in baptism (a touch that is “communal and cruciform”), and is both claimed for God and God’s people, and yet, is also made more completely the gift of the baptised person him/herself. In this context, the unborn are to be welcomed in their valueless and powerless lives, just as other baptised bodies, whether of individuals or church communities, have been welcomed by God.

Carole Stoneking similarly seeks to develop sacramental forms of ethical reasoning around euthanasia, suicide, and dying, in relation to the Lord’s Supper. She begins by describing the very apotheosis of such reasoning as it appears in the guise of rational individualism which is unable to “tolerate moral ambivalence or recognize meaning in suffering.” Fundamentally, such individualistic ideology results in the belief that “we are the determiners and possessors of our own life, that our time is something to be lived through, and thus that death, when it can no longer be avoided, can be hastened through our own power.” For the church community, on the contrary, as they receive the bread and wine they learn that they are not “the determiners” of their own lives but God is. The main Christian virtue which is required to cope with illness, whether the believer’s own, or

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109 The ways in which the sacraments also function beyond the community are explored in the next section (8.4).
111 Bauerschmidt, "Being Baptized," 252.
116 Stoneking, "Receiving Communion," 376.
117 Stoneking, "Receiving Communion," 379.
118 Stoneking, "Receiving Communion," 379.
that of others for whom the believer cares, is patience, especially as it is expressed as patience with waiting for death.\textsuperscript{119} Such patience cannot be suddenly summoned as the need arises but must be learnt over a prolonged period in the midst of community.\textsuperscript{120} It begins in the shared knowledge of God’s patience with human failings, and is exemplified “in Christ’s patient restraint,” which is not a passive thing, but a determined waiting on the Father and his will, whether in living or dying.\textsuperscript{121} In this light, receiving the cup of Christ at the Lord’s Supper is “deadly work because it forms our lives not in terms of what we will do with them, but what God will do with our lives, in our living and our dying.”\textsuperscript{122} In the context of this work, the church community patiently bears (with) its sick and dying, and makes the hopeful proclamation that the Lord’s Supper will culminate in the great eschatological banquet at which Jesus will again share the bread and wine with his people.\textsuperscript{123}

It cannot be assumed by Australian Baptist church communities that their members have somehow absorbed Christian forms of reasoning around such issues as abortion, suicide and euthanasia. The prevailing cultural milieu is pervasive even within such church communities and promotes the individualistic language of rights and self-determination which, as these two examples have demonstrated, are at odds with Christian ethical reasoning formed by sacramental practices. It is the very nature of these participative practices as repeated events which, when appropriately narrated, slowly and steadily form God’s people into “a community of character.”\textsuperscript{124} If, on this basis, the sacraments of baptism and the Lord’s Supper are understood to pose such ethical challenges and to require such ethical commitment, it is clear that, although God’s action is initiatory and primary, faithful human response in them is revalued as being of far greater significance than that which could be accorded to an individual confession of faith or private remembering.

Recognising the ethical implications of the sacraments of baptism and the Lord’s Supper caused the early Baptists to give careful consideration to the capacity of participants to commit themselves to the communal and ethical responsibilities which are attendant upon

\begin{footnotes}
\item[119] Stoneking, “Receiving Communion,” 378.
\item[120] Stoneking, “Receiving Communion,” 378.
\item[122] Stoneking, “Receiving Communion,” 380.
\item[123] Matt 26:29. Stoneking writes of Christian hope in a general way but does not make this eschatological connection explicit. Stoneking, “Receiving Communion,” 381.
\end{footnotes}
such sacraments, and, therefore, to the age of such participants. McClendon echoes this when he suggests,

Perhaps in our culture responsible baptism can hardly occur earlier than adolescence, when children find themselves again able to say ‘No’ to parents, or even adulthood, when they can say ‘No’ to their peers as well. For baptism’s ‘Yes’ to God and faith and church is hardly meaningful unless a ‘No’ is psychologically possible.

Colwell, on the other hand, recognises the apparent inconsistency of claiming to practice “believer” baptism and failing to make it available to believing children. The question arises as to whether the emphasis in baptism lies on the gracious welcome of God and God’s people to all who come in faith, or the desire to preserve the church community’s integrity in receiving only those whose faith is rooted in a capacity to reason, choose, and commit, and to protect children themselves.

With this last concern to the fore, Fiddes proposes that the tradition of English Baptist church life is right to ask children to wait until later. Baptism is not simply believers’ baptism, but a ‘disciples’ baptism’. It is a moment for taking up the responsibilities of carrying our cross, suffering opposition for the sake of Christ, and sharing in the mission of God in the world. It is an occasion when the Spirit gives gifts for ministry, and calls us to use them in some vocation in life. It is not right to impose these demands and burdens on a child, for whom the playfulness of childhood is something which anyway passes too quickly away.

Such a stance will only make sense in the context of the careful work of the church community to welcome, bless and pray for children as infants, together with their parents, to conscientiously teach and encourage children to grow in faith, and to help them understand what is, in Baptist sacramental terms, the privilege, as well as responsibility, which is laid up for them as they await their baptism.

This time between infant blessing and taking up the privilege and responsibility of baptism may be bridged, according to Fiddes, by the participation of the child who has been received into the community by blessing, at the Lord’s Supper. In suggesting that this might be the case, he appears to shift the emphasis from ethical responsibility as he dealt

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125 This sense seems to have followed upon that held by earlier Anabaptists for whom baptism was into Christ and his suffering and death. On this basis, “it was not simply unscriptural to baptize infants... it was immoral and incoherent in light of the costs and conditions of genuine Christian discipleship.” Andrew D. Black, "Kingdom of Priests or Democracy of Competent Souls?" (Master’s Thesis, Baylor University, 2006), 174. http://beardocs.baylor.edu/xmlui/handle/2104/5017 (accessed 22 May, 2010).

126 McClendon, Doctrine, 394.

127 Colwell, Promise and Presence, 129.

128 This also raises issues around the participation in baptism and the Lord’s Supper of those with impaired cognitive/volitional functioning. Fiddes argues that for those with special needs the manifestation of trust and discipleship may look different but still provides a valid basis for their participation. Fiddes, Tracks and Traces, 153-155.

129 Fiddes, Tracks and Traces, 136.

130 Fiddes, Tracks and Traces, 132, 185.

131 Fiddes, Tracks and Traces, 184.
with it concerning baptism, to the graciousness of God’s presence and work in the community in the Lord’s Supper. Such a shift is by no means untenable, but does appear inconsistent in that it downplays the ethical responsibilities which are also undertaken by receiving the bread and wine, and which are at least as onerous as those of baptism. Again, the church community will need to work out its particular emphasis, whether on Christ’s gracious acceptance of all those who come to his Table, or on the ethical responsibilities of those who do so, and, in either case, to continue to acknowledge such tensions.\(^{132}\)

There are, as this brief discussion of some of the issues around the inclusion of children in baptism and the Lord’s Supper demonstrates, many tensions at play, and many possible choices to be made by each church community. The quality of the outcome in ecclesial terms will be measured, not by arriving at a specific outcome, but by engagement in an intentional process of understanding the range of issues (theological and contextual) at work and the application of appropriate forms of spiritual discernment concerning them (Chapter 6.3.2). Amongst such issues, will be the implications of the practice of baptism and the Lord’s Supper for both worship and the ethical life of the community, but also, as the next section explores, for the community’s capacity to share God’s blessing with the world beyond itself.

**8.4. Sacraments as Sharing God’s Blessing**

It may well be perceived that baptism and the Lord’s Supper, as events which mark and reinforce the membership boundaries of the covenant community, are quintessentially places at which the community closes itself against the world, and the possibility of sharing God’s blessing with it. This, however, as this project has argued, is to fundamentally misunderstand the nature of the covenant community which, knowing itself to be called by God to live in community with God and with one another, is also responsible to remain open and ready to share God’s blessing with God’s world. This covenantal determination to share God’s blessing is expressed in a number of ways through baptism and the Lord’s Supper: participation in the sacraments expresses priestly solidarity with and openness to

\(^{132}\) As I have suggested previously, and will continue to explore in the following sections, I believe that a church community may actually practice a variety of forms of the Lord’s Supper depending on their context. The key to the appropriateness of such rites does not lie in definitive decisions concerning a range of tensions, but rather informed discernment by the church community, and appropriate actions and narration around such choices. Grappling with such complexities are not, I would argue, beyond the capacity of church communities but are, rather, vital to their maturity and grasp of the breadth and richness of the canonical narrative.
the world; it prepares and nourishes the community for its role of service to the world; and it acts as witness to the world of the life in community which God gives.

Firstly, baptism and the Lord’s Supper are events in which the baptismal candidates/communicants representatively bear the world before God. This sense is particularly captured by Brian Haymes for whom baptism, far from being a sectarian act of exclusivity, proclaims that the baptised are, and continue to be, in just the kind of priestly solidarity with the world which was expressed in Chapter 7.4:

The particular identity of Christians does not remove them from the general identity of human beings with all the moral and political implications that go with sharing a common life. For all that they may follow a different Lord, Christians are not called to sectarianism as a form of negative separateness. To be baptized into Christ is to be baptized into one who, at the Jordan and the cross, totally immersed himself in human life.¹³³

In the same fashion, as communicants make their confession of sin (Chapter 7.4.2.1), and receive the bread and wine and are re-membered in Christ, they bear God’s world before God and hold it provisionally in God’s blessing (Chapter 7.4.1), even being willing to renew their “sacrificial commitment to make up what is left over of Christ’s sufferings (cf. Col 1:24) – to be part of God’s own costly mission to humanity.”¹³⁴ And, to do so with great hope that many “outcasts” will be present at the great eschatological feast.¹³⁵

As the church community stands together in such events, they also affirm their openness to God’s world. Baptism is the “evangelical sacrament” which affirms that any and all who come to faith are welcome to join the community: baptism and membership of the local church cannot be “targeted” with the aim of a homogeneous membership, but rather should deliberately aim to be as “catholic” as possible, thereby reaffirming that it is God who is the only ground of their community.¹³⁶ More controversially, Anthony Clark proposes that, under a “mission imperative which is eager not to exclude,” the Lord’s Supper may be a place at which even those who are just beginning to explore the possibility of faith are welcome.¹³⁷ If the emphasis on what is occurring in the Lord’s Supper lies on God’s gracious presence and work, this makes good sense: even in the presence of very little faith, God is, according to Christ, able to do great things.¹³⁸ If the emphasis is laid on ethical formation and commitment, I have suggested that this may

¹³⁴ McClendon, Doctrine, 403.
¹³⁶ Fiddes, Tracks and Traces, 254.
¹³⁷ Clarke, “A Feast for All?,” 2:99.
¹³⁸ Matt 17:20.
make the participation of children questionable, but those adults who are open to faith and such formation, may well be encouraged, both humanly speaking and by the work of the Spirit, in their faith journey by participating in the bread and wine. Where, on the other hand, emphasis is laid on a fully committed discipleship (in as far as this is ever possible given the continued failings of the church community and its members), other forms of participation may be offered to those who are unable to participate in the bread and wine, which reflect the many ways of belonging to the church community beyond fully-fledged covenant membership.\textsuperscript{139}

Secondly, the sacraments of baptism and the Lord’s Supper prepare and nourish the community for its role of service to the world in sharing God’s blessing. In baptism, believers enter into Christ, and, therefore, participate in his being sent by the Father, and being gifted for their work by the Spirit.\textsuperscript{140} This participation is not carried out by baptised members in isolation, but, as was demonstrated in Chapter 7, the body of Christ works together to share God’s blessing with God’s world.\textsuperscript{141} In the Lord’s Supper, similarly, “the Church is renewed in its participation in the Son’s mission to the world.”\textsuperscript{142} If the bread and wine are served to the church community by its deacons, such commissioning and sending is portrayed and modelled in this diaconal movement and service.\textsuperscript{143} In the Lord’s Supper, God’s people are nourished by the Holy Spirit as they feed on Christ, and so are strengthened “in the spirit of suffering service to bear the word of life, to continue Christ’s own work of reconciliation” (Chapter 7.3.2).\textsuperscript{144}

Thirdly, as the church community participates in baptism and the Lord’s Supper, it acts as witness to the world of the life in community which God gives; to that which enables human flourishing whether within or beyond the church community: “The people of God is called to be today what the world is called to be ultimately.”\textsuperscript{145} As was explored in Chapter 3.3.4, the practice of baptism witnesses to the possibility of overcoming all forms of social distinction, and the Lord’s Supper to generous sharing with those in need. In Section 8.3 above, the ethical implications of the sacraments were extended to issues such as abortion and euthanasia. Particularly as the actions of baptism and the Lord’s Supper are

\textsuperscript{139} Nigel Wright’s suggestions of the various ways of belonging were explored in Chapter 5.2. Wright, New Baptists, 77-78. Alternative responses may include an invitation to quiet prayer, reading some prepared information about the Lord’s Supper, or receiving a blessing from a representative of the church community.

\textsuperscript{140} Fiddes, Tracks and Traces, 272.

\textsuperscript{141} Especially relevant here are the gifts of apostles and evangelists (Eph 4:11), but a range of other gifts may also contribute to life both within and beyond the community (Rom 12:6; 1 Cor 12:28).

\textsuperscript{142} Colwell, Promise and Presence, 74.

\textsuperscript{143} Fiddes, Tracks and Traces, 272.

\textsuperscript{144} John 6:22-58. Fiddes, Tracks and Traces, 272.

\textsuperscript{145} Yoder, \textit{Body Politics}, ix.
narrated by the church community, it becomes apparent that such practices are undergirded by an alternative form of ethical reasoning to that which operates in the wider culture. Bauerschmidt (Section 8.3), whilst addressing his baptismal reasoning around abortion to the Christian community, demonstrates his awareness of this dynamic: such reasoning will not help us resolve the conflict between the standard ‘pro-life’ and ‘pro-choice’ positions, not least because both of these positions presume that bodily life is like some sort of object that human beings possess, rather than that which they are. The light that baptism casts calls precisely such an assumption of ownership into question. Put differently, it shifts the relevant question from ‘who owes what to whom?’ to ‘who is my neighbor?’

Witness, then, must not be confused with the imposition of outcomes which make no sense in the wider cultural context, but must rather demonstrate alternative possibilities of both ethical reasoning and action, which can be heard and seen to make a life-affirming difference in the lives of both individuals and their communities.

8.5. The Priestly Narration of the Sacraments

In this chapter I have argued that in engaging in the practices of baptism and the Lord’s Supper, the church community participates in God’s covenant-making and renewing love; in worship, ethical life together, and the mission of sharing God’s blessing with God’s world. Various aspects of this participation by the community and its members have been explored as priestly participation in Christ’s own priestly work, but, as has been suggested throughout, such priestly participation cannot be complete without the linkage of sacramental action with sacramental reasoning through the narration of baptism and the Lord’s Supper as a retelling of them which explores and explicates them, scripturally, historically and theologically into the lives of contemporary participants. Without this narratival link, God’s presence and work through the sacraments as they are received by faith, the meaning of the sacraments, and their capacity to form the church community, are each heavily attenuated.

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146 Bauerschmidt, "Being Baptized," 260.
147 See Chapter 7.3.2 and Green and Robinson’s rejection of such attempts to enforce Christian principles regarding “private morals.” Greene and Robinson, Metavista, 212.
148 This narratival link, which is scriptural, historical and theological, does not just belong in academic institutions, but must find its natural home in church communities. Rees, “Enabling Congregations,” 4, 5.
149 Together, sacramental action and narrative, comprise one aspect of what Rees describes as “doing theology,” which “can assist the local church to become a community of biblically formed and socially responsive Christians, continually engaged in discerning the presence and call of God to them and, both individually and collectively, responding in worship and service.” Rees, "Enabling Congregations," 5, emphases in original.
Two examples, of which mention has already been made, will suffice to make the point. Firstly, it has been church tradition (both more widely, and amongst most Australian Baptists until recent times), for baptismal candidates to undergo some form of disrobing/rerobing in white. This “spoke of,” and was narrated as, the putting off of the old self, through repentance, forgiveness and cleansing, and putting on of the new self in Christ, with its responsibilities to the community and the world. The failure to make such reasoning explicit has resulted in this practice appearing to be an odd anachronism, an external ritual which is insignificant in comparison to the internal experience of faith and, therefore, “just” a “traditional” practice with little to offer contemporary baptismal candidates. With this loss of comprehension, the practice has, inevitably, largely disappeared. Secondly, the Lord’s Supper has for some, particularly in larger Australian Baptist churches, become a “self-serve” event. The elements, in individual portions, are placed around the auditorium and community members move to take these, return to their seats, and focus inwardly on their individual task of remembrance. The whole action is performed by the individual, with roles for neither God (except as the object of remembrance) nor the joint church community. Again, loss of explicit connection between the actions of the Lord’s Supper, and the sacramental reasoning behind them, has resulted in highly anthropocentric and individualistic forms of practice. In both examples, the loss of sacramental action, in turn, further reduces opportunities to narrate what is actually happening in the sacrament. The final outcome, as might be expected according to the principle of *lex orandi, lex credendi*, is that when very little is done or said in worship, very little may be believed or acted upon.

The issue of the relationship between, on the one hand, sacramental words and actions, and, on the other hand, the presence and work of God, was first raised in Chapter 4.2.3: could a failure to acknowledge and narrate God’s presence and work in the sacraments actually limit that presence and work? The principle at work behind Protestant forms of sacramentalism, including the Calvinist form adopted by the early Baptists, was that God, in covenant faithfulness and freedom, promises to be present and at work in a particular sacramental way when the human response of faith is operative. In one sense, this

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151 Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God*, 528-529. Again, as was noted in Section 8.1.3, just as one cannot say that God must be at work in the sacraments (see Sections 8.1.1; 8.1.2 and 8.2.1 above), one cannot say God cannot be at work where a specific sacramental form of faith is absent. Nevertheless, it is possible to say that believers hope with assurance that God is present and at work in the sacraments because God promises to be so, and that a specific form of faithful imagination is, normatively, the receptive human state in which God draws people to participate in the fullness of God’s presence and work in those sacraments.
could be taken to mean only a general faith response to God and God’s saving work through Christ. Whilst this is a starting point, however, the sacraments of baptism and the Lord’s Supper appear to invite a more specific practice of faithful imagination which presses into and intentionally participates in God’s presence through the sacraments. Such imagination does not seek after an experience or immediate manifestation of God’s presence, but trusts that God is present and at work:

That which is given by the Spirit for us to perceive is the sacramental sign, a material particular established as a sign through a divine promise. That which is not necessarily given by the Spirit for us to perceive is the immediate fulfilment of that sacramental sign: the immediate presence and action of God by the Spirit is received through faith on the basis of promise.152

This faithful imagination is formed through both sacramental word and action, but it is the words, the narration of the actions, which “constitute these actions as well as enrich and amplify what is done.”153

The restoration of the fullness and richness of the meaning of the sacraments lies, then, in the recovery of sacramental acts together with the narration which places them in their scriptural narratival context and explores and explains the reasoning behind them: each act is thereby linked with what it signifies. The narrative of joint and mutual covenantal priesthood provides a coherent shape and order to such actions and narration, beginning with the explicit gathering of the community (by God through the church) to worship, being reminded that they have gathered together for the purpose of worshipping God and being formed for life together and sharing God’s blessing with God’s world. This process of gathering is continued through the reading/hearing of Scripture.154 In response to this retelling and the remembrance and anticipation it provokes, the whole community is prepared, through corporate confession and recommitment to discipleship, to play its part in the sacramental events which are to follow. It is in this communal context that those who participate as baptismal candidates or as communicants, then make their personal

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152 Colwell, *Promise and Presence*, 58.
154 Here, the coordination of the celebrations of baptism and the Lord’s Supper over time will require careful planning so as to encompass a range of readings which cannot be included at any one event. For Curtis Freeman, for example, the Free Church preference for the words of the Pauline and synoptic gospel accounts of the institution of the Lord’s Supper must be balanced by readings from the Gospel of John. Freeman, “‘To Feed Upon by Faith,’” 1:203. The range of readings which are suitable to baptism is even more extensive, and, as is also the case for the Lord’s Supper, allow links to be made with the story of the covenant community of Israel, exploring the whole sweep of the narrative of God’s work, including both continuities and discontinuities with that work through Christ and in the church. Beasley-Murray’s work, for example, still provides one of the most comprehensive overviews of the many ways in which baptism is addressed in Scripture. Beasley-Murray, *Baptism in the New Testament*. 

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response of faithful obedience and acknowledge the covenantal responsibilities, to God and to one another, which are laid upon them in their participation.155

Those who administer the sacraments acknowledge that they act on behalf of and represent the gathered community, and with thanksgiving, request God’s faithful presence through the person of the Holy Spirit in the sacramental events and the community which is formed/reformed through them. The central acts of baptism and the Lord’s Supper are then enacted, with prayerful commentary throughout: perhaps the baptismal candidate is reminded why they are wearing white and being immersed; and the communicants are invited in forms appropriate to the context, to come and receive, and be united with Christ and with one another.156 Finally, just as the community has remembered God’s presence and work in the past, and have participated in God’s presence and work in the present, they now anticipate God’s future, looking forward to a time when the eschatological community which is proleptically formed in baptism, and re-membered in the Lord’s Supper, will be complete.

In the midst of these sacramental actions and narration, the community is formed. It is formed by the real and spiritual work of God by the Spirit in their midst.157 It is formed by the sense of belonging which is engendered amongst its members through knowing that they belong to one another in Christ and in their ethical lives together (Chapter 2.2 and 2.3.4). And it is formed as, together, they share in God’s insistent intention to bring God’s world to blessing.

Conclusion

God calls those who enter into God’s covenant community, to serve together as God’s priesthood, in worship, in their lives together, and in sharing God’s blessing with God’s world. Each of these dimensions of the church community’s priesthood comes to expression in baptism and the Lord’s Supper. In contrast to much current belief and practice, Australian Baptists should be able to stand in the light of Scripture and the tradition of their forebears, and claim that the term “Baptist Sacramentalism” is not an

155 In the case of baptismal candidates this occurs as a public declaration, through testimony and in response to baptismal challenges which ensure that the fullness of baptism is celebrated. See, for example, Baptist Union of Great Britain, Gathering for Worship, 70, 71. For those receiving communion, this personal response should include both closed and wide-eyed prayer, receiving and participating in God who abides by the Spirit both within the human person and in the community.

156 Cross provides an exploration of the various actions (scriptural, historical and contemporary) involved in baptism and their meaning. Cross, Recovering the Evangelical Sacrament, 279-298.

157 As has been explored previously, Calvin’s sense of Christ’s presence in the Lord’s Supper was both “real” and “spiritual.” For him and the early Baptists, the two terms sit together in their sacramental sense. See Chapters 3.3.4; 4.1.3.
oxymoron. This will, however, only be the case if the church communities which celebrate baptism and the Lord’s Supper, do so with a coherent sense of being and acting as a priestly community. Such sacramentalism undergirds the establishment of church covenant communities who, in their worship in baptism and the Lord’s Supper, reaffirm God’s place as preeminent and central to the church community: worship is not just about God, but is instigated, enabled and shaped by God, as God is present and at work in the sacraments. The church community and its members each have their role to play, but these roles never eclipse that played by God. Such worship is then expressed in the life within the community which imitates and participates in this God who is worshipped. A sacramental understanding of baptism and the Lord’s Supper, rather than rejecting the physical and social milieu of participants, provides an alternative set of practices and forms of ethical reasoning which enable and shape the discipleship of the community. And this ethical life, together with God’s other blessings, rather than being bound up within the boundaries of the church community, are made available to God’s world as the sacraments are celebrated; as the community and its members remember their solidarity with that world and their openness to it, as they are prepared for their work in and for that world, and as they act as God’s witness to that world.

All of this is brought together as the church community, in the power of the Holy Spirit and in its priesthood derived from that of Christ, narrates the sacramental actions in which it participates. These narratives, rooted in Scripture, are manifold, and thereby have the capacity to hold together the many tensions which come to light as the community celebrates the sacraments. Sometimes and in some contexts, the focus may fall heavily on God’s gracious action in baptism and the Lord’s Supper. At other times and in other contexts, the emphasis may be almost entirely on the ethical implications and responsibilities of such participation. Or again, the emphasis may rest on openness and welcome. But, over time and with careful narration, the rich multivalence of the sacraments will come to expression in each church community.

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158 See Fowler, "Is 'Baptist Sacramentalism' an Oxymoron?,” 1:129-150
Conclusion
Increasingly over the past three hundred years, Baptists have tended to practice their faith as if it were primarily, even solely, a matter of their individual relationship with Christ. This thesis has argued that, rather than being a faithful rendering of the scriptural narrative, this is a reflection of the Enlightenment individualism which has undermined the sense that human persons are persons, first and foremost, in relational community with God and with one another. Recognising this distortion, it becomes possible to again read the stories of creation and fall as epitomising God’s desire for community, both with and amongst human creatures, and as meaning that, when sin entered the world and the “other” came to be seen, not as the beloved but rather as a hateful limit, all might have been lost – except for God’s loving determination to restore community. As the Old Testament traces it, God then called Abraham and his descendants into covenant relationship with Godself, beginning a narrative thread of community as a work in progress which can be traced through Israel’s history to its climax in Christ, in whom God “was pleased to reconcile to himself all things.”¹ The story does not, however, end there, but rather presses on into the formation of communities of God’s people across all nations, tribes and tongues, awaiting fulfilment in God’s future. There is, in all this, an essential sociality to both created human existence and God’s redemptive work which awaits an eschatological fulfillment.

In attending to this sweeping narrative of community, it has become apparent that it may be comprehensively understood in terms of three dimensions; radically monotheistic and trinitarian worship, life together in love, and an intentional commitment to share the blessing of God with the world which God creates, sustains and loves. Remove or attenuate any of these three dimensions, and the other two become so distorted that the capacity of church communities to fulfil their covenant calling is significantly compromised. The New Testament takes up an Old Testament theme and attests to the possibility that one way of imaginatively rendering such three-dimensional covenant communities is according to a canonical narrative of joint and mutual covenantal priesthood. The priestly church community envisaged according to this narrative comes before God to offer the Father worship, in Christ, by the Spirit; it seeks to live in faithful response to and participation in this God by mutual love and care within its boundaries; and then it turns to the world, representing God to it and seeking to share God’s blessing with it. Seeing the world in its plight, the priestly community turns again to God, representing the world to God in confession and intercession. And so on, over and over, driven by a priestly imperative to live and serve in the gap between God and God’s world.

¹ Col 1:20.
The early English Baptists of the seventeenth century, formed as they were by a desire to become a “primitive” church after the fashion of Scripture, took both covenant and priesthood to heart. The very nature of their church communities was defined by their covenant undertakings, together, with God and with one another. The two aspects were inseparable: God had called them together, initiating and grounding their community in Godself, and, in grateful response, they freely committed themselves to God and to one another. They were determined to worship God spiritually and fittingly, as God required, and to rigorously support one another as they sought to become a people fit to host God’s holiness and to witness to God, sharing God’s blessings with God’s world. Their church communities were thus both an important means to and a significant, if provisional, goal of such mission. Each of these dimensions was attended to as these early Baptist church communities celebrated God’s sacramental work in their actively receptive midst, in believer baptism and the Lord’s Supper.

This was the foundation upon which the Baptists who followed had the opportunity to build, but, as this thesis has shown, they were diverted by the forces of the Enlightenment in general and individualism in particular so that the concepts and practices of both church covenant and the priesthood of believers came under enormous pressure – and the balances which had been so painstakingly achieved were lost. Covenant was subverted into its solely human counterpart of voluntary association, and the priesthood of believers became solely focused upon the believer’s individual “right” of access to God as “soul competency.” Such deformations impacted upon each of the three dimensions of Baptist church community life; worship became focused on the individual experience of each believer; the disciplined and discerning community of love became fractured; and the focus in the work of sharing God’s blessing fell on the salvation of individual souls for the sake of their own, isolated relationship with God. Such changes were epitomised by the growing emphasis on baptism and the Lord’s Supper as merely human acts of obedience and remembrance.

It is this background which serves as context for the findings of the descriptive theology of this thesis. In contrast to their early Baptist forebears, contemporary Australian Baptist churches tend to practice a pragmatic, evangelical, individualistic theology with little interest in or commitment to the ecclesial nature and practices of the church community. This, it has been shown, is exemplified by a reliance on a demotic discourse of destructured relationality, ambivalence concerning boundary issues, a decline in influence within the community, and the loss of shared narratives of community. It is to these issues,
both at the broader level of individualism and in relation to these specific examples of it, that a culturally conscious but scripturally and theologically formed reappropriation of the canonical narrative of joint and mutual covenantal priesthood is able to respond.

Firstly, this thesis has proposed, this narrative re-establishes the initiatory calling work of God in gathering people into church community which, although rich in human sociality, both organised and relational, will explicitly know itself to be grounded in the very being of Godself, as the Spirit lives amongst them. Secondly, it points again to the appropriateness of church covenant as the outward form which this called and yet freely gathered community will take, in commitment to both God and to one another. In worship it emphasises a renewed sense that the church community together, as a joint priesthood, will bring their worship to the Father, under the high priesthood of Christ, orchestrated by the Spirit. In doing so, they will worship in spirit and in truth, through a full range of experiences which reflect the richness of their created and creative humanity, and also through a full intellectual engagement with the resources of Scripture, church history and theology. In their mutual priesthood, as they seek to live together under the law of Christ which is love, they will seek to practice justice and compassion within their community, praying for one another and bearing one another’s burdens. They will nevertheless recognise that this mutual priesthood belongs always within the context of their joint priesthood as, for the sake of both their worship and their witness they will, together, practice discernment and accountability, seeking Christ’s presence and mind in their midst. Then, in participating in God’s love for God’s world, they will seek together to share God’s blessing, allowing it to overflow from their community to others. They will jointly represent God to the world, through proclamation, action and witness, and jointly represent God’s world back to Godself, in their very being, and in confession, intercessory prayer and suffering. In all this, they will not see themselves as set over and against the world but in loving solidarity with it.

All this will be reflected in the sacramental life of the covenanted community, drawn repeatedly to celebrate their “membering” in baptism and constant “re-membering” in the Lord’s Supper. In doing so, they will bring their worship to God who is graciously and faithfully present and at work, they will learn to reason and live according to God’s ways, and to always bear, with great openness and in great hope, the world which God loves. Quintessentially, in these sacraments, worship, life together and mission, as the three key dimensions of church community, will be found to be, not set in competition against one another, but entirely and vitally interdependent. When carried out in this context, this
theocentric form of sacramentalism will not be an aberrant practice, ill-fittingly forced onto “traditional” (i.e., post-Enlightenment) Baptist theology, but rather an entirely vital and coherent expression of priestly community.

In light of this narrative of joint and mutual covenantal priesthood, each of the examples of individualism which were identified in the descriptive theology has been addressed and ways forward proposed. Firstly, the demotic discourse of belonging has been shown to be an inadequate account of the ecclesiality of church communities, and the necessity of the reprioritisation of scriptural-historical-theological discourses has been established. Secondly, it has been demonstrated that the deep ambivalence which currently attends boundary issues within Australian Baptist churches, should be replaced with a confident dual affirmation of covenanted church communities as both profoundly boundaried and yet radically open to the world: both things are true and require careful and creative attention. Thirdly, it has been show that the decline in influence within church communities, whether in terms of the influence of community members on their community or of the community on its members, must be countered by scripturally and theologically based practices of discernment and accountability. Finally, rather than focusing only on disembedded usage of “family” and “body of Christ” narratives of church community, it has been made clear that the full range of scriptural narratival images of such communities should be employed, and that the canonical narrative of joint and mutual covenantal priesthood, as it has been presented in this thesis, provides a particularly coherent and comprehensive means of narrating church community life.

Such comprehensive engagement with the nature of the church community as a joint and mutual covenantal priesthood will clearly require significant levels of attention and effort by those church communities. Some forms of this attention and effort may be unfamiliar, and even unwelcome, as they rub against the grain of contemporary Australian Baptist life as it has been described in this work. Yet, the Baptist commitment to be constantly attentive and faithful to God’s ways as they are made known in Scripture demands it, and early Baptist ecclesiology provides a constructive model for it. It is only from this solid foundation that the necessary balance between ministering within and to a culture, and compromising with it, can be discerned. In all this, as this thesis has demonstrated, heightened attentiveness and care is required around the tension between Australian individualism and the fundamentally communal nature of the Christian life.

Methodologically, this thesis has moved through the various stages of practical theology. It has described the contemporary cultural context in psychosocial terms, and highlighted
particular features of the “crisis” of individualism in Australian Baptist churches. It has then
drawn on the resources of historical theology in Scripture (as primary and normative), and
Baptist ecclesiology (as both exemplary and salutary). Finally, it has sought to
systematically apply the resources of the latter to the issues of the former, and in doing so
to both highlight problems in current beliefs and practices and to propose constructive
ways forward. As was noted in Chapter 1, a “strategic” or “fully practical theology” which
explores and promotes the practices which optimally operationalise this systematic
theology awaits further work. Many proposals as to how this might be begun have been
made throughout the last four chapters, but further research might also attend to the
implications and applications of such a narrative of community for teaching and formation
practices in Baptist training institutions, inter-church relations and the nature of state
Unions, fellowship with other denominations, and the sacramentalism of other aspects of
Baptist life such as church meetings. The nature of community between God’s people and
the whole of God’s creation which is waiting “to obtain the freedom of the glory of the
children of God,”\(^2\) from an Australian Baptist perspective, would also bear specific and
sustained attention.

Even when this work is done, however, the process of practical theology will not be
complete, but rather open to an ongoing reassessment of the ways in which each
Australian Baptist church is called to live in community as a joint and mutual covenantal
priesthood.

\(^2\) Rom 8:21.
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