

**DEVELOPING THE MINISTRY OF ADULT
SPIRITUAL TRANSFORMATION –
ANDRAGOGY MEETS THEOLOGY**

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Abstract

My personal concerns regarding a perceived lack of spiritual transformation taking place in many Australian churches and Christians' lives, led to an examination of similar concerns being expressed by a wide range of others also involved in pastoral, theological, and Christian educational ministries. These preliminary investigations led to deeper examinations within the two disciplines of Biblical Theology and Adult Education.

Research into Biblical Theology firstly investigated the relationship between both spiritual formation and spiritual transformation. This investigation included the inherent elements of physiological, psychological, and social formations and transformations, involved in both the normal human maturational processes toward adulthood, and spiritual growth toward maturity in Christ. A brief historical overview was also conducted of how the church has engaged in these processes throughout history, including Jesus' personal human maturational processes, and his methodologies employed in spiritually developing his twelve disciples. The conclusions drawn were that adult spiritual transformation is a biblical imperative, and is a simultaneous and dialectical process comprising of a *gift*, a *goal*, and a *task*. The *gift* is comprised of redemption and regeneration through faith in Christ and the work of the Holy Spirit; the *goal* existing in the full replication of the image of Christ within the believer, however, not completed until the resurrection; and the *task* being the formational processes of the application of the Word, by the church and the believer, in collaboration with and empowered by the Holy Spirit.

Research into with Adult Educational theory and practice, primarily through Jack Mezirow and Paulo Freire's writings, including other associated authors, explored andragogical principles within their transformative educational theories. This approach uncovered the significant differences between andragogy and pedagogy, involving the different learning needs and abilities inherent within adults when compared to children and adolescents. During that process some common threads between adult educational theory and practice, and the emerging discipline of Practical Theology were also uncovered, specifically identifying the usefulness of the concepts of dialectics and praxis in relation to developing the ministry of adult spiritual transformation.

In an effort to uncover the degree of actual ‘spiritual transformation’ being experienced in believer’s lives, four local churches in the Ringwood area of Melbourne’s outer-east were engaged, and twenty-five people, including the four senior leaders and five or six congregants from each of those churches were interviewed. From that entire investigative process, and careful analysis of the interview materials, emerged the six transformational themes of personal Bible engagement; small group interaction; empowering leadership; missional expressions; conversational prayer; and Holy Spirit encounters.

These emergent transformational themes were critiqued, in the light of theological imperatives, and the methodologies of Jesus and the Apostles, and then in the light of adult educational theory and practice. In each case they proved to be in fundamental agreement with these six emergent transformational themes. Applications were also found in both Adult Education and Practical Theology that bore remarkable similarity to relevant elements of the six emergent transformational themes.

A participatory and reflective praxis-based model for small group operation was then formulated around the six emergent transformational themes, having suitable application in a congregational setting toward developing the ministry of adult spiritual transformation. This praxis-based model utilises the four ‘action points’ of personal Bible engagement within the context of daily living; critical personal and theological reflection; small group dialogue with critical theological and reflective wrestling; and integrative alignment with biblical values, actioned as necessary. Within the context of a local congregation that is supported by an empowering leadership who practice conversational prayer, individual small groups would function with their own empowering leadership supported by conversational prayer within each group. These groups would function around the four ‘action points,’ each ‘action point’ being supported by conversational prayer, and dependent on Holy Spirit encounters, in order to nurture transformative processes that lead to missional expressions in daily living. Also, each of these ‘action points’ become transformational trigger points in the ongoing process of adult spiritual transformation toward full conformity to Christ’s image, being completed in the resurrection.

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Adrian Turner

Melbourne, June 2010

Certification of Thesis

Candidate

I certify that the substance of this project of approximately 49,964 words (including footnotes, but excluding bibliography, and appendices) has not previously been submitted for any degree and is not currently being submitted for any other degree.

I also certify that any assistance received in conducting the research embodied in the project, and all quotations and the sources of significant ideas and paraphrases, have been acknowledged in the text or notes.

SIGNED:



NAME: Adrian F. Turner

DATE: 1st July, 2010

Supervisor

I consider that this project of approximately 49,964 words (including footnotes, but excluding bibliography, and appendices) is in a form suitable for examination and conforms to the regulations of the Australian College of Theology for the degree of Doctor of Ministry.

This project shows evidence of original research and the exercise of independent critical analysis. The candidate has been trained in the techniques relevant to the field of research, and is capable, without supervision, of applying these techniques to other research projects.

The project has not been submitted to another university or theological college in Australia or overseas.

SIGNED:



NAME: Charles de Jongh

DATE: 1st July, 2010

Chapter 1: Context and Purpose of this Research

1.1 Introduction

Adult spiritual transformation is of particular significance because of its biblically imperative nature and having become a primary motive within my own calling to pastoral, discipleship training, and leadership development roles within the church. I want to understand why I do not see more consistent ongoing change into Christlike character and missional expression taking place within the lives of Christians I meet in a variety of church settings, and particularly in those for whom I am directly responsible. Further, I want to understand how we can better nurture ongoing spiritual transformation within the lives of those who participate in our congregations.

In this chapter I am writing from my personal context within this research project, raising issues that I share with other Christian leaders, and providing a broad outline of the purpose and objectives of this research. I will also present some inherent problems that I perceive to be relevant to the broader scope of the project that relate to pastoral, theological and educational questions. And since research needs to have formulated ideas about potential reasons for those problems, I will present my hypothesis regarding the poor quality of ongoing spiritual transformation in many Australian churches.

In relation to the title: *Developing the Ministry of Adult Spiritual Transformation – Andragogy meets Theology*, andragogy is possibly an unfamiliar term; it signifies the education of adults, in contradistinction to pedagogy, the education of children. As a separate science, it is relatively recent in the English speaking world, introduced by noted adult educator, Malcolm Knowles, in 1968.¹ It was originally coined by German grammar teacher, Alexander Kapp, in 1833, but it was not until 1957 that it was popularised in educational circles, when German teacher Franz Poggeler published his *Introduction to Andragogy – Basic Issues in Adult Education*.² Since Knowles' article appeared in 1968, there has been a rising tide of interest and publications throughout the English speaking world.

I will show that andragogy is significantly different to pedagogy from a variety of perspectives, including psychological, sociological, and methodological applications. While

¹ Malcolm Knowles, 'Contributions from Adult Education' in *The Adult Learner – A Neglected Species* (Gulf Publishing, 1984), 49

² Knowles, *The Adult Learner*, 59-51

pedagogy by nature is “teacher-directed education”³, adult education increasingly must become “self-directed education” if the learner is to grow in both knowledge and experience. Inherent within these distinctions lie a raft of *teaching-learning*⁴ obstacles, which I contend hold some of the keys to understanding why the resultant adult spiritual transformation has often been ineffective. I will also suggest some potential solutions relating to the andragogical theories and methodologies of noted adult educators, Jack Mezirow and Paulo Freire, among others in that field. The chapter will conclude with a brief overview of the research findings from the interview materials gathered during the research.

1.2 Context of the Project

It is difficult to read the New Testament in the context of 21st century Australian culture and not be aware that there was far greater potency then than now in much of the Christian Church in our nation. My questions are, why? What are we missing? And what must be done about it? This is not to say that there are not good things happening in peoples’ lives in many churches within Australia. However, I am convinced that there could and should be much more spiritual transformation happening in many more peoples’ lives, as they encounter the love, grace, and holiness of Jesus Christ in their daily living. When we consider the impact of Jesus’ life-changing and culture-challenging words and actions on ordinary Jewish and Gentile people; inspiring hope for many, while infuriating others of the religious and cultural establishment, we have to ask what was really happening.

Based on the evidence of the New Testament writers many lives were deeply affected – we could say *transformed*. An overview of a few well-known examples bears this out. The Samaritan woman at the well found a man, who for the first time, really understood her for who she was, not what she could provide (Jn 4:1-42); the man born blind simply knew he had received the gift of sight from Jesus, and challenged religious sceptics on that basis (Jn 9:1-41); Zacchaeus the swindler became a philanthropist over a meal with Jesus (Lu 19:1-10);

³ Knowles, *The Adult Learner*, 51-63; Stephen Brookfield, “Self-Directed Learning, Political Clarity, and the Critical Practice of Adult Education,” *Adult Education Quarterly*, Vol. 43, No. 4, Summer, 1993, 228-232

⁴ Knowles, *The Adult Learner*, 52-61; Knowles suggests six differentials around which he develops his distinctives between pedagogy and andragogy. These are: the need to know; the learner’s self-concept; the role of experience; readiness to learn; orientation to learning and problem-solving; and motivation to learn. There are fundamental differences between how children and adults approach the learning task at each of these points.

Peter the reed learnt how to be a rock for Christ and found his voice, still being heard and responded to today (Matt 16:13-20; 26:69-75; Acts 2:14-41). And what of the radical transformation that took place between Saul the vigilante Jew, and Paul the apostle to the gentiles (Acts 7:59-8:1; 9:1-31). Equally impacting, but far less dramatic, were the changes in John Mark, the quitter from Paul's apostolic team, who became Mark the Gospel writer (Acts 12:25-13:1-13; 2Tim 4:11).⁵ And the astonished observation by the members of the Sanhedrin, noting the courage and confidence of Peter and John, was that "...these men had been with Jesus" (Acts 4:13). The Gospel of Jesus Christ is still "...the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes...",⁶ and therefore, my expectation is that we should be seeing the same transformative results in the lives of all those who hear and believe him of whom the gospel speaks. If we are not, then we must ask the appropriate questions, and seek the necessary solutions to change an unacceptable situation.

1.2.1 Shared Concerns

Various Western church leaders have expressed real concerns over the apparent ineffectiveness of many churches to contribute to the transformation of Christian believers. These concerns are encapsulated in Carr's blunt assessment, "Whatever is going on from week to week in most Australian churches could not be legitimately described as an equipping process. A more appropriate term might be the 'domestication' or routinisation of faith."⁷ He also notes that,

"...the Christian mind, whether individual or collective, is suffering terminally from neglect and abuse in most churches today. The radical demands of the Kingdom for the penetration and transformation of society have long since been submerged by more trivial pursuits such as the maintenance of local or denominational structures."⁸

Boice asks, "Why is today's church so weak? Why are we able to claim many conversions and enrol many church members but have less and less impact on our culture? Why are

⁵ See also *Eusebius' Ecclesiastical History* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 1989), Book 2, Chapter 15, 64-65

⁶ Rom 1:16

⁷ Neville Carr, 'Christian Education as Empowerment for Transformation', in *The Cultured Pearl – Australian Readings in Cross-Cultural Theology and Mission*, Ed. Jim Houston (Melbourne: Victorian Council of Churches, 1986), 199

⁸ Carr, 'Christian Education as Empowerment for Transformation', 198

Christians indistinguishable from the world?”⁹ Thielicke adds pointedly, “Surely something has gone wrong when moral failures are so massive and widespread among us.”¹⁰ The stark reality is that there appears to be little “...intention to bring Jesus’ people into obedience and abundance through training,”¹¹ with Frost and Hirsch being even more pessimistic of the historical Western church when they say, “It simply has not worked.”¹²

Research suggests that many professing Christians have neither a “...deep rooted personal relationship with a loving God...”, nor the capacity to give “...consistent intentional missional expression...” to their faith in “...actions of love, mercy and justice.”¹³ More recent research at the Willow Creek Community Church has confirmed several elements of earlier findings, shedding some significant light onto the issues of spiritual formation and resulting transformation, and exploding some deeply cherished, but taken for granted assumptions, that the leaders at Willow Creek had staunchly clung to.¹⁴ Six specific discoveries emerged from their research:

Involvement in church activities does not drive long-term spiritual growth

Spiritual growth is about increasing relational closeness to Christ

The church is most important in the earlier stages of spiritual growth, but then shifts to a secondary influence

Personal spiritual practices are the building blocks for a Christ-centred life

The church’s most effective evangelists, volunteers and donors come from the most spiritually advanced segments, and

⁹ Foreword by James Montgomery Boice, in John F. MacArthur Jr., *The Gospel According to Jesus – What does Jesus mean when he says, “Follow Me”?* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing, 1988), xii

¹⁰ Helmut Thielicke, *The Trouble with the Church – A Call for Renewal* (New York: Harper & Rowe, 1965), 3; cited by Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy*, 47-48

¹¹ Dallas Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy– Rediscovering our Hidden Life in God* (London: Fount Paperbacks, 1998), 345

¹² Michael Frost & Alan Hirsch, *The Shaping of Things to Come – Innovation and Mission for the 21st Century Church* (Jointly by Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers & Erina, NSW: Strand Publishing, 2003), 14

¹³ John M. Dettoni, ‘What is Spiritual Formation,’ in *The Christian Educators Handbook on Spiritual Formation* (eds. Kenneth O. Gangel & James C. Wilhoit; Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 1994), 11-13

¹⁴ Greg L. Hawkins, Cally Parkinson, & Eric Arnson, *Reveal* (Chicago: Willow Creek Association, 2007), 27-52.

More than 25% of those surveyed described themselves as stalled or dissatisfied with the role of the church in their spiritual growth.

A primary assumption *had been* that increased church activity equated to increased spiritual growth. However, it's not about activity; it *is* about personal relational closeness to Christ.

Even within the halls of theological seminaries and Bible colleges, questions are being raised as to the effectiveness of the preparation of candidates for Christian ministry by Christian educators.¹⁵ There is a growing acknowledgement that more needs to be done in relation to personal spiritual and moral formation within candidates' lives as part of their seminary experience. An unfortunate emphasis on purely intellectual development lacks the spiritual dynamic that translates into the effective establishment of personal spiritual disciplines that nurture ongoing personal, spiritual and social transformation in ministry settings. Carr again suggests that, "If Christians are to be equipped for the work of service by 'pastors and teachers' (Eph 4:12), then the training of equippers needs a thorough overhaul."¹⁶

Not only are these concerns disturbing, but as a pastoral leader of some thirty years experience in various roles as youth pastor, church planter, senior minister, and currently a senior associate pastor and Leadership Academy director, there are a number of elements mentioned that concur with my own observations and experiences. I have become frustrated, along with numbers of my pastoral colleagues, with the apparent lack of *spiritual transformation* taking place in many congregants' lives. My current role involves me in Christian education, spiritual formation, and leadership development within a local church setting. While there are some notable examples of genuine personal spiritual growth and transformation among those who are attending local churches, my concerns relate to many who appear to be simply going through the motions of church attendance at varying levels of regularity.

¹⁵ Robert Banks, *Reenvisioning Theological Education – Exploring a Missional Alternative to Current Models* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing, 1999), 17-33; Don S. Browning, *A Fundamental Practical Theology – Descriptive and Strategic Proposals* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991); Lewis S. Mudge and James N. Poling, eds, *Formation and Reflection – The Promise of Practical Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1987)

¹⁶ Carr, 'Christian Education as Empowerment for Transformation', 198-199

Noted missiologist, Newbigin, makes the emphatic claim that “...the only effective hermeneutic of the gospel is the life of the congregation which believes it.”¹⁷ He asks the questions, “What kind of ministerial leadership is required?”; “What is the task of the ministry?” and, “What will be the relationship of the minister to the community of faith?”¹⁸ Coincidentally, Noll cites Clifford’s statement, “The Evangelical Protestant mind...has always tended toward an over-simplification of issues and the substitution of inspiration and zeal for critical analysis and serious reflection.”¹⁹ These questions and issues raise significant challenges to those of us whose role it is to nurture and equip all the members of a congregation in such a way that they, firstly, grasp the power of the gospel in their own lives, and then, express it in such ways that reflect the faith-filled and sacrificial life of Christ, as his committed followers within society. The empowering roles of leadership in the necessary expressions of evangelist – contacting and connecting within society; pastor – nurturing, healing, and equipping for service; and as a disciple of Jesus – modelling personal devotion and discipleship to his/her congregation, become paramount if local congregations are to be a genuine hermeneutic of the gospel they proclaim. Others acknowledge the “...formative power in the lives of people...” inherent within faith communities, but at the same time lament the fact that “...too often...congregations are not always all that faithful,” rather, “...more a reflection of the wider culture’s values than an embodiment of the distinctive good news of the gospel.”²⁰ Ogden refers to this as the “*discipleship deficit* – the gap we observe between the biblical standard and the reality in our Christian communities.”²¹ Newbigin’s questions become particularly relevant regarding the charge that while communities of faith inherently have formative powers, they often seem to be swamped by the seemingly all-pervading power of cultural socialisation.

¹⁷ Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (Jointly by, Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing, and Geneva: WCC Publications, 1989), 234

¹⁸ Newbigin, *The Gospel*, 235-241

¹⁹ N. K. Clifford, “His Dominion: A Vision in Crisis,” *Sciences Religieuses/Studies in Religion* 2 (1973), 323; cited by Mark A. Noll, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing, 1994), 12

²⁰ Craig Dykstra, *Growing in the Life of Faith – Education and Christian Practices*, 2nd ed (Louisville & London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), 83

²¹ Greg Ogden, *Transforming Discipleship – Making Disciples a Few at a Time* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 23

1.3 Purpose and Objectives of the Project

The purpose of this research is to investigate the experiences of Christians in relation to spiritual transformation within their own lives, as they participate within the formational processes of their local churches, and coincidentally to explore the potential contribution of adult educational methodologies, to the development of an effective ministry that nurtures adult spiritual transformation.

My primary course of action was firstly to explore the espoused purposes and processes of five local churches within the outer eastern suburbs of Melbourne. These churches were chosen because of their active pursuit of the goals of Christian maturity and missional extension, within the varying expressions of their different denominational emphases. Throughout this exploration I have looked for key insights into the spiritual formation processes and practices, particularly in creating an environment that is conducive to Christian formation that results in ongoing transformation at both personal and congregational levels. I am approaching personal and congregational transformation as a *biblical imperative*: the biblical norm for every Christian, and the congregations they are part of. This is based on the premise of the Apostle Paul's imperative challenge, "Do not be conformed to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind...",²² which will be exegeted fully in the following chapter. This research has the potential to uncover some valuable insights into what is effective at the coalface of local church leadership and discipleship processes, which will be of critical importance for local church leaders. Initially, the project created an enthusiastic response from the participating ministers, becoming tempered with an accompanying degree of apprehension as to what implications it may uncover in their congregations.

The primary objectives of engaging with these churches, at both leadership and congregational levels, is to endeavour to understand what is happening both *formationally* and *transformationally* in the lives of individual Christians, from *their* perspectives, within these congregations. By *formationally*, I mean the discipling or Christian educational strategies and processes that each congregational leadership team has in place to nurture spiritual transformation; and by *transformationally*, I mean the actual personal transformative

²² Rom 12:2

results of those strategies and processes within the lives of the participating individuals. This focus is designed to unearth three other related sub-issues:

(1) What are the underlying theological assumptions of each leadership team with regard to the biblical imperative of Christian transformation? My concern being that many ministry teams may not have seriously considered the theological connection between their espoused 'vision' and the biblical imperative for individual and congregational transformation.

(2) What educational strategies are in place to foster forward congregational movement within this biblical imperative? My concerns being that many churches may not have prioritised their Christian education or discipleship processes around the biblical imperative of transformation, and therefore their strategies could actually be counterproductive to their espoused vision.

(3) What do the congregants themselves perceive, and engage with, in relation to the biblical imperative of transformation. My concern being that many Christians may not have prioritised their daily living around the biblical imperative of transformation through "renewing the mind"; or Paul's parallel analogies, "daily inner renewal,"²³ and, "until Christ is formed in you."²⁴

It is hoped also that the leadership groups involved would be challenged to be more critically discerning of whether their congregants are consciously prioritising their engagement with the biblical imperative of transformation through the daily renewing of their minds being nurtured by the application of their spiritual disciplines. Also, I have endeavoured to remain open to the possibility of this research producing a paradigm shift within my own thinking as data is collected, coded and analysed.

1.3.1 Perceived Problems Relevant to the Project

As a pastoral leader, the driving concerns behind this project relate to *pastoral*, *theological*, and *educational* issues. The pastoral and theological issues are two sides of the same coin:

²³ 2Cor 4:16

²⁴ Gal 4:19

the experiential outworkings within individuals and congregations in their responses to their encounters with biblical truth and its directives; in short, their daily expression of the Christian life of faith. The educational issues relate to the effectiveness of what is being taught and how it is being presented. In other words, are people learning effectively?

Pastorally, the questions revolve around discovering and understanding the reasons why relatively few Christians that I engage with genuinely relish their experience of relationship with God through Christ. Conversely, why do so many Christians either struggle with entering into and enjoying a vital personal relationship with God, and/or have apparently settled for the status quo of a mere religious routine. The possible answers to these questions could range from their; a) not seeing modelled what enjoying a genuine personal relationship with God looks like, b) not having genuine repentance towards God, c) not understanding who God is and what he has done for them, d) not knowing how to enter into the provisions that God has made for believers in Jesus Christ, e) having been taught incorrectly how to enter into God's provisions, or f) all of the above.

Theologically, I seek answers to why the dynamic impact of Jesus' call to discipleship on a disparate group of Jewish men and women²⁵ is so often not evident in many contemporary Christian's lives? And why the dramatic ongoing effects in his disciples' lives and message following the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost,²⁶ is not often seen in so much of Western church life? Why do we not see more of the type of miraculous encounter that Saul of Tarsus had with the risen Christ on his way to Damascus, and the radical transformation that took place in his life, enabling Saul the opponent of the Christians to become Paul the champion of the Gentiles?²⁷ And further, why is the dynamic that empowered a small group of people from a backwater in the Roman Empire to so dramatically impact large tracts of that Empire, arriving at its capital Rome within 30 years of its inception,²⁸ not so evident in contemporary Western society?

²⁵ Mat 4:18-22; 28:18-20; Mk 5:25-34; 14:1-9; Jn 20:10-18; Acts 4:13

²⁶ Acts 1:1-11; 2:1-47; 6:1-7; 8:4-40

²⁷ Acts 9:1-31; 13:1-12; 28:16-31; Michael J. Gorman, *Cruciformity – Paul's Narrative Spirituality of the Cross* (Grand Rapids, Michigan / Cambridge, UK: Eerdmans, 2001), 28

²⁸ Michael Green, *30 Years that Changed the World – A Fresh look at the Book of Acts* (Leicester, England: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 7-10

A careful reading of the New Testament leaves one in no doubt as to the expectations that Jesus and the Apostles placed on their followers.²⁹ The Apostle Paul often utilised the dialectical *indicative-imperative* emphasis to great effect in order to convey the supernatural dynamic of the *both-and* relationship between the infinite, yet immanent, Triune God, and finite, fallen humanity.³⁰ We will explore this relationship further in the next chapter. However, much of current Western Christianity, Australia included, seems to have descended into a culturally accommodating mentality.³¹ Sadly, I resonate with Willard's bleak assessment that much of the contemporary Western church has stalled on a mindset reflecting "...the practical irrelevance of actual obedience to Christ."³² Jesus' final commission to his disciples contains, along with the three participles of *going*, *baptising*, and *teaching*, the single imperative; to *make disciples*.³³ The clear inference in Jesus' commission is that he had already shown, taught, and trained them in what it meant to be a disciple.³⁴ They were now being authorised and empowered to continue the ministry that he had commenced.³⁵ The challenge for us, the contemporary church, is to fulfil Jesus' commission to *make disciples*, and not just accommodate pew warming adherents.

The *educational* concerns that I have regarding spiritual formation and resultant ongoing adult spiritual transformation relate to the effectiveness of the teaching methodologies being used. I was alerted to this reality when reading Catholic educator and theologian, Robert Brancatelli, who based his findings on the research of theorists, psychologists, and adult educators, in the associated fields of communications theory, life-span psychology, and transformative learning theories.³⁶ The conclusions that they had drawn strongly suggest that the intellectual capacity to distinguish between socially formed taken-for-granted-

²⁹ Mk 1:14-28; Mat 5, 6 & 7; Lu 24:44-49; Jn 8:31-36; 13:34-35; 14:21-27; Rom 12:1-8; Eph 4:1 – 5:1; Col 3:1-17; Heb 2:1-4; 2Pet 1:3-11

³⁰ Rudolph Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, 2vols (London: SCM Press, 1955, Vol. 2), 203-207

³¹ H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture* (New York: Harper & Rowe Publishers, 1951), 91-101; Martin Robinson, *The Faith of the Unbeliever* (Crowborough: Monarch, 1994), 11-21; Dallas Willard, *Renovation of the Heart – Putting on the Character of Christ* (Leicester, UK: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 21-23; Frost & Hirsch, *The Shaping of Things to Come*, 14-15

³² Willard, *Divine Conspiracy*, 3

³³ Mat 28:18-20; Gk. *matheteusate* - imp. act

³⁴ Mk 3:13-15; Mat 9:35 – 10:25; Lu 10: 1-24; Jn 13:12-17; 14:5-14; 17:6-23

³⁵ Acts 1:1-8; Jn 15:27; 20:21-23; Lu 24:45-49

³⁶ Robert Brancatelli, 'Discipleship and the Logic of Transformative Catechesis' in *The Spirit in the Church and the World* (Bradford E. Hinze, ed; Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2004), 219-244; Jack Mezirow, *Transformative Dimensions of Adult learning* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1991; James W. Fowler, *Stages of Faith – The Psychology of Human Development and the Quest for Meaning* (New York: HarperCollins, 1981), 41-52

assumptions about *self* and *life*, through the agency of critical self-reflection, does not develop until the later stages of adolescence into early adulthood, depending on the individual. In the contexts of spiritual formation and transformation, these findings raise the following questions: are the educational methods we are using best suited for adults to learn effectively in order to experience genuine spiritual formation and resultant ongoing transformation? Alternatively, have the methods being used actually hindered the spiritual formation and resulting transformation in peoples' lives, in some cases? What are the best teaching methods to use with adults that produce a more conducive learning environment?

These pastoral, theological, and educational questions will be raised and addressed as we work our way through the chapters of this research paper.

1.4 My Hypothesis

Based on these concerns from personal experiences, observations, and the writings of others, my contention is that there are specific reasons why some Christians consistently move forward in spiritual transformation and many others do not. It is my hypothesis that the main reasons for the poor quality of adult spiritual transformation lie in:

Insufficient exercise of empowering leadership

Inadequate educational philosophy and corresponding andragogical strategies

Little appreciation of the dialectical nature of Christian life in our fallen world

Lack of dialogical methods that foster critical reflection and reflective action, and

Minimal and/or ineffective personal engagement in the basic spiritual disciplines

In response to these reasons I will argue that the andragogical approaches of Jack Mezirow and Paulo Freire, among other associated adult educators, could also have a contribution to make to the meaningful addressing of the educational issues behind the poor quality of adult spiritual transformation within our churches. Brancatelli's paper led me to adult educator Jack Mezirow and his Transformative Learning Theory.³⁷ In turn, Mezirow's work introduced me to those of Paulo Freire, and his experiences of education for liberation and social transformation in South American nations.³⁸ There is no doubt in my mind that

³⁷ Jack Mezirow, *Transformative Dimensions of Adult Learning* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1991)

³⁸ Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (Harmondsworth, England: Penguin Books, 1972a)

Mezirow and Freire, in particular, have much to offer Christian education, spiritual formation and adult spiritual transformation at the *cognitive* level. Both these adult educators have captured the essence of the theory and practice of good andragogy; Mezirow emphasising theory and Freire methodology. These issues will be further developed and applied in the following chapters.

In the light of this hypothesis, I will examine the evidences of transformation occurring in local Christian churches and the spiritual formation strategies that they employ. The objective of this is to test my five reasons for the current poor quality of adult spiritual transformation, and in the light of those findings, to explore how the theories of Mezirow and Freire could contribute to adult spiritual transformation within local congregations.

1.5 An Overview of the Research Report

The initial readings of the twenty-five interviews produced seventeen *parent* or *generative* headings. From subsequent readings and analysis, a further 178 *child* headings and thirty-eight *grandchild* headings were added. After more intensive and reflective analysis on those materials, forty-four *substantive responses* were produced, out of which ultimately came *six emergent transformational themes*³⁹ that were then applied to ministry situations in the light of our theological and adult educational research.

The six emergent transformational themes are: 1) Personal Bible Engagement; 2) Small Group Interaction; 3) Empowering Leadership; 4) Missional Expressions; 5) Conversational Prayer; and 6) Holy Spirit Encounters.

In the process of engaging with theological and adult educational writers, a clear link was established between Practical Theology and Adult Education involving the implications and applications of the concepts of praxis and dialectics. Inherent within these related concepts are the processes of the critical and reflective thinking required to uncover distorted taken-for-granted assumptions, and resultant reflective actions to both correct those distorted assumptions and move toward the specific purpose of spiritual transformation. When these processes are seen in the light of the biblical imperative of transformation into the image of Christ; an ongoing process commenced at regeneration but not completed until the

³⁹ See Fig. 3 on pg. 85 for an outline of this process

resurrection; a dynamic transformational environment develops. These issues have been explored in the application of the *six transformational themes* that have emerged from the research materials, resulting in a *strategic praxis model for nurturing adult spiritual transformation*, incorporating the six emergent transformational themes. The four *action points* of this model are: 1) personal Bible engagement within the context of daily living; 2) critical personal and theological reflection; 3) small group dialogue with critical theological and reflective wrestling; and 4) integrative alignment with biblical values and missional actions as necessary.

Moving forward, we will define Adult Spiritual Transformation and explore the connections between it and the role of spiritual formation within believers' lives, and the spiritual disciplines associated with spiritual formation within churches, as they have been practiced historically, and are taught and practiced contemporarily.

Chapter 2: Adult Spiritual Transformation

2.1 Introduction

Adult spiritual transformation is a broad topic with a number of interrelated elements which will be explored in this chapter. It is a continuous goal we move toward that is only fully completed at the return of Christ. Inherent within the processes of this continual goal are the activities of spiritual formation which have been practiced in a variety of ways throughout church history as spiritual disciplines. The intention of spiritual formation and its associated spiritual disciplines is to nurture spiritual transformation within the lives of individual believers within the church through the application of the Word of God and the illumination and empowerment of the Holy Spirit as the means of grace for that transformation.

2.2 Defining Arenas of Formation and Transformation

While being primarily concerned with the ongoing goal of *adult spiritual transformation*, we must also acknowledge and understand the *spiritual formation* processes within the Christian life and broader church setting that nurture spiritual transformation. Further, within this context, we will explore and engage with four broad arenas of both formation and

transformation, which function within human lives and their societies, and require some definition. These broad arenas are the physiological; psychological; social; and spiritual dimensions of human life.

2.2.1 Arenas of Formation

Commencing with *physiological formation*; Scripture informs us that “...the Lord God formed the man from the dust of the ground...”⁴⁰ While encompassing the whole person, the emphasis here is on the formation of human physical life, from which all the other elements of human life in God’s image emerge.⁴¹ For our purposes in this paper, the main consideration in this dimension is the physical development of brain function with respect to the growing capacity for critical thinking and decision making toward reflective actions.⁴²

Psychological formation refers primarily to the development of a sense of “self” that is differentiated from other persons, objects, and concepts.⁴³ It is initially connected to physiological development, in that the brain as an organ must first develop sufficiently to support the complex neurobiological and neurocognitive functions, progressively required as it develops from fetus to adult.⁴⁴ It also interacts with social formation since “...the formation of the self...must also be understood in relation to both the ongoing organismic development and the social process in which the natural and the human environment are mediated through the significant others.”⁴⁵ Mature psychological formation results in the individual’s capacity to exercise critical analysis and reflection on personal beliefs and behaviours, interpersonal relationships, and the broader social systems in which they live.⁴⁶

⁴⁰ Gen 2:7

⁴¹ James R. Beck & Bruce Demarest, *The Human Person in Theology and Psychology – A Biblical Anthropology for the Twenty First Century* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Kregel Publications, 2005), 40-41

⁴² It is beyond the scope of this thesis to examine the implications of underdeveloped or maldeveloped brain functions in adults for spiritual formation and transformation.

⁴³ Fowler, *Stages of Faith*, 49-86; covers the stages of infancy, early childhood, childhood, adolescence, and adulthood; Jack O. Balswick & Judith K. Balswick, *The Family – A Christian Perspective on the Contemporary Home*. 2nd ed (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 1999), 43-46

⁴⁴ Candida Peterson, *Looking Forward through the Lifespan – Developmental Psychology*, 4th ed. (Frenchs Forest, NSW: Pearson Education Australia, 2004), 115-118; David G. Myers, *Exploring Psychology*. 6th ed (New York: Worth Publishers, 2005), 115-120

⁴⁵ Peter Berger & Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality – A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge* (New York: Anchor Books, Doubleday, 1966), 50; Walter Brueggemann, *Mandate to Difference – An Invitation to the Contemporary Church* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007), 191

⁴⁶ Fowler, *Stages of Faith*, 78-86; Mezirow, *Transformative Dimensions of Adult Learning*, 196-198; Jack Mezirow, ‘Transformative Learning: Theory to Practice’ in *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education*, no.74, Summer 1997, 8-11

Social formation can be defined as the normal and necessary learning of social norms from parents, family, friends, and teachers that allow us as human beings to fit into society around us, coming primarily to us externally.⁴⁷ Social formation is fundamentally about developing our physiological and psychological compatibility with social culture; that of “...building a humanly meaningful world...” in which we readily fit and function.⁴⁸

Spiritual formation in the Christian context, presupposes the activity of the Holy Spirit within the church and the individual believer, incorporating the three dimensions of physiological, psychological, and social formation, and adding the dimension of spiritual development.⁴⁹ Christian spiritual formation, in *overview*, is commenced through a faith encounter with Jesus Christ resulting in justification and regeneration, continued in sanctification and renewing, and completed in resurrection and glorification at the return of Christ.⁵⁰ However, spiritual formation, in *process*, involves the forming of a new way of thinking and acting, which are in alignment with biblical truth. This is achieved through the intentional and continual input and application of biblical spiritual disciplines.⁵¹ These *spiritual disciplines* are specific practices empowered through the Holy Spirit, including biblical teaching and study, prayer, worship, Bible reading and meditation, small group involvement, mentoring, and various training, serving, and missional opportunities that the church provides.⁵² These are encouraged in Scripture and employed throughout church history, and act as the ‘formwork’ through which *spiritual formation* takes shape. In other words, the activities that would ordinarily constitute the expression of normal Christian experience “...by participating in the practices of the

⁴⁷ Berger & Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality*, 94; Jack Mezirow, *Transformative Dimensions of Adult Learning* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1991), 1

⁴⁸ Peter Berger, *The Sacred Canopy* (Garden City, New York: Anchor Books, 1969), 3-7, 27; H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture* (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1951), 32-39; Brueggemann, *Mandate to Difference*, 191-192

⁴⁹ David G. Benner, *Care of Souls – Revisioning Christian Nurture and Counsel* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 1998), 91-95, 107-108

⁵⁰ Stanley Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing & Vancouver: Regent College Publishing, 1994), 433-447; Donald Bloesch, *The Holy Spirit – Works & Gifts* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 327-329; Ray S. Anderson, *The Soul of Ministry – Forming Leaders for God’s People* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997), 102-105

⁵¹ Craig Dykstra, *Growing in the Life of Faith – Education and Christian Practices*, 2nd ed. (Louisville and London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), 38

⁵² 1Cor 4:14-17; 14:26; Gal 6:1-10; Eph 5:15-21; Phil 2:1-18; Col 3:1-17; 4:2-6; 1Thess 5:12-28; 2Thess 3:1-15; 1Tim 4:11-15; 2Tim 2:1-7; 10-16; 4:1-5; Tit 2:1-15; 1Pet 4:1-11; Jude 20-23

Christian community,” become both the means and the evidence of the Holy Spirit’s activity and grace within the church and the believer.⁵³

2.2.2 Arenas of Transformation

Moving forward we now address the four arenas of transformation. Firstly, *physiological transformation* is the general descriptor for the normal and necessary developmental changes that take place within humans as they traverse the journey of physical maturation from fetus to adult.⁵⁴ This internal process involves obvious physical transformations, through the varying stages of the developmental process, including size, form, strength, and gender differentiations, including brain growth and its development.⁵⁵

Psychological transformation involves the not so obvious internal developmental changes that enable “...greater internal differentiation, complexity, flexibility, and stability,” within the maturing individual.⁵⁶ This is the basis of the issue that Brancatelli raised while critiquing the Catholic catechetical methodology, finding it inadequate simply because the children at which it was aimed did not have the required brain development or psychological maturity to critically examine their own belief systems in the light of Scripture. Going further, he also questions the logic of using the same pedagogical curriculum when teaching adult converts to Catholic faith; highlighting the need to differentiate between pedagogical and andragogical approaches.⁵⁷ This is also the level at which Mezirow and Freire as adult educators are operating. We can quite legitimately include cognitive transformation, or perspective transformation as Mezirow terms it, under the general rubric of psychological transformation, since human thought and behaviour; “...the core issues of the human person...,” are the primary provinces of psychology.⁵⁸ It is at this psychological and cognitive level that both Mezirow and Freire can be of assistance to us in both spiritual formation and spiritual transformation, as we shall see in the following chapter.

⁵³ Dykstra, *Growing in the Life of Faith*, 41-44

⁵⁴ Fowler, *Stages of Faith*, 52; See Fowler’s Stages of Human Development chart, where he synthesizes the works of Erikson, Piaget and Kohlberg with his own divisions of developmental stages.

⁵⁵ Jack Mezirow, *Transformative Dimensions of Adult learning* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1991), 145-160; Fowler, *Stages of Faith*, 47-50

⁵⁶ Fowler, *Stages of Faith*, 49

⁵⁷ Brancatelli, ‘Discipleship and Logic of Transformative Catechesis,’ 224

⁵⁸ Beck & Demarest, *The Human Person in Theology and Psychology*, 19-21; David G. Benner, *Care of Souls – Revisioning Christian Nurture and Counsel* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 1998), 68-69

Social transformation within an individual involves their growing capacity to communicate openly, freely, and meaningfully with other individuals within their social sphere. Transformation of this kind comes about through their prior physiological and psychological maturation, and their social engagement with others in meaningful dialogue. Such dialogue provides opportunities for critical discourse where “...equal opportunity to participate, role reciprocity...focussing on issues, hearing alternative arguments, examining assumptions, and seeking consensus...” develop the capacity for critical reflection and reflective actions.⁵⁹ As Freire says, “Only dialogue, which requires critical thinking, is also capable of generating critical thinking.”⁶⁰ Derivatively, those who have developed their capacities for critical reflection and reflective action can significantly influence the broader cultural dimensions of social transformation within the wider society.⁶¹

Finally, we come to the issue of *adult spiritual transformation*. I am viewing this as the longer-term supernatural and evidential results in the believer’s life of his/her response to the word of God and their cooperation with the Holy Spirit’s ministry, firstly in regeneration and secondly, in sanctification over time in their personal life.⁶² This arena of transformation requires a revelatory encounter with the transcendent God through faith in Jesus Christ, received through the Holy Spirit, producing observable changes over time.⁶³ These *evidential results* should include: deepening intimacy with God, resulting in the development of godly character; a growing care and concern for others; active service both within and outside the church utilising the gifts of the Spirit; increasing comprehension of biblical theology; an enlarging commitment to missional expressions in daily living; and financial contributions to the work of God in the world.⁶⁴

⁵⁹ Mezirow, *Transformative Dimensions of Adult Learning*, 103-111, 206-207

⁶⁰ Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 65

⁶¹ Mezirow, *Transformative Dimensions of Adult Learning*, 208-211; Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 61-62

⁶² Leon Morris, *The First and Second Epistles to the Thessalonians*, NICNT (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing, 1959), 122

⁶³ Matt 5:14-16; Acts 4:13; 9:10-22; 1Cor 6:9-11; Phil 1:12-18; 1Thes 1:2-10; 2Thes 1:3-10

⁶⁴ Rom 1:11; 8:28-30; 12:1-3; 1Cor 6:9-11; 12:1-31; 14:1-40; 2Cor 3:17-18; 5:14-21; 1Tim 1: 12-17; Tit 3:3-7; Philemon 8-21; 1Pet 4:10-11

2.3 The Relationship between Spiritual Formation and Adult Spiritual Transformation

The connection between *spiritual formation* and *adult spiritual transformation* is to be understood as the dialectical relationship between *process* and *result*; the result being ongoing transformation of attitudes and behaviours in Christlikeness over time. Participation in the Christian disciplines of *spiritual formation* become the “...means of grace...in order to grow in the life of faith...they become part of who we are;”⁶⁵ thereby becoming part of the *evidence* of spiritual transformation. This is a direct outworking of God’s “...incarnating dynamic”; his desire to extend himself in love through his divine image being *embodied* in human lives. This is the crowning purpose of creation, and supremely revealed in Jesus’ incarnation, and extended through “...Christ being formed...”⁶⁶ within believers as part of the *missio Dei*, resulting in transformed lives.⁶⁷ This can also be expressed as the dialectical relationship between the work of the church and its spiritual disciplines on and within a believer, on the one hand, and the supernaturally transformational work of the Word and the Spirit within a believer, on the other hand.⁶⁸ The dialectical nature of this relationship will be explained in greater detail later in this chapter. In broad terms, *spiritual formation* is the work of both the church and the believer, through instruction and application of spiritual disciplines in collaboration with the Word of God imparted through the Holy Spirit. On the other hand, *adult spiritual transformation* is the resultant supernatural work of the Word and the Spirit, with the believer’s active collaboration over time, which develops the character of Christ within the believer resulting in changed attitudes and behaviours. So, *spiritual formation* is a developmental process practiced by the church and the believer by faith, with the aid of *spiritual disciplines* in collaboration with the Word and the Spirit, and *adult spiritual transformation* is the supernatural result of embodied Christian character within, and lived out, by the believer.

⁶⁵ Dykstra, *Growing in the Life of Faith*, 44-46

⁶⁶ Gal 4:19

⁶⁷ David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission – Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1991), 389-392; Ross Langmead, *The Word Made Flesh – Toward an Incarnational Missiology* (Lanham, Maryland: UPA, 2004), 19-21; Leonardo Boff, *The Lord’s Prayer – The Prayer of Integral Liberation* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books / Melbourne, Australia: Dove Communications, 1985), 2-4. See also Gal 4:19

⁶⁸ Donald G. Bloesch, *A Theology of Word and Spirit – Authority & Method in Theology* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1992), 14-15, 202-203. Rom 1:16-17; 12:1-2; 2Cor 3:17-18; Gal 4:17-20; Eph 4:1-16; 1Thess 1:1-10; 2:6-13; 4:1-12; 1Tim 6:11-16; 2Tim 2:14-26; 3:16-17; Tit 3:3-7; Heb 4:7-16; 5:11 – 6:3; 10:12-14; 2Pet 1:3-11; 3:18

It is my contention that the biblical call to conformity to the image of Christ requires physiological, psychological, social, and spiritual transformations in order to be biblically effective. In other words, we must be mature enough physiologically, psychologically, socially, and spiritually, in order to engage appropriately in conversational and collaborative relationship with God in Christ through the Holy Spirit. That is not to say that children cannot have meaningful relationships with God. As an eight year old, I made a genuine commitment to Christ at the level of my understanding – I was justified and regenerated. But it was not until I was an adult that I truly understood the implications of my childhood commitment, and was capable of intelligently challenging my culturally inherited taken-for-granted belief systems in the light of God’s Word, and intentionally collaborating with his purpose for my life.

The perceived ineffectiveness of *spiritual formation* in some sectors of the church is sometimes misunderstood as nothing more than a failure of socialisation, or *social formation*, within a particular religious/social setting. Sociologist, Peter Berger, defines *socialisation* as “...the process by which a new generation is taught to live in accordance with the institutional programs of the society.”⁶⁹ From this purely sociological perspective, all human societies, church included, are merely a phenomenological product of the interactions between the individuals within them, which continuously acts back on the participants reinforcing itself, or in other words, culture tending to reproduce like-culture through institutionalisation.⁷⁰ This ‘society-creating’ capacity within humanity is well documented throughout history and is what helps provide its necessary stability and predictability.⁷¹ Brancatelli raises this issue also in his article, citing Haughton, who links *formation* with “...social structure, values and standards...” and *transformation* with “...spiritual conversion...involving the death of the old and the birth of a new person”.⁷² So for Haughton, *formation* appears to be purely *social formation* and *transformation* purely *regeneration*. However, Haughton does make the brilliantly paradoxical statement, “Without the long process of formation, there could be no

⁶⁹ Berger, *The Sacred Canopy*, 15.

⁷⁰ Paulo Freire, *Cultural Action for Freedom* (Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin Books, Ltd., 1972a), 35; Berger, *Sacred Canopy*, 3

⁷¹ Berger & Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality*, 47-52; Berger, *Sacred Canopy*, 3-6

⁷² Cited by Brancatelli, ‘The Logic of Transformative Catechesis’, 221-222; Rosemary Haughton, *The Transformation of Man: A Study of Conversion and Community*, rev. ed. (Springfield, Illinois: Templegate Publishers, 1980), 7, 81

transformation; yet no amount of careful formation can transform.”⁷³ It is unclear whether Brancatelli sees a disjunction between *social formation* and *spiritual formation*, or conversely, whether he sees a necessary connection between *spiritual formation* and ongoing *adult spiritual transformation* in this context.

2.3.1 Other Views on Transformational Change

Shults and Sandage speak of “...first and second order change...”; first order being behavioural only, and second order being a change in thinking, or of biblically renewing the mind.⁷⁴ They appear to equate ‘first order’ behavioural change with *social formation* and ‘second order’ systemic thought-change with *spiritual transformation*. But this is too simplistic an approach, since *social formation* inevitably both informs and forms our thinking, admittedly at a purely cognitive level, which in turn produces the behaviour patterns that are acceptable to the social setting; be that society at large, family, or church. However, *adult spiritual transformation* is far more complex than just a *spiritual experience* at one end of the spectrum or just a *new way of thinking* at the other. It must, of course, involve both of those elements, through a spiritual revelation of who Jesus Christ is through the Holy Spirit, and our need for his salvation. Simultaneously, it must also engage all the physiological, psychological, and social capacities we have been endowed with by God, since we are totally integrated beings created in his image.

Great strides have been made by the cognitive and neurological sciences expressing the complex interrelatedness between brain, mind, emotions, physiology, and spirituality within humans.⁷⁵ Gregory Peterson reflects on the practical implications of Augustine’s conversion experience:

“Augustine’s sense of wellbeing after his conversion cannot be understood as only a spiritual change but not a physical and biological one, for the simple reason that such divisions no longer make sense. Our ‘spirit’, however we may define that, emerges out

⁷³ Cited by Andrew Grannell, “The Paradox of Formation and Transformation,” *Religious Education*, Vol. 80, No. 3, summer (1995): 384; with which I am in total agreement. Transformation is a work of the Word and the Spirit.

⁷⁴ F. LeRon Shults & Steven J. Sandage, *Transforming Spirituality – Integrating Theology and Psychology* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2006), 18

⁷⁵ Gregory R. Peterson, *Minding God – Theology and the Cognitive Sciences* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), 59, 89-92; Antonio R. Damasio, *Descartes’ Error – Emotion, Reason, and the Human Brain*, Updated (New York: Penguin Books, 2005), 86-113

of the activities of the mind/brain, which in turn are intimately connected to the body. A spiritual transformation, therefore, is in some sense also a biological one. Soteriology must therefore include the whole person. This seems to imply that while salvation is not limited to brain chemistry, any full concept of salvation must include it... Likewise, theological claims about soteriology are incomplete unless they take the whole person – body, brain and all – into account. A religious transformation is also a psychological transformation. It is even a biological one.”⁷⁶

Based on these and other well documented insights, what emerges is that *adult spiritual transformation* must inevitably include physiological, psychological and social transformations, but can never be reduced to just those three initial levels of transformation.⁷⁷ As Brancatelli comments, “Transformation is not merely a human mechanism for conflict resolution...set in a religious context. Rather, a transcendent “Other” is a constitutive part of the process...”⁷⁸

These various influences have helped me reflect on my own personal growth and development, and also on my past attempts to disciple individuals and congregations, using a variety of spiritual formation or discipling strategies. From these come my interest in an in-depth study of this *biblical imperative*, and its application to the processes of spiritual formation within church and individual life that nurture the ongoing ministry of adult spiritual transformation.

2.4 Traditional Approaches to Spiritual Formation and Transformation

Historically, spiritual formation has referred to the development of the kind of life followers of Jesus Christ want to live in order to exemplify the things that Jesus taught and did – their “...lived reality...”⁷⁹ of the transforming presence of Christ in the context of their Christian and larger social communities. The question it seeks to answer is, “How does one become

⁷⁶ Peterson, *Minding God – Theology and the Cognitive Sciences*, 94-95

⁷⁷ Shults & Sandage, *Transforming Spirituality*, 20; see footnote

⁷⁸ Brancatelli, ‘The Logic of Transformative Catechesis’, 235

⁷⁹ Simon Chan, *Spiritual Theology – A Systematic Study of the Christian Life* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1998), 15-16

more authentically Christlike?”⁸⁰ Most of these traditions were developed in specific situations by specific people who had particular encounters with God through Christ, around which they then sought to structure a way of life, often with some form of regimen, which would reflect their understanding of God and his requirements, within their particular era, language, culture, personality and theological emphasis.⁸¹

Widely varying approaches, such as the austere Desert Fathers; St. Benedict’s *Regula*;⁸² Bernard of Clairvaux; Francis of Assisi; the *Spiritual Exercises* of Ignatius of Loyola; and Wesley’s societies and classes, among many others, were developed as part of this desire to intentionally *live out* their relationship with God in ways that could be passed on to others who were willing to participate with them.⁸³ While it is important to understand the historical milieu in which the development of these different approaches took place, against what are these various approaches to be critiqued and judged?

2.4.1 New Testament Examples of Spiritual Formation and Transformation

Both Jesus and the Apostles make reference to the fact that Jesus Christ is our example in life and ministry: taking his yoke and learning from him; taking up one’s cross and following him; fixing thoughts and eyes on Jesus; suffering as Jesus did when necessary.⁸⁴

So what of the formational processes that shaped the life and heart of the young Jesus? The Gospels give us very little information about these processes as Jesus grew up, but what is given is significant in what it reveals.⁸⁵ There are only two verses that deal with his childhood and development into manhood. “And the child grew and became strong; he was filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was upon him” (Lu 2:40), covering the span from circumcision to twelve years of age. Secondly, “And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and

⁸⁰ Robin Maas & Gabriel O’Donnell, *Spiritual Traditions for the Contemporary Church* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1990), 14.

⁸¹ Thornton, *English Spirituality*, 44-47; Chan, *Spiritual Theology*, 20-21; Maas & O’Donnell, *Spiritual Traditions*, 17, 25.

⁸² Martin Thornton, *Spiritual Direction* (USA: Cowley, 1984), 50

⁸³ Thornton, *English Spirituality*, 22; Maas & O’Donnell, *Spiritual Traditions*, 48-50, 174-180, 312-316; Henri J. M. Nouwen, *Reaching Out – The Three Movements of the Spiritual Life*, (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1975), 99-100.

⁸⁴ See Matt 11:29; 16:24; Jn 13:15; Heb 3:1; 12:2; 1Pet 2:21

⁸⁵ Luke alone gives us these insights; Lu 2:40, 52. See Frederick W. Danker, *Jesus and the New Age – A Commentary on St. Luke’s Gospel*, rev ed (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988), 72-79; James E. Reed & Ronnie Prevost, *A History of Christian Education* (Nashville, Tennessee: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1993), 61-62; Banks, *Reenvisioning Theological Education*, 90-93;

in favour with God and with men” (Lu 2:52), encompassing his twelfth to thirtieth years, after which he commenced his ministry.⁸⁶ The contextual picture is a beautiful blend of normal human developmental processes on the one hand, with clear inferences to remarkable knowledge and insight from a young age, and a growing awareness of his unique relationship to his heavenly Father as the eternal Son of God. Obviously, one cannot afford to press this too far, but Luke does appear to be at pains to say all that he can. Significantly, growth in physical strength, wisdom, and grace are common to both references. However, Lu 2:52, alludes to four specific areas of development; “Jesus grew⁸⁷ in wisdom⁸⁸ and stature,⁸⁹ and in favour with God⁹⁰ and men.”⁹¹ So the picture emerges of Jesus’ spiritual formation encompassing *a whole-of-life constellation of growth and development*; intellectually, physically, spiritually, and socially; from boyhood to mature adult, which he later confirmed in his adult ministry.⁹² This mirrors exactly what we have already observed in normal human developmental experience.

2.4.2 Spiritual Formation and Transformation in the Twelve

Birthing on the day of Pentecost, the primitive church bore the impress of the spiritual formation that the Twelve had received from Jesus. A brief synopsis of Jesus’ formational methodology is found in Mark’s gospel. His initial invitation was, “Come, follow me, and I will make you fishers of men,”⁹³ implying an empowering *becoming* process.⁹⁴

⁸⁶ Luke makes the connections between these transitions very clear; Lu 2:39-42; 51-52; 3:21-23

⁸⁷ *Proekopton* – imperfect tense; continued to progress in development; Spiros Zodhiates, ed, *The Hebrew-Greek Key Study Bible* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1984), 1570

⁸⁸ *Sophia* – exceptional knowledge and insight, particularly in relation to the law, and viewed as a gift from God; an attribute rather than an activity; Jürgen Goetzmann, ‘Sophia’, *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, 4 vols; Rev. Ed.; ed. Colin Brown (Exeter, UK: Paternoster Press, 1986), Vol. 3, 1026-1030; see also reference to Stephen; Acts 6:3-10

⁸⁹ Could refer to both physical and social stature, in line with Greco-Roman honourific formulations, but the next two items cover that and more of his ongoing development; Danker, *Jesus and the New Age*, 78-79

⁹⁰ *Charis* – the personal favour and delight of God on his exceptional, chosen One; Hans-Helmut Esser, ‘charis’, *NIDNTT*, Vol.2, 115-119. This echoes God’s same sentiments regarding Samuel; 1Sam 2:26; 3:19-21, and is clearly reflected in the Father’s baptismal and transfiguration pronouncements regarding his Son; Lu 3:22; 9:35. This refers to Jesus’ spiritual development in his relationship with and obedience to his Father.

⁹¹ Favour with men signifies social development. As with Samuel (1Sam 3:20) and Stephen (Acts 6:8-10), there was a recognition by the people of exceptional wisdom and grace in each one’s ability to relate to people where they were at, and articulate the Word of God clearly and convincingly.

⁹² Jesus quotes Deut 6:5 in Mk 12:30; Lu 10:27; affirming these four spheres of life in which we are to glorify God

⁹³ Mk 1:16-20

⁹⁴ See William L. Lane, *Commentary on the Gospel of Mark*, NICNT (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing, 1974), 66-70

Subsequently, he *called* to himself those he wanted, *appointing* twelve whom he designated as apostles, so that *they might be with him* in order to be trained so that he might *send them out to preach and exercise his authority to drive out demons*.⁹⁵ This suggests a somewhat linear process of calling; appointing; training through life-on-life association; and sending to preach and demonstrate kingdom authority. His methodology must be understood in the context of a developmental process spanning approximately three years of conversation and collaboration with Jesus in his ministry – an on-the-job apprenticeship model while doing life together.⁹⁶

Luke presents a similar process throughout his Gospel – Called to follow (Lu 5:1-11, 27); chosen for training as apostles (Lu 6:12-49); training by association (Lu 8:1-53); training by delegation (Lu 9:1-6); training by review and participation (Lu 9:10-17); training by revelation and explanation (Lu 9:18-62); training by enlarged responsibility, review, further participation and teaching (Lu 10:1-24 – 21:4); teaching for the task ahead (Lu 21:5-37); instituted into the New Covenant of the kingdom based on surrender to Father's will (Lu 22:1-46); training in dealing with apparent reversals (Lu 22:47 – 23:56); encountering the risen Christ, and preparing for the new life of the Spirit (Lu 24:1-53).

According to Matthew, this was culminated with the command from Jesus to “...go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation...making disciples of all nations, baptising them...and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you” (Matt 28:19-20). The clear implication inherent within this *commission* is that they were being sent out to repeat continually *Jesus' mission*, which he had both modelled and trained them to do.⁹⁷

Throughout these *formational processes* we see *instances of transformation* taking place in various disciples' lives. Andrew appears to be the first disciple to recognise Jesus as Messiah coming out of his first conversational encounter with Jesus (Jn 1:35-41). Philip and Nathanael also had a transformational experience at their first encounter with Jesus (Jn 1:43-51). Some three to six months later, Peter, Andrew, James and John had another transformative encounter with Jesus on the shores of the Sea of Galilee. Responding to his call, they left their fishing to engage with Jesus (Matt 4:18-22; Mk 1:14-20). At a later stage again, Peter

⁹⁵ Mk 3:13-15

⁹⁶ Banks gives an excellent insight and overview of this process, *Reenvisioning Theological Education*, 94-111

⁹⁷ This is also clearly implied in Luke's construction of Acts 1:1-2; see C. K. Barrett, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 2vols, ICC (London & New York: T&T Clark, 2004), Vol. 1, 66

had a transformative revelation of his own sinfulness in light of the miraculous haul of fish, and his initial doubting of Jesus' directive to "...let down the nets for a catch," after they had fished all night and caught nothing (Lu 5:5-11). Peter had a number of other transformational experiences: at the transfiguration of Jesus, he writes about its impact on him in his second letter (2Pet 1:16-18); his denial of Christ after his declaration of willingness to die for him (Matt 26:31-35, 69-75); Jesus' tender but probing affirmation of Peter's future ministry (Jn 21:1-19). Thomas also experienced transformation through his encounter with the risen Christ (Jn 20:24-29). But by far the greatest transformation in the Apostles' lives is evidenced after the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost. This was dramatically demonstrated by the effect of Peter's preaching, and the response of approximately 3000 people that day, and the ongoing effectiveness of the church in its mission throughout the Book of Acts and beyond.⁹⁸

2.4.3 The Primitive Church

A study of the Book of Acts reveals a similar pattern emerging in the Apostles' approach to their ministries. Luke's summary of *church life* after the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost⁹⁹ reveals the believers devoting themselves to: *The apostles' teaching* – there was a hunger for God's Word that was evident.¹⁰⁰ The apostles' teaching ultimately became the basis of the New Testament scriptures; including the recording of Jesus' words and works in the Gospels, the spread of that gospel in Acts, and the letters of instruction and encouragement to the resultant local churches that were birthed. *The fellowship* – meaning those who had come into mutual association, through the apostolic message of Christ's gospel, for care and support of one another;¹⁰¹ *The breaking of bread* – following the tradition of the Last Supper, consisted of the Eucharistic Meal within an ordinary mealtime

⁹⁸ Acts 2:14-47; 4:32-35; 5:42; 9:31; Rom 15:17-20

⁹⁹ Acts 2:42-47

¹⁰⁰ F. F. Bruce, *Commentary on The Book of The Acts*, NICNT (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing, 1954), 79; W. G. Kümmel, *Theology of the New Testament* (London: SCM Press, 1974), 322-333; Rudolf Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, 2 vols. (London: SCM Press, 1955), Vol. 2, 138-142; see also, Acts 1:1-9; 2:14-41; 1Cor 12:28; 14:37; 15:1-11; Eph 2:19-20; 3:1-6; 2Pet 3:15-16

¹⁰¹ C. K. Barrett, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 2 Vols, ICC (London & New York: T & T Clark International, 1994), Vol. 1, 163-164

setting;¹⁰² and, *Prayer* – plural prayers, which may refer to specific Christian prayers, such as the Lord’s Prayer and similar, or simply to continual communal and individual praying.¹⁰³

Within the later primitive church, the apostle Paul briefly alludes to a regime of training, similar in nature to that of athletes training for competition, which he subjected himself to in order to not find himself disqualified from the prize of his heavenward call in Christ.¹⁰⁴ Further, the New Testament records upwards of forty people that Paul included in his network of team members,¹⁰⁵ however, Paul gives more specific instructions to some of these men he had trained, recorded in his letters to Timothy and Titus. It is with this smaller group in particular that we see evidences of Paul adopting Jesus’ unique training and formation methods with the Twelve.¹⁰⁶

2.4.4 Spiritual Formation and Transformation prior to the Reformation

Both internal and external difficulties began to preoccupy church leaders and congregations alike.¹⁰⁷ Bouyer gives a credible account of how these early Christian assemblies were similar in format to that of Jewish synagogue worship, prayer, Scripture readings and teaching, but with the distinct difference of focus on the *Eucharistic Supper*.¹⁰⁸ Since new converts were now mostly non-Jewish with no knowledge of the Old Testament, a significant amount of time was spent in properly preparing candidates for baptism through a process of indoctrination. This became increasingly ritualised, and while rich in symbolism, baptism appears to have increasingly become a profession of the *Church’s faith* rather than *the faith of the individual* receiving baptism.¹⁰⁹ Brunner describes this problem incisively, “A ‘believer’ is now no longer...a person who has been claimed and transformed by Jesus Christ, but a

¹⁰² Barrett, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 164-165; Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, Vol. 1, 40; Bruce, *The Book of The Acts*, 79

¹⁰³ Barrett, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 166; Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, Vol. 1, 40-41; Bruce, *The Book of The Acts*, 79-80

¹⁰⁴ 1Cor 9:24-27, and Phil 3:12-14

¹⁰⁵ Robert Banks, *Paul’s Idea of Community*, Rev. Ed. (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994), 150-151; Banks, *Reenvisioning Theological Education*, 114; Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 132

¹⁰⁶ Arthur F. Glasser, *Announcing the Kingdom – The Story of God’s Mission in the Bible* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2003), 293-296

¹⁰⁷ Reed & Prevost, *A History of Christian Education*, 75-79

¹⁰⁸ Louis Bouyer, *A History of Christian Spirituality*, 3 vols, ‘The Spirituality of the New Testament and the Fathers,’ Vol. 1 (London & Tunbridge Wells: Burns & Oats, 1963), 175-182

¹⁰⁹ Craig A. Blasing, ‘Spiritual Formation in the Early Church’, *The Christian Educator’s Handbook on Spiritual Formation*, eds. Kenneth O. Gangel & James C. Wilhoit (Grand Rapids, Illinois: Baker Books, 1994), 21-26

person who accepts what the Church offers him as divinely revealed doctrine...”¹¹⁰ It took roughly 350 years for the Church to settle its major doctrinal struggles and establish its primary creeds.¹¹¹ It was in these contexts that spiritual formation was nurtured within these early congregations.

Constantine’s apparent conversion to Christianity brought a halt to State persecution and martyrdom against Christians and with the primary Creeds now in place, another shift in focus becomes discernable towards more extreme forms of asceticism. The issue of facilitating the ‘imitation of Christ’, whether hermitic or monastic, revealed a desire to identify *physically* with specific aspects of Christ’s life and death on earth, which clearly has some biblical roots.¹¹² As the Patristic Age progressed, these ‘imitations of Christ’ expanded to include monasticism, virginity, and poverty, which were seen as viable substitutes for the loss of martyrdom as the supreme sign of faith, and as compensations for that loss.¹¹³

The movement through Patristic to Medieval Church eras saw the development of numerous monastic models for spiritual formation.¹¹⁴ Clearly, there are some positive elements in each Rule, particularly in the original context of a rapidly degenerating society. Equally clearly however, while Christlike character development was a high priority, because the monastic life was within a closed community, there does not appear to be any real commitment to external mission into the surrounding society; with the exception of Francis of Assisi.¹¹⁵ Also, there frequently appears to be an inherent sense of ‘earning’ or ‘deserving to become partakers in Christ’s kingdom’ through persistence in the spiritual disciplines, rather than a commitment to serving out of a faith-response of obedience to Christ’s call, having received his gracious gift of salvation.¹¹⁶ So, with some notable exceptions, what transpired through much of this period sounds more like *social formation* within the church without necessarily resulting in *spiritual transformation* within individuals’ lives.

¹¹⁰ Emil Brunner, *Revelation and Reason* (London: SCM Press, 1947), 8-9

¹¹¹ Earle E. Cairns, *Christianity through the Centuries – A History of the Christian Church*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1996), 125-132

¹¹² Robert P. Meye, ‘The Imitation of Christ – Means and End of Spiritual Formation,’ *The Christian Educator’s Handbook on Spiritual Formation*, eds. Kenneth O. Gangel & James C. Wilhoit (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 1997), 199-212; see also, Jesus – Jn 13:12-17; Paul – 1Cor 4:15; 11:1; Peter – 1Pet 2:21

¹¹³ Maas & O’Donnell, *Spiritual Traditions*, 33-60

¹¹⁴ Maas & O’Donnell, *Spiritual Traditions*, 61-67; Reed & Prevost, *A History of Christian Education*, 113-118; Augustine, John Cassian, and Benedict

¹¹⁵ Cairns, *Christianity through the Centuries*, 220; Fleming, *The Fire and the Cloud*, 113-120

¹¹⁶ George Cyprian Alston, “Rule of St. Benedict.” *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, Vol. 2. (New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1907), 9 Apr. 2009 <<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/02436a.htm>>

2.4.5 Spiritual Formation and Transformation since the Reformation

The two towering figures of the Reformation, Luther and Calvin, both took a catechetical approach to spiritual formation.¹¹⁷ For Luther it comprised of; the Ten Commandments; the Apostles' Creed; the Lord's Prayer; and teachings on Baptism and the Sacrament. In his Small Catechism, Luther also includes instructions on how parents should teach their households morning and evening devotions, and thanksgiving for meals.¹¹⁸ Calvin also had a serious commitment to children's 'religious instruction' as a means of spiritual development before a child could be 'admitted to Communion.' He also taught the need for believers to derive from Scriptures "...a rule of conduct..." for their daily behaviour on the path of holiness, since "...our slothfulness has need of much spurring and helping, it will be useful to gather together from various passages of Scripture the ways of rightly regulating our life..."

Wesley, influenced by the Pietists, Spener and Von Zinzendorf, formulated *societies* and *classes* in order to facilitate both public congregational worship and preaching of the Word of God, and private reading and study. His strategy incorporated small group Bible study and discussion, which was designed to promote accountability to the Word, and to one another, through acknowledgement of active application of biblical truth to daily living, and also confession of faults to each other. He also insisted on private engagement with Scripture reading and prayer, and missional expressions of ministry within broader society.¹¹⁹

Bonhoeffer, early 20th Century theologian martyred for his faith, was a strong advocate of genuine spiritual formation, as reflected in his book titles, *The Cost of Discipleship*, *Ethics*, and *Life Together*. In *The Cost of Discipleship* he explains "...cheap grace is the deadly enemy of our church,"¹²⁰ and that "...costly grace is the Incarnation of God... It is costly because it costs a man his life, and it is grace because it gives a man the only true life."¹²¹ He expounds the Sermon on the Mount and its implications for believer's lives and applications through the church. *Ethics*, written while in a Nazi prison,¹²² explains that for the Christian, living an ethical life – the Christian life – *is* spiritual formation; the transformative process by

¹¹⁷ Martin Luther, *The Large Catechism* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1921), provided by <http://www.iclnet.org/pub/resources/text/wittenberg/luther/catechism/web/cat-02.html>

¹¹⁸ Luther, *The Large Catechism*

¹¹⁹ Cairns, *Christianity through the Centuries*, 383-388

¹²⁰ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (London: SCM Press, 1959), 35

¹²¹ Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, 37

¹²² Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, 11

which we are conformed to the image of the incarnated, crucified and resurrected Christ through encounter and obedience through his Word.¹²³ This is only possible through the revelation of Jesus Christ in history, in personal regeneration, and continuing in a daily relationship in which the revelation of Christ is always made new.¹²⁴ In *Life Together*, Bonhoeffer contends for the communal nature of Christian life since our new identity ‘together’ is in and through Christ; we are “...the Body of Christ.”¹²⁵

2.4.6 Contemporary Proponents of Spiritual Formation and Transformation

Among others worthy of our attention, two contemporary proponents of spiritual formation that nurtures spiritual transformation are Richard Foster and Dallas Willard. Foster has identified what he calls *six spiritual traditions* evident throughout church history: the Contemplative stream, or prayer-filled life; the Holiness stream, or virtuous life; the Charismatic stream, or Spirit-empowered life; the Social Justice stream, or compassionate life; the Evangelical stream, or Word-centred life; and the Incarnational stream, or sacramental life. He insists each contributes a vital dimension to Christian spirituality,¹²⁶ to which he attaches significant historical exemplars as representatives of each stream. Each stream is one expression on the part of believers to ‘imitate’ an aspect of the life of Jesus.¹²⁷ Obviously, more than one stream can and should be evidenced in the lives of individual Christians, and the communities of faith to which they belong.

Foster asserts that “...superficiality is the curse of our age,” and suggests that the primary vehicle by which we can extricate ourselves from this contemporary “curse” is a return to the “...classical Disciplines of the spiritual life that call us to move beyond surface living into the depths.”¹²⁸ However, he warns against turning the Disciplines into another Law, calling that the “...way of death”,¹²⁹ and acknowledges that the necessary inner transformation is

¹²³ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Ethics* (London: SCM Press, 1955), 60-63

¹²⁴ Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 22-23

¹²⁵ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together* (London: SCM Press, 7-17; 30-112

¹²⁶ Richard Foster, *Streams of Living Water- Celebrating the Great Traditions of Christian Faith* (Bath, UK: Eagle Publishing, 1999), 15-16; Richard Foster & James Bryan Smith, Eds., *Devotional Classics – Selected Readings for Individuals and Groups* (Rev. Ed.; San Francisco: Harper, 2005), 2-3.

¹²⁷ Foster, *Streams of Living Water*, 17-18

¹²⁸ Richard Foster, *Celebration of Discipline – The Path to Spiritual Growth*, Rev. Ed. (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1989), 1

¹²⁹ Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, 9-11

“...God’s work, not ours.”¹³⁰ That does not mean we have no part to play; but rather like the farmer, who although cannot make the grain grow, must prepare the ground in order to provide the right conditions that allows the grain to grow. “The Disciplines,” he says, “allow us to place ourselves before God so that he can transform us.”¹³¹

Willard is a professor at the University of Southern California’s School of Philosophy, and a prolific writer on the topics of spiritual formation and discipleship.¹³² He writes from a more technical perspective than does Foster, but is nonetheless very readable and practical. Willard defines *spiritual formation* as “...the redemptive process of forming the inner human world so that it takes on the character of the inner being of Christ himself.” He asserts that the degree to which this is successful, the outer life of the individual becomes a natural expression of the character and teachings of Jesus.¹³³ Like Foster, he warns against focussing on “...the external manifestation of Christ-likeness,” lest the process descend into “...crushing legalisms and parochialisms.”¹³⁴ In *Renovation of the Heart*, commenting on the distinction between God’s will and our human will, and the role of spiritual disciplines, he says they “...make room for the Word and the Spirit to work in us, and they permit destructive feelings to be perceived and dealt with for what they are: our will and not God’s will.”¹³⁵ He says elsewhere succinctly, “Spiritual formation is not something that may, or may not, be added to the gift of eternal life as an option. Rather, it is the path that the eternal kind of life should naturally take.”¹³⁶ He develops this idea of the ‘eternal kind of life’ in *The Divine Conspiracy*, through his expansive perspective on the content and intent of the gospel of the kingdom. He sees this ‘good news’ as the “...presence and availability of life in the kingdom, now and forever, through Jesus...in life, death and resurrection.” This ‘life in the kingdom’ is the eternal life of God himself, enfleshed and lived out in Jesus, and now made accessible through an “...intimately interactive relationship with him;”¹³⁷ a conversational relationship with God. This, he says, “...calls for a reconsideration of how humans have been approaching

¹³⁰ Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, 6

¹³¹ Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, 19

¹³² As well as several books, his articles include: *Journal of Psychology and Theology*; *Journal of Spiritual Formation and Soul Care*; *Spring Arbor University JOURNAL*; *Christian Ethics Today*; *Christian Scholar's Review*; and *Christianity Today*.

¹³³ Willard, *The Great Omission*, 105

¹³⁴ Willard, *The Great Omission*, 105

¹³⁵ Dallas Willard, *Renovation of the Heart – Putting on the Character of Christ* (Leicester, UK: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 121

¹³⁶ Willard, *Renovation of the Heart*, 15

¹³⁷ Willard, *Divine Conspiracy*, 58-59; Willard, *Hearing God*, 29

life, in light of the fact that the opportunity is being presented, to live in the presence of Jesus, within God's eternal purposes under his good governance...where we live in the interface between our lives and God's kingdom among us."¹³⁸ Willard sees a progressive development in a believer's devotional life with God. "The gospel both empowers and calls forth a response in its own power enabling us to see and enter as participants..." into the kingdom of God, opening the heart and mind, and "...progressively transforming the whole personality," as the believer learns to hear and obey the voice of the Spirit illuminating the Word to his/her heart.¹³⁹ Willard is very clear in his goals: (1) transformation of the human heart that reflects genuine Christlikeness; (2) intentional application of tangible disciplines involving the realistic methods of Christ himself, which nurture the development of Christlike character and behaviour, through cooperative obedience with the Word and Spirit of God.¹⁴⁰

2.4.7 Summary of Traditional Approaches to Spiritual Formation and Transformation

We commenced with New Testament examples of the very personal, hands-on approach of Jesus with his disciples, and a similar approach by Paul with his close associates, supported by letters of encouragement, correction, and instruction.

The Patristic and Medieval Churches rapidly appeared to become more institutionalised and regulated, with personal impartation through association becoming 'institutionalised,' expressing more *the faith of the church* at the expense of *the faith of the individual* in obedience to an encounter with Christ – a 'social only' rather than 'social/spiritual' emphasis. This led on to a primarily physical imitation of the *events* of Christ's life, rather than a faith response to both *the person* of Christ, and the *missional purpose* of his life.

The Reformation brought significant corrections to this imbalance, with its emphasis on justification by faith alone and elevation of the Word of God to its rightful place. However, it was the Pietists who recognised the need for a personal commitment to Scripture reading, prayer, and missional expressions of love, which had a great influence on Wesley's ministry

¹³⁸ Willard, *Divine Conspiracy*, 22-28, 31

¹³⁹ Willard, *Hearing God*, 150; see Mk 4:14; Gal 5:25; 6:8

¹⁴⁰ Dallas Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines, – Understanding How God Changes Lives* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1996), xi-xv; Willard, *Renovation of the Heart*, 19-20; Willard, *Divine Conspiracy*, 351-354; Dallas Willard, 'Spiritual Disciplines, Spiritual Formation, and the Restoration of the Soul', *Journal of Psychology and Theology*, 1998, Vol.26, No.1, 106-109

and strategies. For Bonhoeffer, the problem was *cheap grace* – a wrong gospel. For Foster, the problem is a failure to recognise the Spirit of God at work in the world, within individuals and denominations, limiting themselves to only one or two expressions of ‘imitating’ the life of Jesus. Willard sees the problem as the practical irrelevance of actual obedience to Christ in much of the contemporary church, and the resultant failure of entering into God’s eternal kind of life now.

Each agrees on the necessity for a personal encounter with Christ, and application by faith of personal and corporate spiritual disciplines, as *a result of*, rather than *a path to*, personal salvation by faith in Christ. Spiritual formation must to be seen as a persistent process, a *forward progression of obedience* in ongoing transformation, following Christ into the world, with the light of the gospel, in the power of the Holy Spirit, rather than an *upward progression into holier living* in the hope of transformation, since Christ is already our transforming righteousness and sanctification.¹⁴¹ It is a collaborative journey *with* Christ rather than an individual journey *to* Christ.¹⁴²

We appear to have come a historical full circle, and hopefully are learning from the excesses of past eras since the patristic church, and are endeavouring to employ the lessons that have been gathered up over the past two millennia of Christian history.

2.5 A Theological Exploration of Spiritual Transformation

It is now time to look for a biblical paradigm from which to develop a theological understanding of the biblical call to, and the processes of, adult spiritual transformation.

2.5.1 A Global View of God’s Purposes for Humanity

“In the beginning...” introduces the reader to the *book of beginnings* – Genesis; a name that reflects its intention to give understanding regarding the reason for the creation and existence of the universe by God, and in particular for humanity created in his image.¹⁴³ As the biblical narrative unfolds, there is constant movement from creation through the fall of humanity and

¹⁴¹ Donald G. Bloesch, *Spirituality Old & New – Recovering Authentic Spiritual Life* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2007), 14

¹⁴² Kenneth Boa, *Conformed to His Image – Biblical and Practical Approaches to Spiritual Formation* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2001), 19

¹⁴³ Gen 1:1-2; 26-28

the various epochs of redemption and restoration, to the coming of Jesus the Messiah, and his announcement of the reestablishment of God's Kingdom on earth in Himself.¹⁴⁴ The New Testament continues this theme of the forward movement of redemption and restoration of and through his New Covenant people, the Church, toward the return of Jesus Christ as the crowned King of glory, having brought all things under his feet, and completed the transformation of a new heaven and earth.¹⁴⁵

During these eras of forward movement there is a consistent call to God's covenant-people, firstly Israel and then the Church, to be his transformative representatives on earth.¹⁴⁶ An exploration of the Genesis account of creation reveals a number of significant implications that relate to God's transformative purposes for humanity, which are corroborated throughout Old and New Testaments.

2.5.2 Specific Implications Relating to Humanity

Inherent within the biblical revelation of God's image in humanity come some specific capacities and attendant responsibilities that correspond to the nature of the relationship that God intends between himself as the Divine triune being and human beings.

Firstly, it is a *conversational* relationship. On the basis of the biblical record, the first activity of God, having created Adam and Eve, was to address them personally; he *spoke* to them. This reality has significant implications in shaping the way we understand that God intends to relate to humanity, and gives insight into aspects of what it means to be created in God's image. Brueggemann says, "Dialogue, I shall suggest, is not merely a strategy, but it is a practice that is congruent with our deepest nature, made as we are in the image of a dialogic God."¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁴ C. H. Dodd, *The Parables of the Kingdom*. Rev. ed (London & Glasgow: Collins Fontana Books, 1961), 36,40-41; George Eldon Ladd, *The Presence of the Future* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing, 1974), 291-292; Stanley J. Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God*. 2nd ed (Grand Rapids, Michigan & Vancouver: Jointly, Eerdmans Publishing & Regent College Publishing, 2000), 473-475; See also, Gen 3:1-11, 21-24; 6:8-9; 9:1-17; 12:1-3; Ex 3:1-14; 14:10-31; Deut 8:1-5; Josh 1:1-9; 1Sam 16:7; Is 40: 1-11; 61:1-11; Jer 31:31-34; Ezek 36:22-30; Joel 2:12-14, 28-32; Matt 4:17-25; Mk 1:14-15; Lu 11:20

¹⁴⁵ Acts 1:1-11; 3:16-21; Rom 16:25-27; Eph 1:3-14; Phil 3:20-21; Tit 2:11-14; 3:3-7; Heb 1:1-4; 2Pet 1:3-11; Rev 21:1-7; 22:12-13

¹⁴⁶ Gerhard von Rad, *Genesis*. 2nd ed (London: SCM Press Ltd, 1963), 59-60

¹⁴⁷ Walter Brueggemann, *Mandate to Difference – an Invitation to the Contemporary Church* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007), 73-74.

The capacity for intelligent speech implies *personhood*, involving communion or communication between *persons*.¹⁴⁸ God intends for humanity to live in a *personal* relationship with him, which incorporates intelligent conversation. In the case of Adam and Eve, the implications of God speaking to them in blessing, authorisation, instruction in responsibilities, and provision of boundaries, are that; they could hear and understand what God was saying; they could dialogue reciprocally; and they could respond in obedience or disobedience with defined consequences.¹⁴⁹ This is totally compatible with the whole of the biblical narrative. God *calls*, often by name, and interacts with those he *calls* through personal communication in some form or other.¹⁵⁰ The reverse is also true, “Call to me and I will answer you and tell you great and unsearchable things you do not know.”¹⁵¹

This principle is supremely evident in the life of Jesus and his unique relationship with his Father. Jesus said, “But he who sent me is reliable, and what I have heard from him I tell the world...I do nothing on my own but speak just what the Father has taught me.”¹⁵² Significantly, this *conversational* relationship is graphically portrayed in Jesus’ conversation with his Father in the Garden of Gethsemane as the prelude to his voluntary and vicarious death, burial, and resurrection.¹⁵³ The implication here is of a genuine struggle within his own humanity, as the Representative Man,¹⁵⁴ regarding laying down his own will to that of his Father’s for the sake of humanity’s redemption, prior to coming to the place of settled surrender to his Father’s will in relation to his impending death on the cross. When viewed in parallel with Paul’s theological explanation of the incarnation, burial, and resurrection of Christ to the Philippian believers, one sees the inference of a presupposed conversation in

¹⁴⁸ John D. Zizioulas, *Being as Communion - Studies in Personhood and the Church* (New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1985), 107; Stanley J. Grenz, *The Social God and the Relational Self – A Trinitarian Theology of the Imago Dei* (Louisville; London; Leiden: Westminster John Know Press, 2001), 55-56; Miroslav Volf, *After our Likeness – The Church as the Image of the Trinity* (Grand Rapids, Michigan & Cambridge, UK: Eerdmans Publishing, 1998), 181-189

¹⁴⁹ Gen 1:26-30; 2:15-17; 3:1-24

¹⁵⁰ Abram, Gen 15:1; Hagar, Gen 21:17; Abraham, Gen 22:1; Jacob, Gen 32:27-30; Moses, Ex 3:4; Samuel, 1Sam 3:6; Paul, Acts 9:4-5; Ananias, Acts 9:10; Peter, Acts 10:13; Cornelius, Acts 10:1-4

¹⁵¹ Jer 33:3

¹⁵² Jn 8:26, 28. On another occasion Jesus said, “For I did not speak of my own accord, but the Father who sent me commanded me *what to say* and *how to say it*...So whatever I say is just what the Father has told me to say;” Jn 12:49-50

¹⁵³ Matt 26:36-46; Matthew’s account, in particular, gives insight to a progressive shift in Jesus’ thinking: “My Father, if it *is* possible...” (v39); “My Father, if it is *not* possible...” (v42); and then to his disciples, “Rise, let us Go! Here comes my betrayer!” (v46).

¹⁵⁴ Rom 8:1-4; 2Cor 5:16-21; Phil 2:5-11; 1Tim 2:3-6; Heb 2:9-18; 5:7-8

eternity past, in which the Son voluntarily “made *himself* nothing...humbled *himself*,”¹⁵⁵ a real decision made in heaven that still needed to be ‘worked out’ as a real decision on the earth.¹⁵⁶ Christ, our Lord and Representative, models in every respect what the Spirit empowers within us; the exercise of human will voluntarily surrendered to God’s will through his grace.¹⁵⁷

Secondly, it is a *collaborative* relationship. God gave authority and responsibility to Adam and Eve to act as his representatives on earth.¹⁵⁸ He instituted the marriage relationship, giving them the instruction to reproduce themselves and fill the earth with their offspring, and authorised them to rule responsibly over all animal and plant life. He placed them in the garden to “...work it and take care of it...”¹⁵⁹ with the proviso that they were not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil or else they would die. This portrays an expectation of vibrant reproduction, expansive development, and world-transforming growth as God’s commissioned representatives, rather than a static snapshot of frozen perfection in an idyllic garden.

The evidences of this collaborative relationship are plain to see throughout Old and New Testaments. God enlisted Noah’s participation in the building of the Ark for the saving of his family, and by extension, all ensuing humanity.¹⁶⁰ He called Abram to collaborate with him in founding the Hebrew nation, from which the Messiah would come.¹⁶¹ Moses, after being called and told of God’s concern for his people in slavery, was then told that *he* was being sent to bring God’s people out of Egypt.¹⁶² Jesus himself willingly participated in the Father’s will for him, and the redemption of all who place their faith in *who he is*, and *what he did*, and *continually does* for all humanity.¹⁶³ Jesus invited his disciples to journey with

¹⁵⁵ Phil 2:5-11; see also Heb 10:5-7; see Gordon D. Fee, *Paul’s Letter to the Philippians*, NICNT (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing, 1995), 202-218; Karl Barth, *The Epistle to the Philippians* (London: SCM Press, 1962), 60-66

¹⁵⁶ Thomas F. Torrance, *Incarnation – The Person and Life of Christ*, ed. Robert T. Walker (Milton Keynes, UK: Paternoster Press & Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2008), 75; Phil 2:12-13; the idea continued in Paul’s practical “living it out” application to the Philippian believers.

¹⁵⁷ Herbert Hartwell, *The Theology of Karl Barth – An Introduction* (London: Gerald Duckworth & Co. Ltd., 1964), 127-128, 137-139; James B. Torrance, *Worship, Community, and the Triune God of Grace* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 46-56

¹⁵⁸ von Rad, *Genesis*, 60

¹⁵⁹ Gen 1:28-32; 2:15-25

¹⁶⁰ Gen 6:11-22

¹⁶¹ Gen 12:1-3

¹⁶² Ex 3:1-10

¹⁶³ Jn 17:4

him so that they too could catch his vision and collaborate with him in his redemptive mission.¹⁶⁴ “We are God’s fellow workers,” Paul says emphatically.¹⁶⁵

Thirdly, it is a *communitarian* relationship. The blessed mandate given to Adam and Eve was to be fruitful and fill the earth. This was not a task they were capable of achieving on their own. They certainly would be collaborators together in this, both with each other and with God, but they were being called to create *a community* who would *all* be collaborators in this enterprise.¹⁶⁶

Finally, it is a *covenantal* relationship. Even though the concept of covenant is not specifically mentioned until God’s conversations with Noah,¹⁶⁷ the *language of covenant* is present in the creation account in his sovereign provisions, expectations, and limitations; and concurs with God’s pronouncements of the *eternal covenant* that is referred to throughout Scripture.¹⁶⁸ Only after the entrance of sin into creation does the covenantal nature of God’s sovereign relationship with humanity need to be spelled out.¹⁶⁹

So, these elements of *conversation*, *collaboration*, *community*, and *covenant* help define the nature of the relationship that God has always intended that humanity share with him. They help describe what it means to be ‘created in God’s image’, and to be his covenantal and transformative collaborators on earth. Tragically, this is what humanity lost in the fall. The failure of sin and the tragedy of the fall have placed humanity in a dangerous predicament. Having been originally created ‘very good’ by God, and designed for enriching community with God, family, and a society that reflects the relational character of God, the failure of sin “...infects even the core of our being...” resulting in “...our alienation, condemnation,

¹⁶⁴ Lu 24:45-49; Jn 20:21-23; Acts 1:1-8

¹⁶⁵ 1Cor 3:9; regarding the ambiguity, Paul and Apollos were both fellow workers *for* God and *with* God, since it was the same God who had called them.

¹⁶⁶ Gen 12:1-3; Deut 7:6; 1Pet 2:9-10; Rev 7:9-10; Strictly speaking, collaboration only requires two labourers, but God has in mind a *family community*, the people of God, which is a reflection of his own trinitarian community.

¹⁶⁷ Gen 6:18

¹⁶⁸ Gen 9:16-17; 17:13, 19; 2Sam 23:5; Is 55:3; Ezek 37:26; Heb 13:20. Also, Jer 33:20, clearly goes right back to creation.

¹⁶⁹ This he does explicitly with Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses with all Israel, and David; all foreshadowing the establishment of the New Covenant through Jesus Christ; Gen 6:18; 15:17-21; 26:23-25; 28:10-17; Ex 19:3-8; Deut 29 & 30; 2Sam 7:4-17; Lu 21:14-20; 1Cor 11:23-26

enslavement, and depravity.”¹⁷⁰ Only God’s radical, redeeming intervention can overcome this predicament.

2.5.3 Spiritual Transformation – A Biblical Imperative

The biblical picture of *salvation* reveals a panoramic description of God’s rescuing intervention on behalf of fallen humanity, initiating the redemptive possibility and inviting humans again into a covenantal fellowship of true conversational and collaborative partnership with the Father and his Son through the Spirit. This redemptive intervention encompasses a number of activities on God’s part, portrayed by a series of words, each conveying the idea of a *coming back* to a previous state or relationship.¹⁷¹ This *returning* becomes evident in God’s actions in re-demption,¹⁷² re-conciliation,¹⁷³ re-generation,¹⁷⁴ renewal,¹⁷⁵ and re-storation,¹⁷⁶ each painting a different picture of the effect of God’s activities toward and within human beings.¹⁷⁷ “The restoration of interrupted fellowship with God...,” is the intriguing way that Berkouwer refers to it.¹⁷⁸ There are a number of allusions throughout the Old Testament,¹⁷⁹ and some specific references in the New Testament,¹⁸⁰ relating to the restoration of the image of God within God’s people, that require *personal spiritual transformation*.

Broadly, God’s redemptive work can be seen operative in three dimensions; *objectively*: what God has done ‘for us’; *subjectively*: what God is doing ‘in us’; and *collaboratively*: what God

¹⁷⁰ Grenz, *Theology*, 212; Stanley J. Grenz, *Sexual Ethics – An Evangelical Perspective* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997), 32-36; Donald Bloesch, *Jesus Christ – Saviour and Lord* (Carlisle, UK: The Paternoster Press, 1997), 46-48

¹⁷¹ Simon Chan, *Spiritual Theology – A Systematic Study of the Christian Life* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1998), 78; Leonardo Boff, *Jesus Christ Liberator – A Critical Christology of Our Time* (London: SPCK, 1980), 63-64. Rom 1:16-17; 5:1-11; 8:22-30; 10:6-13; 1Cor 1:2-9; 6:9-11; Eph 1:13-14; 2:1-22; Col 1:13-23; 1Tim 1:12-16; 2:1-7; 2Tim 1:6-11; Tit 2:11-14; 3:3-7; 1Pet 1:1-9; 2Pet 1:1-11; 1Jn 1:1-3; Rev 7:9-10.

¹⁷² *Apolutrosis*: buying back a slave or a captive; Col 1:13-14; Eph 1:3-14. Walter Braun, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other early Christian Literature*, 2nd ed; Rev. by F. W. Gingrich & F. Danker (Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 96

¹⁷³ *Katallage*: to restore peace after hostilities; Rom 5:10-11; 2Cor 5:18-19; Col 1:20-22

¹⁷⁴ *Palingenesia & anagennao*: to be born again; Tit 3:5; 1Pet 1:3, 23

¹⁷⁵ *Anakainoushai & anakainosis*: restoration back to an original state; Rom 12:2; 2Cor 4:16; Col 3:10; Tit 3:5.

¹⁷⁶ *Apokatastasis*: Acts 3:19; in this instance referring to the “universal renewal of the earth” H.-G. Link, in NIDNTT, Vol.3, 148

¹⁷⁷ Chan, *Spiritual Theology*, 77-78; Bloesch, *Jesus Christ – Saviour & Lord*, 175-184; George Eldon Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament* (rev. ed; Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing, 1993), 470-498.

¹⁷⁸ Cited by Chan, *Spiritual Theology*, 79

¹⁷⁹ Deut 30: 6; Jer 4:4; 31:31-34; Ezek 36:22-27; Joel 2:12-14

¹⁸⁰ 2Cor 3:18; 2Cor 4:16, in the context of what precedes it; Col 3:10

is doing ‘with or through us’.¹⁸¹ *Adult spiritual transformation* deals with the issues surrounding what God does ‘within’ and then ‘through’ the individual believer, but is always and only predicated on what God has already done for the whole of humanity in Christ, which makes the inner transformation and its outworkings possible.¹⁸² And further, God is not just interested in individual transformation, but as individuals are transformed through regeneration and ongoing renewal, their collective influence is intended to have a collaborative transforming effect through God on whole communities. The current resurgence of interest in Trinitarian theology has championed the paradigm of *relationality*, both within the triune God and toward humanity.¹⁸³ In this paradigm God is presented in his essence as eternally and reciprocally relational as Father, Son and Spirit, and extending himself to and through his ‘image-bearing’ human creation in exactly the same manner, becoming the paradigm for human community.¹⁸⁴

Boff posits an interactive dynamic; the “...Law of Incarnation;”¹⁸⁵ where Christian life is a continuation of God’s incarnational process; “...the divine penetrating the human and the human entering into the divine, at both individual and societal levels.” This understanding provides a strong biblical basis for transformational *spiritual formation* that is rooted in the *missio Dei*.¹⁸⁶ From this context, the mission of the church is to demonstrate and inculcate Christ-like character, and join with God in his mission of embodiment – the Word continually becoming flesh conversationally and collaboratively through his body the church.¹⁸⁷ Brueggemann applies this graphically in relation to the church’s ministry, pointing out that through God’s image in humanity, we are *socially formed* by family and culture; so it

¹⁸¹ Gordon D. Fee, *Paul, the Spirit, and the People of God* (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 1996), 85-95; Keith Drury, *Spiritual Disciplines for Ordinary People* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing, 1991), 12; Emil Brunner, *The Letter to the Romans – A Commentary* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1959), 103.

¹⁸² Jn 3:16; Rom 3:19-26; 5:1-11, 16-19; 8:1-17; 12:1-21; Robert P. Lightner, ‘Salvation and Spiritual Formation’ in *The Christian Educators Handbook on Spiritual Formation* (eds. Kenneth O. Gangel & James C. Wilhoit; Wheaton, Illinois: Victor Books, 1994), 41-46.

¹⁸³ This was commenced by Karls, Barth and Rahner, and carried forward by numerous others; Stanley J. Grenz, *Rediscovering the Triune God – The Trinity in Contemporary Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004), 4-5; Langmead, *The Word Made Flesh*, 15-34.

¹⁸⁴ Grenz, *Rediscovering the Triune God*, 117-125

¹⁸⁵ Boff, *The Lord’s Prayer*, 2-4

¹⁸⁶ Langmead, *The Word Made Flesh*, 20-21.

¹⁸⁷ Langmead, *The Word Made Flesh*, 55-56; Jürgen Moltmann, *The Church in the Power of the Spirit* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 10-11.

logically follows that “...everybody has a script.”¹⁸⁸ However, the fallen dominant script of our individualistic Western consumerism, has totally failed, so the ministry of the church is to proclaim God’s “...counter-script...” of covenantal life through Christ. This ‘counter-script’ must replace the “...failed-script...”, and *spiritual formation* involves the ‘descripting’ of believers of the ‘failed-script’ and ‘rescripting’ them with God’s ‘counter-script’ – the gospel of Jesus Christ – revealed in the Word of God through the power of the Spirit. This is the necessary requirement of movement towards *adult spiritual transformation* and God’s ultimate goal of *global transformation*.¹⁸⁹ We will return to Brueggemann’s insights in Chapter Five.

2.6 An Exegetical Exploration of Spiritual Transformation

The first expression of the idea of *spiritual transformation* in the New Testament is found in the notion of repentance. Both John the Baptist and Jesus commenced their respective ministries with the call, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near.”¹⁹⁰ John is very clear in his expectation of a changed life, rather than just an intellectual exchange of ideas, when he adds, “Produce fruit in keeping with repentance.”¹⁹¹ In other words, genuine repentance is evidenced by a changed life, encompassing attitudes, actions and associations.

2.6.1 Repentance – A change in thinking and acting

The word ‘repent’ – *metanoia*, is a compound of *meta*: to change, and *nous*: the mind. However, *nous* is a difficult word to translate precisely since it is used in a variety ways throughout the New Testament.¹⁹² It covers the notions of ‘*understanding*’ – the faculty of thinking, reasoning, and knowing;¹⁹³ ‘*attitude*’ – a way of thinking, encompassing the whole mental, emotional and moral state of being;¹⁹⁴ ‘*discernment*’ – the faculty of insight and

¹⁸⁸ Walter Brueggemann, *Mandate to Difference – An Invitation to the Contemporary Church* (Louisville & London: John Knox Westminster Press, 2007), 191

¹⁸⁹ Brueggemann, *Mandate to Difference*, 192-204; Brueggemann, *The Word that Redescribes the World*, 3-9, 207-211

¹⁹⁰ Matt 3:2; 4:17

¹⁹¹ Matt 3:8; ‘produce’: *poiesate*; imperative active

¹⁹² See, Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (William F. Arndt & F. Wilbur Gingrich, trans.; 2nd ed; rev. & aug. by F. Wilbur Gingrich & Frederick W. Danker; Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 544-545; G. Harder, *Nous*, in NIDNTT, Vol.3, 126-127; J. Behm, *Nous*, in TDNT, 1vol, 636-637.

¹⁹³ Lu 24:45

¹⁹⁴ Eph 4:23

judgement;¹⁹⁵ and ‘*intention*’ – the results of thinking leading to a decision of the will for action.¹⁹⁶ In the New Testament it comes to mean the interior life of thought, discerning reason, affections, and will, in the light of faith.¹⁹⁷ The unavoidable element is the personal responsibility required in order to actually address the need to change thought patterns to such a degree that affections and behaviours are also changed. This is a work of grace to which humanity must, nonetheless, be intentionally responding.¹⁹⁸

Two questions arise here requiring answers. Firstly, on what basis, or in response to what, does one repent? It is always in response to the revealed Word of God. Jesus variously said, “Repent and believe the good news;”¹⁹⁹ and, “If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth and the truth will make you free.”²⁰⁰ Secondly, what does one need to repent of? Traditionally, this has always been recognised as the sin of disobedience to God’s word; contravening his revealed will.²⁰¹ The concept of turning away from evil and back to God comes through from the Old Testament prophets²⁰² carrying through into the New. However, the concept of disobedience under the Old Covenant, while undoubtedly true, has created a dichotomy in the minds of many Christians. The *act* of disobedience, the primary focus under the Old Covenant, is actually the reflection of what is in the *heart*, as Jesus taught.²⁰³ Adam and Eve’s sin of disobedience, the basis of their banishment from the paradise of God’s immediate presence, was actually provoked by their listening to *another voice*, causing them to *think differently* to God’s revealed word to them.²⁰⁴ So the real issue in repentance is acknowledging and changing any of our thinking that is contrary to God’s revealed word, including our taken-for-granted assumptions that prove to be invalid in the light of Scripture, and bringing our *thoughts* and *actions* into alignment with God’s. The difference under the New Covenant is that repentance is no longer obedience to a law; rather it is to the person of Jesus, the living Word, who has announced the good news of the re-establishment of the God’s Kingdom on earth.²⁰⁵

¹⁹⁵ Rev 17:9

¹⁹⁶ Rom 14:5

¹⁹⁷ Günther Harder, *nous*, NIDNTT, Vol.3, 127

¹⁹⁸ Jn 14:6; Acts 2:37-38; 11:15-18

¹⁹⁹ Mk1:15

²⁰⁰ Jn 8:31-32 (RSV)

²⁰¹ Gen 2:15-17; 3:11; 1Kings 8:46-51; Eph 5:6; 2Th 1:8

²⁰² Hos 5:4; 6:1; Amos 4:6

²⁰³ Matt 12:33-37; 15:18-20

²⁰⁴ Gen 1:28-30; 2:15-17; 3:1-24

²⁰⁵ Mk 1:1; 14-15; Jn1:1,14; Rev 19:11-13

Repentance is connected to faith;²⁰⁶ turning to God;²⁰⁷ forgiveness of sins;²⁰⁸ baptism;²⁰⁹ and the return of Christ.²¹⁰ Therefore it is intrinsic to the entire process of discipleship.²¹¹ The inner conviction that both prompts and empowers repentance toward God and his revealed word is the same Holy Spirit who empowers regeneration, faith, and discipleship in response to his revealed word – a repentant life of ongoing spiritual transformation until the return of Christ.

2.6.2 The Process of Spiritual Transformation

Paul, in particular, addresses the issue of *spiritual transformation* on a number of occasions with several different emphases, centring round the word-groups of *morphé* (form), *anakainos* (renewed), *phroneo* (think), and *eikon* (image).

Commencing with, “My dear children, for whom I am again in the pains of childbirth until Christ is formed in you...” (Gal 4:19). Paul was remonstrating with the Galatian believers, since through the adverse influence of Judaisers, their thinking/believing had become confused, causing them to lose confidence in his apostolic authority and faith-inspiring gospel, resulting in their reverting back to legalistic thinking.²¹² They needed to come back to faith in Christ; “...until Christ is formed in you.” Paul sees himself needing to go through labour pains *again*²¹³ until their thinking changed back to the faith perception that they previously had of who Christ was, and the continuing development of his character within them. Behm describes Paul’s use of *morphé* (formed) as a “...womb-like...ongoing process, both open and secret, both a gift and a task, with maturity as the goal.”²¹⁴ They had already responded in faith to the preaching of the Gospel, but another line of thought was threatening an *abortive* influence on them. Their transformation had commenced in regeneration, but

²⁰⁶ Mk 1:15

²⁰⁷ Acts 3:19; 26:20

²⁰⁸ Lu 24:47; Acts 3:19

²⁰⁹ Acts 2:38

²¹⁰ Acts 3:19-21

²¹¹ Jürgen Goetzmann, *metanoia*, NIDNTT, Vol.1, 357-359

²¹² Gal 1:6 – 3:14; 4:17-20.

²¹³ Probably expressing an intercessory prayer burden

²¹⁴ Johannes Behm, *μορφωο*, TDNT, 609; aorist 1, passive subjunctive

also needed to be maintained and nurtured through Christ-centred thinking empowered by the Spirit.²¹⁵

Paul utilises a different insight into God's transformative processes with the Corinthian believers. "Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit" (2Cor 3:17-18). The *transformation* that Paul addresses here is represented by the word *metamorphoumetha* (present, passive, indicative). It indicates his positive assertion about the Spirit's progressively transformative work within the believer's life, through faith in Christ and the empowering of the Holy Spirit, into the 'likeness' (*eikon* – image) of Christ. This *progressive transformation* has the end-goal of the full expression of the image of God within the believer, which is revealed as "...the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ."²¹⁶ The inference here is of an inter-personal, face-to-face relationship with Jesus Christ through the Word and the Spirit that is transformative in its effect, and having its fulfilment in the resurrection.²¹⁷ The radical nature of this *conversational and collaborative relationship* is clearly seen in Paul's own personal life-conversion experience, but it is equally clear his expectation was that all his readers would also experience radical (to the roots) transformation over time.²¹⁸

However, his most comprehensive treatment of personal *spiritual transformation* comes in his letter to the Roman believers, as he begins to apply the rich theological foundation he has laid in the previous chapters to their practical daily living.

"Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is...Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgement in accordance with the measure of faith that God has given you" (Rom 12:2-3).

²¹⁵ See Gal 3:1-5; 5:7-18; 6:14-15

²¹⁶ 2Cor 4:6

²¹⁷ Catherine Lowry LaCugna, *God for Us – The Trinity and Christian Life* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1991), 292-293; See also 2Cor 4:4-6, 16-18 & 1Cor 13:12

²¹⁸ Acts 9:3-22

In this approach to transformation, Paul introduces the concept of mind-renewal, as an *indicative-imperative* dialectic.²¹⁹ The construction of the sentence reveals that the primary renewal of the mind has come about through the regeneration of the Spirit,²²⁰ initiating the inner transformation (*metamorphousthe* – 2nd person plural, present, passive imperative). Paul indicates that believers experience a supernatural impartation of the Holy Spirit into the human spirit/soul which is received by faith as *a gift*, and is transformational in its effect,²²¹ referring back to God’s action of mercy which they have already received.²²² This explains the ‘passive’ element of his construction; it is a *gift* which is received by faith. Concurrently, there is also a ‘present’ component which paints the picture of *continuous transformation* towards the full expression of Christ’s image within the believer at the resurrection;²²³ it has a *goal* in mind.²²⁴ However, it also has an ‘imperative’ element attached to the ‘passive’, which implies obedient and collaborative responsibility necessary on the believer’s part.²²⁵ Barth and others relate this directly to ‘repentance’ – *metanoia* – “...rethinking...in order to prove God’s will...,” or to change one’s thinking to align with Christ’s.²²⁶ “Conversion means changing one’s mode of *thinking* and *acting* to suit God, and therefore undergoing an interior revolution,” explains Boff.²²⁷ The change in *thinking* and *acting* is crucial to our

²¹⁹ George Eldon Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing, 1993), 568-569. The *indicative* premise has been stated in Rom 11:30, “Just as you...have now received mercy,” and referred to again in 12:1, “in view of God’s mercy,” laying the foundation for the *imperative* charge.

²²⁰ This gives the same sense that Paul indicates in Tit 3:5; “he saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit.” See also, Robert Jewett, *Romans – A Commentary* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007), 733

²²¹ Jewett makes the important point that the 2nd person plural indicates that Paul’s thought is “corporate rather than individual,” Jewett, *Romans*, 733. While it is true that the Christian life is always intended to be experienced in community, he surely is not inferring that regeneration does not first occur within each individual life. On this see Fee, *Paul, the Spirit, and the People of God*, 74-75

²²² Rom 11:30; “received mercy” – ἡλεήθητε – 2nd person plural aorist 1, indicative passive. He goes on in Rom 12:1, making the connection back to this mercy that has already been received by saying, “in view of God’s mercy...”

²²³ See the parallel 2Cor 3:18

²²⁴ Paul’s immediate *goal* in this context is fulfilling God’s will for worshipful behaviour, but the logical extension, based on what he says elsewhere, is the progressively full expression of Christ’s image in believers, completed in the resurrection.

²²⁵ C. E. B. Cranfield, *Romans – A Shorter Commentary* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing, 1985), 295-298; also William Hendriksen, *Romans*, NTC (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1980), 406; Johannes Behm, μεταμορφωο, TDNT, 609; and, Lightner, ‘Salvation and Spiritual Formation’ in *The Christian Educators Handbook on Spiritual Formation*, 41-43

²²⁶ Karl Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans* (London: Oxford University Press, 1950), 436-437; *metanoia* is a compound of *nous*. Brunner, *Romans*, 101-103; C. K. Barrett, *The Epistle to the Romans*, BNTC (London: Adam & Charles Black, 1971), 232-233

²²⁷ Leonardo Boff, *Jesus Christ Liberator – A Critical Christology of our Time* (Philip E. Hughes, trans; London: SPCK, 1978), 64

understanding, being expressed by all the New Testament authors.²²⁸ This is precisely what Paul addresses in 2 Corinthians 10:4-5;²²⁹ “...we take captive every thought,” is a responsibility that only an individual can undertake, nevertheless, by the agency of the Holy Spirit. It is significant that Paul immediately moves his readers onto the purpose of this transformation – to give believers the capacity to discern the will of God, which he explains will require their doing some serious thinking, and which in turn, will nurture the fruit of living Christ-honouring lives.²³⁰ This is a genuine *task* element in Paul’s estimation, which creates a dilemma for some who do not understand the dialectical nature of Christian life in a fallen world, but relates well to Brueggemann’s analogy of *spiritual formation* involving the ‘descripting’ of believers of the ‘failed-script’ and ‘rescripting’ them with God’s ‘counter-script’ – the gospel of Jesus Christ.²³¹ Chan expresses this well: “A comprehensive spirituality...recognises that true spiritual growth consists of rightly balanced opposing acts.”²³² He explains his position by looking at the two extremes of the Pelagian heresy on the one hand, which makes the human will all-decisive, and contrasts that on the other hand with the quietistic heresy, which counsels complete passivity. Reality lies within the dialectic of creative tension between the intersection of God’s will and the human will, which Bloesch describes as the two poles of the atonement;²³³ “...an objective-subjective reality...salvation happened *in* Jesus Christ *for* us and happens *in* us through faith.”²³⁴ Brunner describes this as the “...unity of assurance and claim, of gift and task...”²³⁵

Another word that Paul uses in this passage is *phroneo* – to think. It also has a range of meanings depending on context, encompassing: *think*, *judge*, *give one’s mind to*, *set one’s mind on*, and *be minded*. Paul uses it in three different forms in Romans 12:3: *phroneo*; *hyperphroneo* – high-minded or arrogant; and *sophroneo* – to think wisely, or with sober

²²⁸ Jesus and the Lawyer; Lu 10:25-37; Col 3:1- 4:1; Jam 1:22-25; 1Pet 2:11-12; 1Jn 3:16-17; Jude20-23

²²⁹ Through “divine power...we demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.”

²³⁰ Cranfield, *Romans*, 297; H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture* (New York: Harper & Row, 1951), 162-164; See also, Rom 12:2-21; he uses the same line of reasoning in other letters; Eph 4:17-32; Phil 2:1-18; 4:6-9; Col 3:1-17

²³¹ Brueggemann, *Mandate to Difference*, 192-204; Brueggemann, *The Word that Redescribes the World*, 3-9, 207-211

²³² Chan, *Spiritual Theology*, 23

²³³ Bloesch, *Jesus Christ*, 162-167

²³⁴ Bloesch, *Jesus Christ*, 163

²³⁵ Emil Brunner, *The Christian Doctrine of the Church, Faith, and the Consummation*, Dogmatics Vol. III (London: Lutterworth Press, 1962), 297

judgement.²³⁶ His usage of *phroneo*, both here and in Romans 8:5-7, make it abundantly clear that the way one *thinks* is intrinsically related to the way one *lives*, expressing “...not merely an activity of the intellect, but also a movement of the will.”²³⁷ And again, *what* and *how* one thinks is the sole responsibility of each person.²³⁸ So Paul’s imaginative use of *metamorphousthe*, *nous*, and *phroneo* in this context reveals *spiritual transformation* to be simultaneously, a *gift*, a *goal*, and a *task* – all through faith inspired by the Word and Spirit.

2.6.3 Paul’s Use of the Indicative – Imperative Dialectic

Paul’s combination of *indicative* and *imperative* is a devise to explain his understanding of the Christian life being lived in a fallen world as a *both-and* dialectic, rather than an *either-or* dualism. This needs to be understood to clearly follow his line of argumentation via the dialectical character of his thinking.²³⁹ Paul considers believers ‘in Christ’ to have already passed into the eschatological new eon – each is “...a new creation in Christ;”²⁴⁰ but, problematically, they are also still living in the old eon of the fallen creation; they are *both* new creations in Christ *and* still living in the old fallen creation.²⁴¹ In Jesus’ terminology this is ‘in the world’ but not ‘of the world.’²⁴² For Paul, the realm of the *indicative* is the faith-statement of the new reality and identity ‘in Christ.’ But since we are also still living in the old eon, we are susceptible to temptations and sin, and therefore need to be “...on guard...with the help of the Holy Spirit,”²⁴³ in order to continually “...live by the Spirit, and not gratify the desires of the sinful nature.”²⁴⁴ This is the realm of Paul’s *imperative* – the human responsibility of “...standing firm in the faith;”²⁴⁵ “...staying filled with the Spirit;”²⁴⁶ “...setting the heart on things above”, “...letting the peace of Christ rule in the heart”, and

²³⁶ J. Goetzmann, *phroneo*, NIDNTT, Vol 2, 616-618.

²³⁷ J. Goetzmann, *phroneo*, 617

²³⁸ A responsibility borne out in other Scripture passages – Rom 15:5; 1Cor 13:11; 2Cor 13:11; Phil 2:1-5; 4:6-8; Col 3:1-10

²³⁹ Victor Paul Furnish, *Theology and Ethics in Paul* (Nashville & New York: Abingdon Press, 1968), 217; Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament*, 536-537, 563, 565, 568-569; Rudolph Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, 2vols (London: SCM Press, 1955, Vol. 2), 203-207; Werner Georg Kümmel, *Theology of the New Testament* (London: SCM Press, 1974), 224-228

²⁴⁰ 2Cor 5:17; Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament*, 568; Fee, *God’s Empowering Presence*, 602

²⁴¹ Furnish, *Theology and Ethics in Paul*, 215-216, 224-227; he explains this dialectical tension very clearly and cogently

²⁴² Jn 17:11, 16

²⁴³ 2Tim 1:14

²⁴⁴ Gal 5:6

²⁴⁵ Gal 5:1

²⁴⁶ Eph 5:18

“...letting the word of Christ dwell in us richly;”²⁴⁷ in order to “...be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus;”²⁴⁸ etcetera. However, the *imperatives* of human responsibility can only be fulfilled in obedient, willing cooperation because the *indicatives* of the new identity and status ‘in Christ’ have already been secured by Christ through his incarnation, death and resurrection, and are implemented by the transforming presence and power of the Holy Spirit within the collaborating believer. As Fackre points out, “...the indicative give birth to the imperative;”²⁴⁹ and Brunner, “The indicative of grace is never without the simultaneous imperative of discipleship.”²⁵⁰ Chan draws on Thielicke and Calvin summing up by recognising the need for the two concepts of grace as *both* divine unmerited favour *and* empowering gift.²⁵¹

This *indicative-imperative* construction is best understood as a dialectical relationship. *Dialectic* is a slippery term that has meant different things to different people in different eras. Etymologically, it means *to speak between two*,²⁵² emphasising the dynamic nature of communication within a conversation. It has broadened over time beyond two individuals to include communication between poles of thought. Bloesch gives a helpful historical overview of its use; from Socrates: the art of question and answer,²⁵³ through Aristotle: a pattern of logical reasoning; Hegel: the dynamic process of universal reality through thesis, antithesis and synthesis; Kierkegaard: a method of holding together affirmations that are diametrically antithetical, and Barth: polar pairs held together in the response of faith, such as infinity and finitude, eternity and time, judgement and grace.²⁵⁴

Within the social sciences, *dialectic* has been variously associated with; immanent change, contradiction, paradox, negation, complementarity, ambiguity, polarization, and reciprocity.²⁵⁵ In this context, Sociologist David Walls interprets *dialectic* as “...the mutually

²⁴⁷ Col 3: 1-2, 15-16

²⁴⁸ 2Tim 2:2

²⁴⁹ Cited by Michael Welton, “Seeing the Light: Christian Conversion and Conscientisation,” in Peter Jarvis & Nicholas Walters, eds, *Adult Education and Theological Interpretations* (Malabar, Florida: Krieger Publishing, 1993), 111

²⁵⁰ Brunner, *The Christian Doctrine*, Vol. III, 297

²⁵¹ Chan, *Spiritual Theology*, 79-83

²⁵² Gk. *dia* – across or between two; *legein* – to speak

²⁵³ Aristotle, a student of Socrates, attributed Socrates as the originator of the ‘dialectic argument’ method of question and answer, becoming known as the Socratic Method; Reed & Prevost, *A History of Christian Education*, 30-31

²⁵⁴ Bloesch, *Word and Spirit*, 76

²⁵⁵ David Walls, “Dialectical Social Science,” from *Theoretical Perspectives in Sociology*, edited by Scott G. McNall (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1979), 214-231

formative relationship between humans and society.”²⁵⁶ In common usage it is most often associated with *paradox*, however, their meanings are not the same. Paradox; from *paradoxos*, having come to mean *incredible* or *glorious* depending on context; expresses the intended reaction of standing aside from something and saying, “That is incredible; in fact so incredible it seems impossible.” Its intent is to *emphasise* difference. *Dialectic*, on the other hand, describes a relationship of creative tension. More explicitly, in the way that I intend applying it, *dialectic* describes the nature of dialogical communication between two persons, poles of thought, or functional roles. Though not necessarily opposite, but certainly different, these roles coexist in a creative tension that is mutually beneficial but requires intentional engagement by both parties in order to overcome their inherent differences, becoming increasingly inter-dependent and mutually enhancing in the process. Dialectic *utilises* differences creatively rather than simply *emphasise* difference as paradox does.

Theologically, its intent expresses the creative tensions within relational differences that become transformational through faith, within the context of God’s redemptive action. This is supremely demonstrated in the incarnation, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, the God-Man: the Word who became flesh in order to reconcile differences and re-establish conversational relationship between God and humanity.²⁵⁷ Significantly, this dialectical tension is seen to outwork in the Garden of Gethsemane as God the Son wrestles with his own humanity, but in conversation with the Father, voluntarily surrenders his own will to the will of the Father in order to fulfil his Father’s greater redemptive will.²⁵⁸ Paul explains the *transformational process* we have already referred to in 2 Corinthians 3:18 using dialectical language.²⁵⁹ It is the treasure of God’s glory in Christ resident in the clay jars of human bodies, made possible through faith in Christ and the empowering presence of the Holy Spirit.²⁶⁰ He expresses the results of this ‘treasure in clay jars’ as the dialectical tensions of “...hard pressed, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed.”²⁶¹ This is a *yes-but*, or *both-and* construction,

²⁵⁶ Walls, "Dialectical Social Science," 217

²⁵⁷ Jn 1:1, 14; 1Tim 2:5-6

²⁵⁸ Matt 26:36-46; Mk 14:32-42; Lu 22:39-46; Phil 2:5-11; see also G. C. Berkouwer, *The Work of Christ*, Studies in Dogmatics (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing, 1965), 143-147; Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Theology* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1981), 446

²⁵⁹ 2Cor 4:7-18

²⁶⁰ Gordon D. Fee, *God’s Empowering Presence – The Holy Spirit in the Letters of Paul* (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994), 321-322; 2Cor 3:17-18; 4:6-7

²⁶¹ 2Cor 4:8-9

which he equates to the Christian experience of identifying with *both* Christ's death *and* resurrection, and out of which we "...believe and therefore speak."²⁶² Barrett points out that the benefit of Paul's dialectical approach is that it maintains the necessary tension between the seemingly paradoxical death-resurrection experiences, but at the same time guards against an over-emphasised *theology of glory* on one hand, and a purely *intellectual abstraction* on the other.²⁶³ This is classic dialectical language involving necessary creative *both-and* tensions.

Some practical examples of dialectical relationships that display these creative tensions requiring mutually intentional and dynamic communication are: the marriage relationship between husband and wife; the learning relationship between teacher and pupil;²⁶⁴ the structural relationship between superstructure and infrastructure;²⁶⁵ the integrative relationship between the whole and the part;²⁶⁶ the interpretive relationship between subject and object; the cognitively transformational relationship between action and reflection;²⁶⁷ and most significantly, the redemptive relationship between a holy and infinite God and fallen, finite humanity, through faith in the incarnated, crucified and resurrected Christ; *both* God *and* Man,²⁶⁸ or as Peter put it on the Day Of Pentecost, *both* Lord *and* Christ.²⁶⁹ The key to understanding dialectical relationships is seeing their inherent *both-and* nature, rather than as a conflicted *either-or* dualism.

In regard to humanity's relationship with God, the idea of a *mutually beneficial* relationship sounds extremely weighted in humanity's favour, and undoubtedly it is since God does not *need* our relationship, yet in his Sovereignty, he has chosen through love, indeed created us,

²⁶² 2Cor 4:8-14

²⁶³ C. K. Barrett, *A Commentary on the Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, BNTC (London: A & C Black, 1973), 139; He says, "God does actually deliver his servant from the power of evil. This is not mythology but fact, even though it remains true that in this age the believer remains in a world characterised by sin and death." See also his *The Signs of an Apostle*, rev. ed. (Carlisle, UK: Paternoster Press, 1996), 104-105

²⁶⁴ Freire, *Cultural Action*, 29, 35-37; and *Education – The Practice of Freedom*, 144-153

²⁶⁵ Freire, *Cultural Action*, 58.

²⁶⁶ Wolfhart Pannenberg, *The Idea of God and Human Freedom*, (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1973), 200-202

²⁶⁷ Freire, *Cultural Action*, 54 (subject-object); 31 (action-reflection); Freire, *Education- The Practice of Freedom*, 144-149 (subject-object & action-reflection); Reed & Prevost, *A History of Christian Education*, 355

²⁶⁸ Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Jesus - God and Man*, (London: SCM Press, 1968), 334-337

²⁶⁹ Acts 2:36

for that very purpose.²⁷⁰ Any incomprehensibility here that we may struggle with draws attention to our inability to truly comprehend the intensity of desire that our God has for humanity, his image-bearers. There are insights revealed in Jesus' conversation with his disciples over their last supper together.²⁷¹ This is hardly referring to his anticipation of suffering on the cross, but rather to the "...joy that was set before him...", in anticipation of restored fellowship with Father and family.²⁷² Jesus also revealed this intensity of desire analogically in the parable of the prodigal. The scene of the Father running to welcome his returning son beautifully portrays both the Father's deep desire for his son, and the dialectical nature of the relationship.²⁷³

This dialectical nature of the relationship between God and redeemed humanity best describes the adventure of Christian living as a covenantal, conversational and collaborative relationship with Father, Son and Holy Spirit, within the context of both Divine and human community. This is the arena of *spiritual formation*: the *faith-task* elements of spiritual life and discipline within community, dialectically related to the empowering *gift* of Christ the eternal Word of grace revealed in Scripture and living within. This is outworked through the dynamic communication of the Spirit, and with other believers, inter-dependently collaborating in the ongoing process of *spiritual transformation* climaxing in *the goal*; conformity to the image of Christ at his return.

Schematically portrayed:

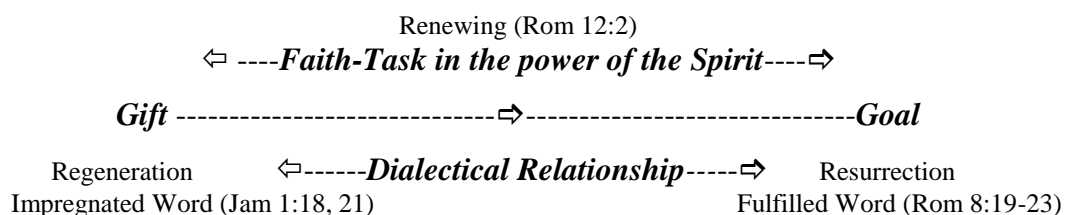


Figure 1:
The Process within and toward Adult Spiritual Transformation

²⁷⁰ Deut 7:7-9; Jer 31:3; Eph 1:3-14; 3:2-10; 1Pet 2:9-10; Rev 4:11; see also Donald Bloesch, *God the Almighty – Power, Wisdom, Holiness, Love* (Carlisle, UK: Paternoster Press, 1995), 44

²⁷¹ Lu 22:14-15; "I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer."

²⁷² Heb 12:2

²⁷³ Lu 15:11-32. Henri J. M. Nouwen, *The Return of the Prodigal Son – A Story of Homecoming* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1994), 124-133

So, the process that is continually resulting in *adult spiritual transformation* is simultaneously a *gift*, a *goal*, and a *task*. The reception of the Word and the Holy Spirit in regeneration on the basis of Christ's atoning ministry is a powerfully transformative *gift* of God's grace which renews the inner person both *relationally* in believers' capacity to communicate with God, and *perspectively* in how they see themselves in relation to both God and the world around them. The *goal* is the complete replication of the image of Christ within believers, which will only be fully realised in the resurrection. The *task* element, a faith-task albeit, inherent within this gift of grace is the need to live repentantly within community through the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Not just as a once-only acknowledgement of sinfulness before God, asking his forgiveness, but a daily renewing of the mind, aligning the thoughts and desires of the heart to the will of God in the context of personal devotion to God among a missional community of faith that is a witness in our fallen world. This can only be achieved through the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit, placing believers within a creative dialectical tension between the Divine will and the human will yielded to his, supremely demonstrated by Jesus at Gethsemane, as the result of a conversational and collaborative relationship between Father and Son. This is the arena of *spiritual formation* which nurtures the depth of meaning, purpose, and empowerment required to realise the biblical imperative of *adult spiritual transformation*.

And further, this community of faith is required to be an authentic missional demonstration of God's transforming grace and life within a society which desperately needs transformation that is only available through the Gospel of his redeeming grace and life. The inculcation of this redeeming and missional Gospel message places significant responsibilities on the teaching ministry of the Church.

2.7 Insights from Practical Theology

Practical theology, as it has come to be understood, can be variously described as the endeavour to bridge "...the widening gap between academia and ecclesia;"²⁷⁴ or, "...the relation of theory to praxis,"²⁷⁵ or again, "...a process...aimed at creating individuals capable

²⁷⁴ Thomas H. Groome, 'Theology on our Feet: A Revisionist Pedagogy for Healing the Gap between Academia and Ecclesia,' in *Formation and Reflection – The Promise of Practical Theology*; eds. Lewis S. Mudge and James N. Poling (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1987), 55

²⁷⁵ Ray S. Anderson, *The Shape of Practical Theology – Empowering Ministry with Theological Praxis* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 14

of entering into a community of practical theological reflection and participating in the action that would follow from it.”²⁷⁶

Anderson comments that “...the concept of praxis has often been associated with a quasi-Marxist component of some contemporary liberation theologies.”²⁷⁷ Marx was deeply influenced by two philosophers, Hegel and Feuerbach; primarily through Hegel’s dialectical thinking, and Feuerbach’s materialism. However, he also criticised them both; Hegel for his idealism, and Feuerbach for his failure to emphasise praxis. From the two he created his own “...distinctive orientation, *dialectical materialism*, which focuses on dialectical relationships within the material world.”²⁷⁸ Interestingly, while Marx was not a sociologist, and with the collapse of global communism and resultant discrediting of his economic theories, it is his sociological concepts that have had an enduring impact worldwide.²⁷⁹ Of the plethora of neo-Marxian thinkers, Habermas has emerged as “...one of the best known...” dialectical thinker/writers utilising a modified Marxian *critical theory*; the point of which is to “...unify theory and practice so as to restore the relationship between them. Theory thus would be informed by practice, whereas practice would be shaped by theory.”²⁸⁰ It is these two associated concepts of *praxis* and *dialectics*; praxis being the ongoing result of the dialectical relationship between action and purpose; which have become fundamental to practical theology.

However, this understanding of *praxis* and *dialectics* pre-dates Marx by almost two millennia. Anderson gives an overview of the Aristotelian meaning of *praxis*, described as “...an action that took into account the *telos*, or goal and purpose of the act.”²⁸¹ The alternative was *poiesis*, “...an action which produces a result,” but bears no responsibility for its outcome. He gives the example of a builder who builds according to the specifications required, and once completed is paid. Should that building be used for illegal purposes after its completion, the builder bears no responsibility for that. He was only responsible for the product, not its ongoing purpose – that is *poiesis*, not *praxis*. With praxis, the ultimate purpose “...becomes part of the action. While the design serves to orient the action toward its goal, the ultimate

²⁷⁶ Don S. Browning, ‘Practical Theology and Religious Education,’ in *Formation and Reflection – The Promise of Practical Theology*; eds. Lewis S. Mudge and James N. Poling (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1987), 79

²⁷⁷ Anderson, *The Shape of Practical Theology*, 102-103

²⁷⁸ George Ritzer, *Sociological Theory*, 4th ed. (New York: The McGraw-Hill Companies, Inc., 1996), 20-22

²⁷⁹ Ritzer, *Sociological Theory*, 23-25, 41-42, 314

²⁸⁰ Ritzer, *Sociological Theory*, 290-295

²⁸¹ Anderson, *The Shape of Practical Theology*, 103

purpose, or *telos*, informs the action so as to correct the design, if necessary, in order to realise the ultimate purpose.”²⁸² This clearly reveals the action-to-reflection-to-corrected-action that creates the dialectical tensions inherent within the concept of praxis that is at the centre of Practical Theology. Christian praxis involves the continual dialogue between *words* of faith and *actions* of faith; or as Paver described it, “reflected-upon action and acted-upon reflection, both rolled into one.”²⁸³

2.7.1 The Place of Critical Reflection that Promotes Reflective Actions

One of the key elements inherent within effective praxis is the application of critical reflection. Farley sees Practical Theology as “...a theology of human and world transformation.” It calls for “...a critical orientation...of the church itself and its function in society.”²⁸⁴ Fowler defines it as “...critical reflection on the church’s task in the formation and transformation of persons,”²⁸⁵ while Groome expands, “Authentic Christian praxis demands engagement in the historical struggles for conversion and transformation, both personal and social.”²⁸⁶ Browning sees the connection here between Habermas’ critical theory of emancipatory knowledge, intended to free people from taken-for-granted assumptions about life that are untrue and therefore unhelpful, and the biblical call to Christian witness in a fallen world.²⁸⁷ Grenz adds, “...to rise above this self-enclosed framework, people must subject their own social-environmental conditioning to scrutiny and criticism...”²⁸⁸

Jesus employed this truth powerfully in his Sermon on the Mount, redefining traditional norms under his new Kingdom manifesto; “You have heard that it was said... But I tell

²⁸² Ray S. Anderson, *The Soul of Ministry – Forming Leaders for God’s People* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997), 26-27

²⁸³ John E. Paver, *Theological Reflection and Education for Ministry – The Search for Integration in Theology* (Aldershot, England: Ashgate Publishing, 2006), 57; see also 2Cor 3:3

²⁸⁴ Edward Farley, “Interpreting Situations: An inquiry into the nature of Practical Theology,” in Lewis S. Mudge & James N. Poling, eds., *Formation and Reflection – The Promise of Practical Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2009), 6

²⁸⁵ James Fowler, “Practical Theology and the Shaping of Christian’s Lives,” in *Practical Theology: The Emerging Field in Theology, Church, and World*, ed., Don Browning (New York: Harper & Row, 1982), 155

²⁸⁶ Groome, “Theology on our Feet,” 65

²⁸⁷ Don S. Browning, *A Fundamental Practical Theology – Descriptive and Strategic Proposals* (Minneapolis: Fortress press, 1991), 69-71; Ritzer, *Sociological Theory*, 291

²⁸⁸ Stanley J. Grenz, *The Moral Quest – Foundations of Christian Ethics* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1997), 187

you...,”²⁸⁹ and all Jesus’ parables were specifically designed to generate critical reflection in people’s thinking. This also is surely the challenge that Paul alludes to: “Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind,” in order to “...test and approve what God’s will is,” however, “Do not think of yourselves more highly than you ought.”²⁹⁰ In other words, exercise some critical reflection about your identity and ministry in the light of God’s word. Similarly, the writer of Hebrews brought a challenge to his readers who had become “...slow to learn,”²⁹¹ and as a result, were failing to critically assess their responses to their current situations, settling for the ‘milk’ of complacency rather than the ‘solid food’ of wrestling with God’s word regarding *being* and *doing* righteousness.

At its base level, this needs to be taught as the fundamental requirement of discipleship, out of which all other elements develop. Jesus taught that if a follower holds on to the message he has spoken, he/she will be a true disciple, who will gain knowledge of the truth that will set them free.²⁹² “Remaining in the truth...” is the mark of a true disciple.²⁹³ The *truth* that one is to remain in firstly being expressed in Jesus himself, The Truth; secondly, through the words which he spoke; and finally, through his written Word, the Bible.²⁹⁴ Because of who Jesus is, the words he spoke have divine authority. They are his message of Good News, the gospel of Christ, which is “...the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes,”²⁹⁵ having transformative effect within those who hear and engage with it. Conversely, “...if the Bible doesn’t bring change it is not being engaged.”²⁹⁶ Dykstra makes the practical point; not only do we need to read and wrestle with the text; we also need to allow the text of God’s Word to read us. Because it contains the power of God, he will wrestle with us to bring his will to pass, as with Jacob.²⁹⁷ Its effects are firstly of regeneration into the family of God;²⁹⁸

²⁸⁹ Matt 5:21-22, 27-28, 31-32, 33-34, 38-39, 43-44

²⁹⁰ Rom 12:2-3

²⁹¹ Heb 5:11-14; 2:1-4; 3:12-14; 10:19-39; 12:11-29; 13:7

²⁹² Jn 8:31-32; gaining knowledge, “know the truth” (NIV), *gnosesthe*; is future, indicative, middle; indicating it is something they are doing to themselves with its result in the future; hence its *if-then* construction.

²⁹³ Bruce Milne, *The Message of John*, The Bible Speaks Today (Leicester, England: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 132; see also Jn 15: 1-8; 2Jn 9; 3Jn 3

²⁹⁴ Jn 14:6; Jn 6:63; Jn 20:30-31

²⁹⁵ Rom 1:16

²⁹⁶ Erwin Raphael McManus, *An Unstoppable Force – Daring to Become the Church God had in Mind* (Sydney: Strand Publishing, 2001), 85

²⁹⁷ Dykstra, *Growing in the Life of Faith*, 151-153; Gen 32:22-30

²⁹⁸ Jn 3:3-8; Jam 1:18; 1Pet 1:3,23

secondly of ongoing sanctification and growth in grace and knowledge;²⁹⁹ and ultimately of complete conformity to the image of Christ in resurrection.³⁰⁰

This now provides an appropriate segue into developing our understanding of the need for the application of both solid biblical theology and sound adult educational theory to the task of Christian formation that nurtures adult spiritual transformation.

Chapter 3: Adult Educational Theory

3.1 Introduction

Adult Education, as a stand-alone discipline within the English speaking world, is a relatively new discipline, beginning in the early 20th Century, through the influence of such men as John Dewey and Eduard Lindeman.³⁰¹ Dewey had a rural background which influenced his early thinking, described as *organic democracy* relating to rural American communitarianism. A ten year stint in Chicago opened him to an intriguing laboratory of urban life, and the embryonic social sciences, significantly influencing his thinking. From 1905 to 1952 he was located at Columbia University, New York, working among leading anthropologists. Education became not just a technique or pedagogy, but “...a central function in the evolutive process of the human species.”³⁰² Lindeman, on the other hand, came from a more sociological perspective than Dewey’s anthropological stance, but was influenced by both Dewey, and his own Danish background. Lindeman sought to develop teaching techniques that likened *experience to life*, in which *meaning* became “...the attempt to give coherence to the fractured lives of people living in an industrialised environment.”³⁰³

Within the discipline there has developed three schools of adult learning: individual learning – involving personal development and humanistic psychology; cognitive development process – including self and social awareness, intellectual competencies, enlightenment

²⁹⁹ Rom 12:2; 2Cor 3:18; Col 3:9-10; 2Pet 3:18

³⁰⁰ Rom 8:28-30; 1Cor 15:50-57; Phil 3:20-21; 1Jn 3:2

³⁰¹ Matthias Finger & José Manuel Asún, *Adult Education at the Crossroads* (London & New York: Zed Books Ltd., 2001), 29-39

³⁰² Finger & Asún, *Adult Education*, 31

³⁰³ Finger & Asún, *Adult Education*, 38

pedagogy, and critical theory; and individual and collective problem solving – pragmatism. These comprise a mix of personal, social, and industrial/national development.

The intellectual mission behind these constructions of adult education; whether Personal Development, Marxian/socialist, or Pragmatism; has been primarily to stimulate personal potential and to humanise industrial development.³⁰⁴ It becomes immediately evident that the humanistic, evolutionary, and in some cases, Marxist, emphases of this discipline, as it has developed into the 21st Century, is at odds with significant elements of Christian theology in relation to the *purpose* and *means* of transformation, which we will develop further in this chapter.

3.2 Mezirow and Freire

Two adult educators that we will dialogue with primarily, Jack Mezirow and Paulo Freire, supported by others,³⁰⁵ are representative of these various trends. Both these men developed their adult educational ideas in very different contexts. Mezirow, a North American living in a society that he fundamentally enjoys, accordingly focuses on personal development, problem-solving, and social improvement.³⁰⁶ Now retired, he was chairman of the Department of Higher and Adult Education, and Professor Emeritus of Adult and Continuing Education, Teachers College, Columbia University, New York. Freire (1921-1997), on the other hand, was born into a middle class Brazilian family that became impoverished through the Great Depression. However, his studies in law, philosophy, sociology, education, and the psychology of language, brought him to prominence in government welfare and educational agencies,³⁰⁷ while at the same time being strongly influenced by what became known as Liberation Theology.³⁰⁸ Consequently, he became very distressed with the plight of his native Brazilian peasant farm-workers who were locked into poverty and illiteracy through an unjust and corrupt hegemonic social system. He inspired liberation from the bondage of illiteracy and its resulting entrapment within a cultural defeatism to sow the seeds of personal

³⁰⁴ Finger & Asún, *Adult Education*, 2-3

³⁰⁵ Ira Shor was an associate of Freire. Jane Vella dedicated her book *Taking Learning to Task* (2001) to Freire and Knowles. Garrison, Anderson and Archer are contemporary adult educators in the field of online conferencing education.

³⁰⁶ Jack Mezirow, 'Transformation Theory of Adult Learning', in *In Defense of the Lifeworld – Critical Perspectives on Adult Learning* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1995), 65-70

³⁰⁷ Reed & Prevost, *A History of Christian Education*, 354-355

³⁰⁸ Peter Jarvis, 'Paulo Freire,' in *Twentieth Century Thinkers in Adult Education*, Peter Jarvis, Ed. (London: Croon Helm, 1987), 265-270; Cheryl Bridges Johns, *Pentecostal Formation – A Pedagogy among the Oppressed*, *Journal of Pentecostal Theology Supplement Series 2* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 46-49

freedom and social reform through political activism. His outstanding grass-roots success over time meant that his temporary exile from Brazil facilitated his expertise being taken into other Latin American and African countries, and the slums of New York.³⁰⁹

3.2.1 Mezirow in a Nutshell

Mezirow explains the possibility of transformation taking place in what he calls *meaning perspectives*; our cognitively developed frames of reference. These are initially uncritical frames of thought developed through interactions with others that may or may not be based on accurate interpretations of the actual happenings and meanings of those interactions. These become the taken-for-granted assumptions on which we base our thinking.

He sees these operating at two levels: surface *meaning schemes* – specific beliefs, value judgements, and feelings; and also deeper *meaning perspectives* – generalised expectations, belief systems, or worldviews.³¹⁰ By drawing on the works of other adult educators, psychologists, and critical theorists, including Freire, Mezirow posits the need to identify possible false, inaccurate, or distorted internalised cultural assumptions, and/or unresolved childhood psychological dilemmas, through the processes of critical reflection usually stimulated by some form of crisis, followed by critical dialogue with others of good will, which finally result in changed reflective actions. The purpose of transformative learning, he maintains, is to “empower the individual to think as an autonomous agent in a collaborative context.”³¹¹ In other words, his intention is to see adults become capable of critically *independent* thought becoming expressed through socially *inter-dependent* action.

3.2.2 Freire in a Nutshell

Freire became famous for the process that he developed and popularised with the term *conscientisation*, which he describes as, “...the awareness of the sociocultural reality which shapes people’s lives and their capacity to transform that reality through action upon it.”³¹² As Director of the Department of Cultural Extension of Recife University, Brazil, and simultaneously as Coordinator of the Adult Education Project of the Movement of Popular

³⁰⁹ Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of Hope*, Trans. by Robert R. Barr (New York: Continuum Publishing, 1994), 13-49

³¹⁰ Jack Mezirow, *Transformative Dimensions of Adult Learning* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1991), 4-7, 111

³¹¹ Jack Mezirow, ‘Transformative Learning: Theory to Practice’ in *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education*, no.74, Summer 1997, 8-11

³¹² Freire, *Cultural Action for Freedom*, 51, n2; Mezirow, *Transformative Dimensions*, 136

Culture, Freire and his team developed a unique and radical method of teaching illiterate Brazilian peasants to read and write. They utilised a process that incorporated a methodology of dialogue within the dialectic of reciprocity; a posture of teacher and student entering together into the learning process within the context of their sociocultural reality, which connected the learning content with the learning process, creating critical awareness of their place within their sociocultural setting, and empowering them to begin transforming it.³¹³

South American liberation theologian, Gustavo Gutierrez, who was influenced by Freire's approach,³¹⁴ credits his work as "...one of the most creative and fruitful implemented in Latin America,"³¹⁵ indirectly acknowledging the dialectical influence of Liberation Theology on Freire's thinking.

3.3 Mezirow's Transformative Learning Theory

The final form of Mezirow's concept involves recognition of the need for developing critical reflection on one's take-for-granted assumptions in order to identify, challenge and correct distortions in underlying beliefs, and resulting emotional responses and behaviours that are unhelpful for the effective daily experience of life in one's social contexts.

Mezirow did not develop his ideas in a vacuum, but out of his own experiences, plus the influences which he acknowledges from a number of sources. The concept of community development was an early influence directly related to his North American context and the immigration phenomenon to their shores. This is evidenced in Mezirow's early efforts to foster democratic social action by endeavouring to integrate people from a variety of ethnic and social backgrounds into cohesive communities. However, when attempting this same strategy in Third World countries he encountered resistance and ensuing frustrations. Through his exposure to the work of Freire he began to understand some inherent mistakes

³¹³ Paulo Freire, *Education: The Practice of Freedom* (London: Writers and Readers Publishing Cooperative, 1973), ix-xiii, 42-49

³¹⁴ Grenz, *The Moral Quest*, 187

³¹⁵ Gustavo Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1988), 57; See also Peter Mayo, *Liberating Praxis – Paulo Freire's Legacy for Radical Education and Politics* (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger Publishers, 2004), 58; and David Deshler, 'Prophecy: Radical Adult Education and the Politics of Power,' in *Adult Education and Theological Interpretations*, eds, Peter Jarvis & Nicolas Walters (Malabar, Florida: Krieger Publishing, 1993), 292-293

based on his own incorrect assumptions. This was a confronting process lasting several years, but through it he became more socially and critically aware.³¹⁶

Freire's concept of conscientisation created its own process of transformative learning within Mezirow's experience, as did a simultaneous decision by his wife to return to formal schooling to complete her undergraduate studies.³¹⁷ Each of these various influences had a dramatically transformative impact on Mezirow's own life and thinking over time. As a result of these occurrences, Mezirow embarked on his now famous research among eighty-three adult women who were retraining to re-enter the workforce. Much of his Theory of Transformative Learning is based on the findings of this 'grounded' study.³¹⁸

3.3.1 Key Elements of His Transformation Theory

As mentioned, Mezirow has identified two levels of comprehension – *meaning schemes*, by which he means specific beliefs, value judgements, and emotions; and *meaning perspectives*, which he interprets as generalised but deeper assumptions, expectations, belief systems, or worldviews.³¹⁹ These are originally developed through the normal and natural processes of childhood relational interactions – *social formation*. His premise is that we all start with what we have been given, and then operate "...within the horizons set by our ways of seeing and understanding," which we have acquired through the learning of socialisation; the "...informal or tacit learning of social norms from parents, friends, and mentors that allow us to fit into society."³²⁰

From an educational perspective, the cultural context of learning is of supreme importance. Social reality is shared, sustained, and continuously negotiated through communication, and it is through this social communication that the individual's *subjective self* is built up in a biographically unique way. It serves as a set of interpretational rules for making sense of everyday life. Much of the social world of everyday life is learned and experienced by the individual as the natural, inevitable order of reality; an attitude toward the everyday world

³¹⁶ Mezirow, *Transformative Dimensions*, xvi-xvii

³¹⁷ Mezirow, *Transformative Dimensions*, xvi-xvii

³¹⁸ Mezirow, *Transformative Dimensions*, 86

³¹⁹ Mezirow, *Transformative Dimensions*, 42-44

³²⁰ Mezirow, *Transformative Dimensions*, 1

and life within it that becomes *taken-for-granted*.³²¹ However, the “...formative learning of childhood,” must become “...transformative learning in adulthood,” in order to move successfully through the developmental and transitional stages of growth toward maturity of the whole person, involving the physical, intellectual, emotional, sociological and spiritual dimensions of a person’s life.³²²

Through the interview processes of his research, he observed two particular *crisis* points where many participants struggled. At the beginning; when their “...established values...and ways of thinking and doing...”³²³ were being exposed to critical analysis. This was creating internal uncertainties that provoked the need to challenge their thinking. The second crisis arose at the point when a commitment to “...reflective action,”³²⁴ based on a new insight was logically required. For some this was “...so threatening or demanding,” that they were incapable at that point to move forward. He explains these responses by suggesting that a *meaning scheme* (a particular belief, judgement, or value) could be changed through a ‘new insight’, but the deeper implications of a *meaning perspective* (the underlying assumption) may still remain to be transformed, since it requires moving beyond simple ‘content reflection’ (reflection on *what* is being thought or done) to the deeper ‘premise reflection’ (reflection on *why* one was thinking or acting that way), which he describes as a dialectical process. Transformation of a *meaning perspective* requires resultant “...reflective action,”³²⁵ and is often only achieved after cumulative *meaning scheme* challenges, if at all.

Mezirow discovered that in each of the participants in his research, the triggering event that provoked their re-training was what he describes as a “...disorienting dilemma.”³²⁶ These encompassed such things as, *natural disasters*; *personal upheavals*, such as death of a loved one, serious illness or accident affecting a family member or bread-winner, loss of employment, or divorce; *external social events*; or *cumulative internal changes*. He also found that other, less dramatic, but equally *disorienting dilemmas* could begin from, “An eye opening discussion, book, poem, or painting; cross-cultural experiences that challenge

³²¹ Mezirow, *Transformative Dimensions*, 1-2, citing C.A. Bowers, *The Promise of Theory: Education and the Politics of Cultural Change* (New York: Longman, 1984), 35-44

³²² Mezirow, *Transformative Dimensions*, 3; see also, Fowler, *Stages of Faith*, 274, 290, for his excellent treatment of the crises encountered in progressing from one stage of developmental maturity to another.

³²³ Mezirow, *Transformative Dimensions*, 171

³²⁴ Mezirow, *Transformative Dimensions*, 171

³²⁵ Mezirow, *Transformative Dimensions*, 107-111, 171

³²⁶ Mezirow, *Transformative Dimensions*, 167-168

preconceived notions and question deeply held personal values, and threaten our very sense of self.”³²⁷ Studies by Erikson, Kohlberg, Levinson, Gould, Fowler, and others, relating to the crises of life transitions, before and since Mezirow’s seminal research, have borne out these findings.³²⁸ Mezirow maintains that dramatic personal and social change becomes possible by becoming aware of the way ideologies; be they sexual, racial, religious, educational, occupational, political, economic or technological; have created or contributed to a dependency on taken-for-granted assumptions about oneself and one’s situations, and the discovery of realistic solutions for them, through critical self-reflective processes.³²⁹ He describes these critical self-reflective processes as *dialectical* and *dialogical interactions*, which in his estimation are the only real way our meaning perspectives will be sufficiently challenged. Typically, these are instigated through disorienting dilemmas, in order to reveal any inaccuracies in the taken-for-granted assumptions that had been considered valid, previous to being challenged.³³⁰ He cites James Basseches in explaining that these “...dialectical processes...” are a developmental movement of thinking that “...conceptualises change as the emergence of contradictions within a system, leading to the formulation of a new, more inclusive system.”³³¹ He also describes this as a ‘dialogical process’ because it occurs most readily as a *communicative action* within a *communal environment* where “...implicit validity claims are made explicit and contested, with an effort to criticise and vindicate them through arguments.”³³²

In other words, these processes can be described as a dialectic of *creative tensions* within the relationship between *meaning schemes* and *meaning perspectives* as they come into conflict over the desire to maintain *a static system of held beliefs* over against the need for a *transformed perspective* that is being informed and reformed through critical self-reflection. This dynamic occurs most readily when using dialogical methods within a communal environment, resulting in reflective actions, being typically provoked by some form of life-crisis.

³²⁷ Mezirow, *Transformative Dimensions*, 167-169

³²⁸ Jack Mezirow, ‘A Critical Theory of Adult Learning and Education’, *Adult Education*, vol. 32, no.1, 1981, 9; Mezirow, *Transformative Dimensions*, 169-185; Fowler, *Stages of Faith*, 98-114

³²⁹ Mezirow, *Critical Theory*, 3-5.

³³⁰ Mezirow, *Critical Theory*, 5-9

³³¹ Mezirow, *Transformative Dimensions*, 152-153

³³² Mezirow, *Transformative Dimensions*, 68, 162

3.4 Freire's Conscientisation Process

For Freire, conscientisation was “...the process in which men[sic], not as recipients but as knowing subjects, achieve a developed self-awareness of the sociocultural reality which shapes people's lives and their capacity to transform that reality...” through their reflective actions upon it.³³³ The genius that lay behind Freire's method was his combination of several simple but time consuming factors. Firstly, utilising the power of dialogue³³⁴ within small groups of farmers known as *Culture Circles*,³³⁵ he unearthed the peasants' “...knowledge of living experience,”³³⁶ from which he then collaboratively, with the peasant farmers, developed their capacity to formulate a written vocabulary.³³⁷ He accomplished this by deliberately discarding the traditional roles of teacher as *subject-expert* and students as *objects-recipients*, and entered into a dialectical and dialogical partnership of “...teacher-student with students-teachers”, becoming “...one who is himself taught in dialogue with the students, who in turn while being taught also teach.”³³⁸ Shor picks up on this graphically in a Western classroom situation, describing it as “...initiated and directed by a critical teacher but is democratically open to student intervention.”³³⁹

Secondly, with great insight he drew out their capacity to distinguish between ‘nature’ and ‘culture’; in other words, between *who they were* as humans and *what they did* as farmers; allowing them to identify their legitimate place, value, and roles in the world.³⁴⁰ Finally, he coupled this with his skill to ‘problematise’, or create dissonance, between their *taken-for-granted* assumptions about themselves and their situation, and the *actual reality* of their subjugation that had been reinforced by the hegemonic socialisation of their cultural situation.

There is a wonderful exchange in which he shares an ‘*ah-ha*’ moment within a culture circle, when as good Catholics believing their lot to be the will of God for them, they suddenly

³³³ Freire, *Cultural Action*, 51, n2

³³⁴ Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 60-63

³³⁵ Freire, *Education – The Practice of Freedom*, 42-43; A ‘culture circle’ was a group of peasant farmers with which he and his colleagues worked, through dialogue and group debate, to develop a vocabulary based on their own experiences of farming the land. He helped them realize that they already had unique knowledge which he did not have even though they had received no formal education as he had.

³³⁶ Freire, *Pedagogy of Hope*, 58

³³⁷ Freire, *Education – The Practice of Freedom*, 41-58

³³⁸ Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 60-61; Mayo, *Liberating Praxis*, 51

³³⁹ Ira Shor, *Empowering Change – Critical Teaching for Social Change* (Chicago & London: The University of Chicago Press, 1992), 1-5, 85-87; Shor coauthored with Freire, *A Pedagogy for Liberation: Dialogues on transforming education* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood, Bergin-Garvey, 1987)

³⁴⁰ Freire, *Education – The Practice of Freedom*, 46-49

realised it was not God's will at all, rather it was the boss's will that they believed and behaved that way.³⁴¹ This was the beginnings of the liberation that Freire sought in "...helping the learners arrive at an increasingly critical view of their reality," which gave them the knowledge to begin to transform that reality.³⁴² Freire's grand vision was for a utopian society in which the 'liberated-oppressed' worked *with* their 'oppressors' so that they too became 'liberated' from their *taken-for-granted* notions of privilege and right to rule the masses. He writes, "This, then, is the great humanistic and historical task of the oppressed: to liberate themselves and their oppressors as well."³⁴³

But Freire recognised that this kind of liberation would only spring from the ranks of the oppressed, since the oppressors were unlikely to relinquish their power and control over a system that kept them in power. Further, he saw the necessity and the power of love to be the motivating principle behind liberation, otherwise the 'liberators' simply become the new 'dominators' – a phenomenon actually revealed in virtually *all* purely political conquests. With prophetic insight Freire writes, "Only power that springs from the weakness of the oppressed will be sufficiently strong to free both."³⁴⁴ He describes the emergence of this utopian society as a *new man* – "...the humanisation of all men...in the process of achieving freedom",³⁴⁵ a remarkable commentary on the power and purpose of the incarnation of Christ, even if using a somewhat different vocabulary.

Summarising, in Freire's mind, conscientisation amounted to the development of language and understanding in order to expose illiterate peasants to the injustices of a hegemonic social structure that was designed to keep them in ignorance and subjugation. In order to do this, he entered into *their world* in order to open up a *new world* of accurate understanding to them, which, when explored, freed them from false taken-for-granted cognitive assumptions about their place and purpose in the world, giving them the knowledge to transform the reality that they had previously believed to be their inevitable lot in life.

³⁴¹ Freire, *Pedagogy of Hope*, 44-49

³⁴² Freire, *Cultural Action for Freedom*, 36

³⁴³ Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 21

³⁴⁴ Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 21

³⁴⁵ Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 21-25

3.5 A Synthesis of Mezirow and Freire

Firstly, both Mezirow and Freire engage with the necessity of *making meaning* in their approaches to adult education, both also coming from the perspective that making meaning, or grasping reality, is a uniquely human quest. This human quest involves the process of accurately interpreting the *real meaning* behind our life-experiences, and where necessary, exposing and debunking false meanings and their limitations.

Mezirow expressed this as identifying possible false, inaccurate, or distorted internalised cultural assumptions, and/or unresolved childhood psychological dilemmas, that have become taken-for-granted assumptions; or in other words, unchanging laws of personal and social life. The identification of false assumptions can occur through the processes of *critical reflection*, usually stimulated by some form of crisis, followed by *critical dialogue* with others of good will, which can finally result in *changed reflective actions*. Similarly, Freire explained the process as one in which people, not as recipients but as knowing subjects, achieve a *developed self-awareness* of the sociocultural reality which shapes people's lives and their capacity to transform that reality through their *reflective actions* upon it. He endeavoured to specifically raise the consciousness of the peasants' naivety regarding the reality of their situation – the *real meaning* of the inherent deception and deliberate subjugation behind a corrupt and hegemonic social system in which they were submerged and accepted as taken-for-granted. So, even though their social agendas were quite different, Mezirow and Freire both agree that any transformative change must begin in the hearts and minds of individuals before genuine social reform can be sustained.

Secondly, both educators see the place of *conflict*, or *crisis*, but see its application somewhat differently, again because of their relevant contexts. Mezirow noted that in each case of his interviewees, some form of *external crisis* was the catalyst for retraining. However, it was not until the *internal crisis* of *premise reflection* was fulfilled that genuine perspective transformation was achieved. Freire, on the other hand, saw the need for a perspective transformation in his illiterate students, and utilised the facility of small-group dialogue to create the dissonance for *internal crisis*, instigating a perspective transformation or shift in their worldview.

Thirdly, both Mezirow and Freire also include the concept of *dialectical tensions* between competing factors that require a dynamic solution in order to bring about resolutions that

result in perspective transformations within individuals and societies. This becomes the creative process that has the potential to transform conflicted *either-or* situations into collaborative *both-and* possibilities through the methodology of *intentional communal dialogue*.

So, the three broad areas of agreement between Mezirow and Freire consist of firstly, the need to challenge existing taken-for-granted assumptions about self, the world, and life-roles, through critical reflection, in order to discover the real meaning of our experiences and our place in the world. Secondly, some form of personal conflict, whether internal or external, is usually required in order to provoke the necessary critical reflection that is needed to affect transformative learning. And thirdly, the dialectical nature of the tensions within social relationships that are best negotiated through dialogical methods in order to arrive at transformed perspectives that are mutually beneficial.

Mezirow and Freire have much to offer Christian education and spiritual formation, but limited to the parameters of the cognitive arena. Mezirow's development of a theory of perspective transformation is very useful in relation to the *task* elements of *spiritual formation* and resultant ongoing *adult spiritual transformation*, as it applies to the cognitive elements of 'renewing the mind', utilising his concepts of 'content' and 'premise' reflections on taken-for-granted cultural and psychological assumptions. This provides a solid theoretical base from which to make practical applications in everyday life. But, of course, it lacks the inherent capacity to initiate a regenerative relationship with the transcendent God, and nor does he claim that it could.

By contrast, Freire clearly did have personal faith in God,³⁴⁶ but he did not appear to have emphasised this in his educational approach with the Brazilian peasants. Consequently his 'conscientisation' process, while incredibly successful at the cognitive and political levels, does not appear to have developed their *faith* in God, leaving them politically aware but

³⁴⁶ Freire once said in an interview in Australia, "I never understood how to reconcile fellowship with Christ with the exploitation of other human beings, or to reconcile a love for Christ with racial, gender and class discrimination. By the same token, I could never reconcile the Left's liberating discourse with the Left's discriminatory practice along the lines of race, gender, and class. What a shocking contradiction: to be at the same time a leftist and a racist." In, Paulo Freire & Donaldo P. Macedo, *Letters to Cristina: reflections on my life and work*. (New York: Routledge, 1996) , 86-87; see also, Peter Mayo, *Liberating Praxis – Paulo Freire's Legacy for Radical Education and Politics* (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger Publishers, 2004), 58

socially conflicted, as missiologist Chris Sugden points out.³⁴⁷ Freire provides us with a very effective dialogical methodology which clearly helps create the dissonance needed to expose any problematic taken-for-granted assumptions that hinder growth and forward movement in individuals. But his utopian dream requires the impartation of a *regenerational* and *incarnational love* beyond human capacity alone, which he himself apparently understood, but in endeavouring to inculcate it through purely educational means, seems to have missed the opportunity for sustainable spiritual and social revolution.

3.6 Recent Developments in Adult Education

A more recent development in the field of adult education is the concept of *Community of Inquiry*, or what Mezirow calls “...a community of the interested.”³⁴⁸ Garrison, Anderson and Archer suggest that the intersection of three fundamental elements; a *social presence*, a *cognitive presence*, and a *teacher presence*; are necessary for a genuine “...educational experience,” to be created.³⁴⁹ In their diagram below (Fig. 2), the intersections of these three ‘presences’ also involve the ‘processes’ of selecting content for discussion, setting the learning climate, and supporting the necessary discourse.

³⁴⁷ See study done by missiologist Chris Sugden, in ‘Jesus Christ – Saviour and Liberator’, in Bruce J. Nicholls & Beulah R. Wood, (Eds.) *Sharing the Good News with the Poor – A Reader for Concerned Christians* (Carlisle, Cumbria, UK: Paternoster Press & Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1996), 86-94

³⁴⁸ Mezirow, *Transformative Dimensions*, 77

³⁴⁹ D. Randy Garrison, Terry Anderson, and Walter Archer, “Critical Inquiry in a Text-Based Environment: Computer Conferencing in Higher Education,” *The Internet and Higher Education*, 2(2-3, 2000), 87-105

Community of Inquiry

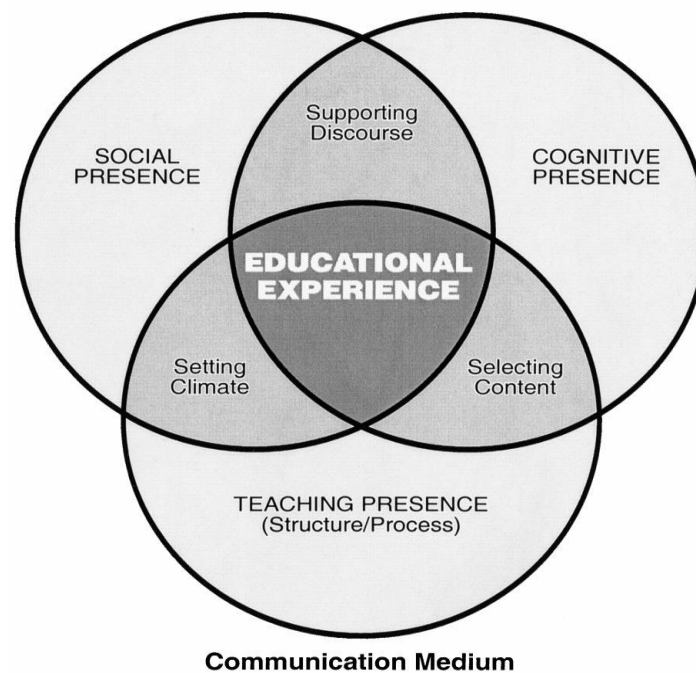


Figure 2: Community of Inquiry

While their particular concern is creating a learning environment in an online computer conferencing context, the principles they are utilising are true for any adult educational experience. These *presences*, and their derivative *processes*, are dialectical in nature, in that they creatively interact on each other, informing and shaping each other in the process of the educational experience. *Selecting the content* involves both the empowering leadership of the teacher presence to provide suitable texts to engage with, and the cognitive presence of willing learners to dialogue. *Setting the learning environment* again involves the empowering leadership of the teacher within the social relationship of the group, and the whole group's willingness to learn together and from each other. *Supporting the necessary discourse* requires the whole group, teacher and students, to engage in dialogue within the framework that the texts provide, reflecting and respecting each learner's varying perspectives based on personal experiences, out of which the educational experiences emerge. I will show that these insights are congruent with the findings of my research in Chapter Five.

3.7 Common Threads between Practical Theology and Adult Education

There has been a long historical connection between theology and education. However, since the radical shift in academic and public thinking, catalysed by the Enlightenment and

augmented by the accelerating growth in status of the natural sciences, several uneasy alliances have developed. These relate to the different purposes and divergent views of transformation that are extant between contemporary Adult Education and Biblical Theology.³⁵⁰ These difficulties need to be explored, exposed and resolved if the common threads between them are to be profitably utilised in the ministry of adult spiritual transformation.

The common threads running through the emerging discipline of Practical Theology, influenced by liberation theologies, and Adult Education, drawing on Marxian influenced sociology, are the twin concepts of *praxis* and *dialectics*. I will endeavour to show how and why this has occurred, and what their significance is to my thesis. Adult educators have seized on these concepts as a way of understanding the dynamic of the relationship between teacher and adult learners. For the English speaking world, a likely connection with the concept of praxis came through the move of the Marxist *Frankfurt school* to New York's Columbia University, as a result of Nazi opposition in Germany just prior to the outbreak of World War II.³⁵¹ As mentioned, Mezirow was once Professor of Adult and Continuing Education at Teacher's College, Columbia University, and Freire was deeply influenced by Liberation Theology in his homeland of Brazil. But they are by no means alone in this interest in praxis and dialectics in the field of adult education.

Dialogic teaching expresses the educational dynamic "...where teaching and learning are integrated..."³⁵² It is based on the premise of Freire's *problem-posing* by the teacher who then invites the learners to engage with him/her in a process of *problem-solving*, involving dialogue, reflection, group discussion, interaction with texts, writing, and integration "...that assumes the unique profile of the teachers, students, subject matter, and the setting it belongs to."³⁵³ "Dialogic teachers are concerned with the constant dialectic interplay between how learners construe (or interpret) events and ideas and how they construct (build or assemble)

³⁵⁰ Nicola Slee, 'Endeavours in a Theology of Adult Education: A Theologian Reflects', in *Adult Education and Theological Interpretations*, eds, Peter Jarvis & Nicolas Walters (Malabar, Florida: Krieger Publishing, 1993), 329-337

³⁵¹ Ritzer, *Sociological Theory*, 207

³⁵² Jane Vella, *Taking Learning to Task – Creative Strategies for Teaching Adults* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2001), xiv; Vella dedicated this book to the memory of Paulo Freire

³⁵³ Ira Shor, *Empowering Education – Critical Teaching for Social Change* (Chicago & London: The University of Chicago Press, 1992), 37-39, 237; Shor was an associate of and co-author with Freire.

structures of meaning.”³⁵⁴ Theologically, this is a specific reflection of our creation in “...the image of the dialogic God,”³⁵⁵ being evident when Yahweh confronted the rebellion of Israel through Isaiah, saying, “Come now, let us *reason together*....”³⁵⁶ The Hebrew word, *yâkach*, means arguing or debating one’s rightness;³⁵⁷ the Septuagint uses *dielegchthomen*, the sense being, ‘let us dialogue together over this’,³⁵⁸ revealing the inherent conversational relationality within the nature of our loving and just triune God. Vella sums up dialogic teaching by saying, “This is...praxis at its best...where learners examine, question, refute if they have the means, and make it theirs through a real struggle.”³⁵⁹ This process is at the heart of both Mezirow’s and the Freirean models of adult education.³⁶⁰

As mentioned in Chapter Two, this understanding of praxis and dialectics is Aristotelian, pre-dating Marx by almost two millennia. However, neither Aristotle nor Marx was coming from a biblical perspective, so while it may be understandable that adult educators see a way forward here, is the confidence that contemporary practical theologians are placing in these two concepts warranted? Do they truly fit within the biblical imperative that calls for spiritual transformation? Gutierrez defines theology as “...a critical reflection on praxis that drives toward liberation of the world.”³⁶¹ However, Braaten challenges “...the use of Marx, his critical theory of society, and the way in which theology is related to praxis,” when he asks the critical question: “What determines the meaning of Christian praxis: the gospel or ideology?”³⁶²

The slogans of Marx and Marxism are very attractive because they demand a union of critical theory and liberating praxis, and on the surface appear to show a way forward. However,

³⁵⁴ Gravett, S. & Henning, E. ‘Teaching as a Dialogic Medium – Learning Centered View of Higher Education.’ *South African Journal of Higher Education*, Spring, 1998; Cited by Vella, *Taking Learning to Task*, 42

³⁵⁵ Brueggemann, *Mandate to Difference*, 73-74

³⁵⁶ Is 1:18

³⁵⁷ William Gesenius, *Gesenius’ Hebrew-Chaldee Lexicon to the Old Testament* (trans. S. P. Tregelles, Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1979), 347-348

³⁵⁸ Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (trans. William F. Arndt & F. Wilbur Gingrich, 2nd ed., (Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 194

³⁵⁹ Vella, *Taking Learning to Task*, 44

³⁶⁰ Mezirow, *Transformative Dimensions*, 10-12; Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 61

³⁶¹ Cited by Carl E. Braaten, *The Apostolic Imperative – Nature and Aim of the Church’s Mission and Ministry* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1985), 92

³⁶² Braaten, *The Apostolic Imperative*, 95

Braaten asserts that Liberation Theology “...is not sufficiently critical in its adoption of the critical theory of praxis that stems from Marxism.”³⁶³ He explains,

“The neo-Marxist critical theory of praxis claims to have gotten rid of an a priori ideal image of human being which calls for implementation in real action. The traditional sequence has placed *being* before *action*, *theory* prior to *praxis*, *faith* ahead of *works*, etc. The critical theory of praxis reverses the order. Praxis is given precedence over any theory that is based on a positive image taken from a theology or philosophy of history. A prior positive definition of the nature and destiny of human being is dismissed by the critical theory of praxis.”³⁶⁴

The fallacy in this approach lies in the fact that the critical theory of praxis assumes that it is right to change the world. However, since it has dismissed any a priori ideal; for example, the kingdom of God, or the image of God in humanity; it has no basis upon which to build its better world. Can a positive answer to the question, why change the world, be deduced by, “...a rational empirical scientific analysis of the negative conditions of life in the concrete present?” Surely this “...presupposes a fundamental commitment to freedom as a positive ideal with prior ontological validity...the essence of human being.”³⁶⁵ This prior commitment to freedom is found in the heart of the trinitarian God of grace and within his redeeming, reconciling, and transforming kingdom rule. Braaten concludes by saying,

“Christian theology must spell out its case clearly against the Marxist notion of the priority of praxis. The first point is that within the structure of Christian theology, the kerygma about Jesus and the kingdom of God is the prius of every transformative praxis. Freedom is primarily a function of eschatological hope grounded in the future of divine promise. Praxis is a second step. The burning bush comes before the parting of the Red Sea. Theology must be true to the divine indicative before it gives expression to any human imperative. Otherwise we are

³⁶³ Braaten, *The Apostolic Imperative*, 97

³⁶⁴ Braaten, *The Apostolic Imperative*, 99; see also, Mechthild Hart & Deborah Holton, ‘Beyond God the Father and Mother: Adult Education and Spirituality,’ in *Adult Education and Theological Interpretations*, eds., Peter Jarvis & Nicholas Walters (Malabar, Florida: Krieger Publishing, 1993), 238

³⁶⁵ Braaten, *The Apostolic Imperative*, 99-100

faced with a legalisation of the Christian faith, whereby the kingdom of God generates no gospel, but only the new law of transformative praxis.”³⁶⁶

Braaten’s understanding of the *indicative-imperative* dialectic is the key to appreciating the need for priority going to the instigating pole of the divine indicative to which, by grace, we are called to respond through the human imperative in the power of the Spirit.

Marx once said, “The philosophers have only *interpreted* the world, in various ways; the point however is to *change* it.”³⁶⁷ Groome astutely paraphrases this to say, “...the task of Christian theology is not simply to interpret the world but to empower Christians to participate in changing it.”³⁶⁸ This provides an excellent foundation for the theological and educational roles of praxis and dialectics in developing the ministry of adult spiritual transformation which we will explore further.

Chapter 4: Research Methodology and Findings

4.1 Introduction

The primary focus of this empirical research relates to discovering and interpreting what is happening transformationally within the lives of individual Christians as a result of the leadership provided, the vision and strategies employed, and the responses elicited from such individuals in their local congregations. Inherent within this research are the interviews with the senior leaders involving their own formative journeys and the transformational effects of those journeys on their personal lives, and the impact of their transitions into pastoral ministry, including transformations they have experienced since entering those ministries. Therefore, the personal stories of people’s experiences and reflections relating to their responses to the Gospel, coupled with their reflections on the formative strategies employed in any previous churches as well as their current church involvement, and the transformative effects in their lives, will be researched.

³⁶⁶ Braaten, *The Apostolic Imperative*, 105

³⁶⁷ Ritzer, *Sociological Theory*, 22

³⁶⁸ Thomas M. Groome, ‘Theology on our Feet,’ in Lewis S. Mudge & James N. Poling, eds, *Formation and Reflection – The Promise of Practical Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2009), 63

4.2 Methodology

Since this is a project of discovery and interpretation within the realms of the personal experiences of particular individuals encountering God, and their participation within the settings of specific church congregations, I will show that a qualitative methodology of research is more appropriate than the traditional empirical methods in this context.

Swinton and Mowat, among others, succinctly overview the differences between the *nomothetic* or regulated knowledge that the scientific world of empirical evidence requires, and the *ideographic* or intuitive knowledge relevant to determining such human experiences as love, joy, hope and faith.³⁶⁹ These two realms of knowledge are intrinsic to the fundamental differences between quantitative and qualitative research, because of the different types of learning and resultant communication that each depends on; the difference between *explanation* and *understanding*.³⁷⁰ Habermas, philosopher and social theorist, describes these differences as ‘instrumental learning,’ the dynamics of leaning to control the environment, and ‘communicative learning,’ the dynamics of learning to understand others.³⁷¹ Access to the facts of peoples’ lives “...is provided by the understanding of meaning, not observation.”³⁷² In other words, as van Manen puts it, “...the objects and events of nature are explained by objective observation, controlled experimentation, and quantitative analysis; but the human person requires description, interpretation, self-reflection, and critical analysis.”³⁷³

Qualitative research is pragmatic, interpretive, and grounded in the lived experiences of people, as living human documents,³⁷⁴ using multiple methods for exploring the topic of interest. Although the *material realm* might best be studied by the use of quantifying procedures and statistical estimates, the *realm of meaning* is best captured through the qualitative nuances of its expression in ordinary language.³⁷⁵ From this overview of different

³⁶⁹ John Swinton and Harriet Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research* (London: SCM Press, 2006), 40-43

³⁷⁰ Cited by Max van Manen, *Researching Lived Experience – Human Science for an Action Sensitive Pedagogy* (Albany, New York: SUNY, 1990), 4; Dilthey made this specific differentiation

³⁷¹ Cited by Mezirow, *Transformative Dimensions*, 64, 72-80

³⁷² Mezirow, *Transformative Dimensions*, 86; citing Habermas

³⁷³ van Manen, *Researching Lived Experience*, 4

³⁷⁴ Anton T. Boisen, *Out of the Depths: An Autobiographical Study of Mental Disorder and Religious Experience* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1960); cited by Lewis R. Rambo, *Understanding Religious Conversion* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1993), xiv

³⁷⁵ Catherine Marshall & Gretchen B. Rossman, *Designing Qualitative Research*, 3rd ed (Thousand Oaks London New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1999), 2; Donald E. Polkinghorne, *Narrative Knowing and the Human Sciences* (Albany, New York: SUNY Press, 1988), 10

end-goals, and different modes of communication, it becomes apparent that the qualitative approach is the more appropriate to this research project, since it explores and utilises the meanings that interviewees attach to their experiences in their ordinary language.

4.2.1 Grounded Theory

In conjunction with the qualitative methodology I will employ a Grounded Theory approach to this research. There is a natural congruence between qualitative research and Grounded Theory since both originated from sociological studies spawned in the hotbed of Chicago during the 1930's. Grounded Theory can be defined as,

“...a detailed grounding by systematically and intensively analysing data, that has been gathered and analysed through the research process, whether sentence by sentence, or phrase by phrase, of the...interview...; and by constant comparison data are extensively collected and coded, thus producing a well constructed theory.”³⁷⁶

Resultantly, it should offer insights, enhance understanding, and provide a meaningful guide to action, and a sense of vision of where it is that I as an analyst want to go with the research.³⁷⁷

The benefit of Grounded Theory for this project lies in its inherent strength of allowing a theory to *emerge* from the collected data, rather than trying to prove an existing theory.³⁷⁸ Charmaz³⁷⁹ recommends four requirements necessary to establish sufficient evaluating criteria for valid grounded research: Credibility – has the researcher achieved intimate familiarity with the setting or topic, and provided enough evidence for his/her claims to allow the reader to form an independent assessment? Originality – does the work challenge, extend, or refine current ideas, concepts, and practices? Resonance – do the analytic interpretations make sense to the interviewees and offer deeper insights about them and their worlds? Usefulness – Does the analysis offer interpretations that people can use in their everyday worlds? The application of these criteria ensures the methodological validity of any theory

³⁷⁶ Anselm L. Strauss, *Qualitative Analysis for Social Scientists* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 22-23

³⁷⁷ Anselm Strauss & Juliet Corbin, *Basics of Qualitative Research – Techniques and Procedures for Developing Grounded Theory*, 2nd ed (Thousand Oaks, London & Delhi: Sage Publications, 1998), 8-12

³⁷⁸ Mezirow, *Transformative Dimensions of Adult Learning*, 86, 168-169; out of his ‘grounded study’ emerged his Transformative Theory of Adult Learning.

³⁷⁹ Charmaz, ‘Grounded Theory in the 21st Century’, 528

that aims to describe the process of transformation in individual's lives through their own stories.

Rather than depending on leaders' espoused intentions or expectations, I have endeavoured to uncover what the critical factors are from the stories of these groups of people, which will shape the applications that will inform a Christian andragogical ministry of adult spiritual transformation.³⁸⁰

4.2.2 Narrative Research

Since a primary source of information, from both senior leaders and congregants, will be via personal interviews, Narrative Research will also be utilised. The purpose of this approach is to access each person's own *lived-experience*, as authentic sources of insights into the transformative experiences they have had. Polkinghorne refers to this as "...narrative knowing,"³⁸¹ while Freire refers to it as "...the knowledge of living experience."³⁸² Polkinghorne asserts that 'narrative' is "...the primary form by which human experience is made meaningful."³⁸³ Narrative meaning is a cognitive process that organises human experiences into temporally meaningful episodes; and experience, as meaningful and human behaviour, is generated from and informed by this meaningfulness. The realm of meaning, as we understand it, is unique to human existence and experience and is directly related to the human capacity to develop intelligent language and communication skills.³⁸⁴ Strauss and Corbin comment further, "Humans the world over cannot avoid giving explanations for events and happenings. The desire for understanding is universal, although the explanations may differ by person, time, or perspective."³⁸⁵

Because this is a cognitive process it is not open to direct observation, but the individual stories and histories that emerge in the creation of human narratives are available for direct observation and interpretation. Van Manen adds, "All human science has a narrative quality (rather than an abstracting quantitative character). And the story form has become a popular

³⁸⁰ Anselm Strauss & Juliet Corbin, *Basics of Qualitative Research - Techniques and Procedures for Developing Grounded Theory*. 2nd ed (Thousand Oaks London New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1998)

³⁸¹ Polkinghorne, *Narrative Knowing and the Human Sciences*, 107-113

³⁸² Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of Hope* (Translated by Robert R. Barr; New York: Continuum Publishing, 1994), 58

³⁸³ Polkinghorne, *Narrative Knowing*, 1

³⁸⁴ Polkinghorne, *Narrative Knowing*, 6-7

³⁸⁵ Strauss & Corbin, *Basics of Qualitative Research*, 123

method for presenting aspects of qualitative or human science research.”³⁸⁶ Therefore, narrative research shares a “...fundamental epistemological or methodological feature with phenomenological human science which also operates in the tension between particularity and universality,”³⁸⁷ and its inherent meaning is “...created by noting that something is *part* of some whole and that something is the *cause* of something else.”³⁸⁸ Consequently, “...lived experience is the breathing of meaning...” in a dialectical movement, which Gadamer calls the “...hermeneutical circle,”³⁸⁹ that operates between the inner subjective perception and the outer objective worldly event. We can only fully understand this ‘circle’ in reflective retrospect, and can only adequately communicate through language, by which we can bring lived experience into a symbolic form that creates by its discursive nature a conversational relation.³⁹⁰

Initially, descriptive narratives will be sought from the participants, but in the analysis of those interviews, explanatory narratives will be drawn, from which a well grounded conclusion, corroborated by a coherent and compelling narrative, will be sought.³⁹¹

4.3 Structure of the Research

In considering the best way to gather the information required, it was decided interviewing each senior minister would be the necessary starting point in order to gain their involvement, followed by a church wide survey into each congregation inviting the self-selection of approximately four further volunteer interviewees from each congregation.

The original intention was to research five local churches within the Ringwood area of Melbourne’s outer east and accordingly the five senior ministers were approached, with all agreeing to freely participate within the project. At the next phase of the project, where congregants from each church were invited to self-select for interview, one of the congregations was unable to provide any interviewees. Accordingly, I was compelled to reduce the number of participating churches to four, but fortunately this has proved to not be detrimental to the project, due to the diversity of the remaining four congregations. Each of

³⁸⁶ van Manen, *Researching Lived Experience*, 115

³⁸⁷ van Manen, *Researching Lived Experience*, 120

³⁸⁸ Polkinghorne, *Narrative Knowing*, 6

³⁸⁹ Cited by Swinton & Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research*, 110-113

³⁹⁰ van Manen, *Researching Lived Experience*, 36, 111

³⁹¹ Polkinghorne, *Narrative Knowing*, 161-174

these churches have a common espoused and publicised commitment to the advancement of Christian maturation and missional expression, yet they have significantly different ministry philosophies, organisational cultures, operational methodologies, denominational affiliations, and are at different stages of organisational development.

4.3.1 Initial Approaches

Initial contact was made with each senior minister by telephone, introducing myself and my research objectives. Having determined their interest, I made an appointment to meet them personally to better outline the nature and purpose of the research and what it would involve for them. I concluded those appointments with an invitation for them to consider their personal and the church congregation's voluntary involvement in the process, and requested any relevant documentation outlining their church's vision and educational opportunities. I also gave them an official 'Letter of Invitation'³⁹² for discussion with their leadership team, and copies of the Research Information Sheet³⁹³, the congregational survey hand-out³⁹⁴, and the suggested personal interview questions.³⁹⁵ I indicated that I would ring back within a week or two to confirm their involvement and arrange to go through the minister's interview questions with them,³⁹⁶ and organise the distribution and collection details for the congregational survey sheets.

4.3.2 Minister's Interviews and Congregational Surveys

Each senior minister was asked to provide any documentation referring to vision, purpose, and Christian education or discipleship training opportunities prior to being interviewed. They were interviewed to discuss their philosophical, theological, strategic, and methodological assumptions and approaches to the biblical imperative of adult spiritual transformation. The Research Information Sheet that was distributed with each congregation's weekly newsletter briefly explained the nature of my involvement with the congregation, acknowledging their minister's approval, and inviting their cooperation in filling out the congregation survey form on the flipside. With the agreement of the ministers, these surveys were collected over a number of weeks at the church office of each

³⁹² See Appendix No. 1

³⁹³ See Appendix No. 3

³⁹⁴ See Appendix No. 4

³⁹⁵ See Appendix No. 6

³⁹⁶ See Appendix No. 2

congregation, from where I collected them. The last question of the survey solicited their voluntary willingness to engage with me in an hour-long personal and confidential interview, with the self-selection criteria of being over the age of eighteen years, a long-term congregant in good standing, and genuinely representative of the congregation.

4.3.3 Data Collection

The congregational survey forms provided basic information regarding potential interviewees' experiences relating to the biblical imperative of spiritual transformation, from which individuals were invited to volunteer for personal interviews. Those volunteering provided their name and telephone number in the space below the relevant question, returning it to the Church Office. I was guided by the ministers' concerns regarding any applicants that they did not believe to be genuinely representative of the congregation. Also, interviewees were notified of counsellors who would be available to them should the need arise, as a result of the interview process.

Apart from using the survey as a means to access possible self-selecting interviewees, and screen those who self-selected for suitability, congregants' responses to the survey were also used to inform possible adjustments to the interview questions. Five individuals were ultimately selected from three congregations and six from the other as sample participants for the personal, semi-structured interviews. Prior to interviewing, I explained the need and purpose of the consent form,³⁹⁷ and secured their consent and signature. They were then invited through open-ended questions to share their peak transformational experiences, and to discuss any spiritual disciplines and discipleship programs they may have found helpful. Some of the interviews involved married couples, allowing me to have two interviews simultaneously, which usually provided deeper insights and greater interaction within the interview process. This compensated for those lost through the non-participation of the one congregation, still producing twenty-five interviewees in total, including the four senior ministers. The relatively small numbers from each congregation, now averaging just over six, allowed time to gather sufficiently "...rich and thick descriptions of real experiences, emotions, and outcomes;"³⁹⁸ the necessary material for effective coding and analysis, yet

³⁹⁷ See Appendix No. 5

³⁹⁸ van Manen, *Researching Lived Experience*, 51-53

keeping the number sufficient “...to saturate descriptive and explanatory categories.”³⁹⁹ The interviews were digitally recorded for later transcription and reviewing, and brief field-notes were taken.

4.3.4 Analysis, Coding, and Storage

Once the interviews were completed and all data gathered, I used the data analysis tool N-Vivo 8 to distil themes and associations within the stories shared, and coded these for their interconnections and relationships, where any existed. This analysis allowed me firstly to develop what are known as *parent* or *generative* headings; these are major headings such as ‘background details’, ‘conversion story’, ‘church’, ‘discipleship’, ‘leadership’, etcetera. From these parent headings arose numerous secondary or *child* themes relating to the generative themes. For example, under ‘church’ were things such as ‘church culture’, ‘church doctrine’, ‘church involvement’, ‘church practice’, ‘church strategies’, ‘church structures’, etc. In some cases there were a number of subsequent *grandchild* themes. For example, under ‘leadership’ came ‘leadership development’ among several other items, and under ‘leadership development’ went ‘leadership recognition’, ‘leadership training’, ‘leadership opportunities’, etcetera. In summary, a simple process of semi-structured and open-ended personal interviews, followed by transcription, coding, analysis, and interpretation has been utilised. Other than on initial surveys returned by interviewees, all personal identities have remained confidential, with the exception of the senior leaders, who agreed that their biographical outlines and church names could be used. All electronic data was kept under secure password, and all hard copy kept in a locked filing cabinet.

4.4 A Brief Overview of the Four Participating Churches

Each of these local churches has their own unique stories, expressions, and place within the urban landscape of Ringwood. Similarly, each of the senior ministers has their own story of finding faith and discovering their call to pastoral ministry and leadership, and the challenges of living out that calling in the specific contexts of their own leadership teams and local congregations. Each has given permission for their stories to be mentioned, and their churches to be named. They are listed alphabetically.

³⁹⁹ Mark J. Cartledge, *Practical Theology – Charismatic and Empirical Perspectives* (Carlisle, Cumbria, UK: Paternoster Press, 2003), 73

4.4.1 New Community Ringwood

New Community Ringwood is a Baptist church plant of seven years standing. It is led by the church-planting minister and wife, and the team they have built around themselves. The passion of this church is to see people coming to faith and giving rise to kingdom values being experienced within the community of faith, and expressed missionally within the larger society. The team leader admits he has been on a journey. Having completed a Master of Divinity in the U.S.A., he served several years in young adult and outreach ministry in a large suburban church in Melbourne, which produced a steady but small amount of missional fruit. However, his growing frustrations led him to progressively pursue a number of questions: ‘What exactly is the gospel of the kingdom that Jesus preached?’ ‘How best do we connect with our local culture?’ ‘How do we actually see Christ formed in people?’ ‘How do we mobilize people towards mission?’ ‘What does it look like to demonstrate the kingdom of God together?’ His fundamental conclusions were to identify kingdom values and to model kingdom practices.

He expresses his primary role as mobilising people toward living out God’s kingdom by teaching and modelling the practices that help people understand and experience prayer and spiritual formation. In turn, this enables those people to continually develop missional conversations that evidence a dynamic of community care and evangelism. He sees spiritual maturity being expressed through the character qualities of Jesus in believers.

4.4.2 North Ringwood Uniting

North Ringwood Uniting is a well established traditional church with a blend of contemporary worship. They also have a very strong Christian Education emphasis and missional outreach into the local community and beyond. The senior minister has a Doctor of Ministry from Fuller Seminary, California, which focused on faith development in the context of the various developmental life-stages, particularly in relation to men, which is evidenced in his ministry philosophy and practice. As a child, he experienced a miracle of God’s providential protection, being very ill and initially misdiagnosed, leaving the doctor baffled over a prolonged period. He explains,

“When he went out to his car, he had his hand on the car door handle and he said he heard a voice, and the voice said, ‘open him up now!’ He ran back inside and I was bundled up into his car and taken to the Children’s Hospital and opened up, on the spot. It was the appendix and it was going to burst within hours. So I grew up knowing this story of what was the voice that this doctor heard; and I’ve always believed that was the voice of God.”

It was evident in his voice that this had made a deep and transformative impression.

He describes maturity in his congregants as, “...when theory translates into action.” He says further, “I think a person becomes mature when they can look beyond themselves, when they think..., feel..., and act beyond themselves; because the opposite is all about oneself.” This congregation give missional expression to their faith through a variety of ways both locally and globally. They run a Care Ministry five days a week, which includes a Food Bank, a Referral Service offering financial counselling, free dental care, and pharmaceutical supplies; a Kids Hope program in the local Primary School; a Breakfast Program in a Secondary School; and a Community Garden Scheme. Globally, they have built a vocational training centre in Naodaol, Zambia; started a drop-in centre for street children in Cambodia, with 70-90 children now in fulltime education; and funded the education and community work of a nurse on Thai/Myanmar border working with Karen refugees.

4.4.3 Ringwood Church of Christ

Ringwood Church of Christ is the oldest of these four churches, very well established, and also with a contemporary feel to worship and ambiance. They too have a strong congregational involvement in the local community through youth ministry and a variety of missional activities. The team leader was raised in a nominally Christian home without any real encounter with God through his Word. Having drifted into a life of experimentation with drugs while at university, it was the consistent witness of a number of university friends who were committed Christians that finally provoked him to purchase a Bible and read it from cover to cover. During this process he says, “By the time I actually got to the end of that, I knew that my life was actually about choice.”

He was trained through the Churches of Christ Theological College in Melbourne, involving practical ministry appointments at several suburban churches over three years, and then in his final year, served as a 'student minister' at Ringwood, before taking up his current post there eighteen years ago. He sees pastoral leadership as "...an interesting balance between church direction, formation and mentoring of others, and leadership formation." So it is a complex picture of what is happening for people, what is happening for himself, and what is happening in the life of the church.

In terms of defining congregational maturity he says, "I can't go too far from the fruits of the Spirit as described by Paul, and probably the heartland of First Corinthians is not a bad grasp of the KPI's for Christian character." They give missional expression to their faith into the local community through an active youth ministry involved in discipleship training and short-term mission trips; Kids Hope and chaplaincy in a local primary school; a weekly soup-kitchen operating mid-week from their premises feeding approximately sixty people; a Community Op Shop operating two days per week; and also a variety of courses covering life-skills issues such as marriage enrichment, practical Christian living, and character development.

4.4.4 Urban Life

Urban Life is a well established Pentecostal church under the denominational banner of the Christian Revival Crusade. Resulting from a bold vision to completely reconfigure and relocate, they now function out of downtown Ringwood, creating a more authentically prophetic voice with greater missional penetration into the local community, rather than be marooned on a large property with multiple facilities on its outskirts.

The senior minister of Urban Life is the only woman among the leaders of the churches I researched. She grew up in a strong, but non-Christian home, finding Christ as a sixteen year old, and almost immediately having a strong sense of call to fulltime ministry in leadership. Given her young age, this did not take place for quite a few years. After her schooling and higher education she rose to the position of National Accounts Manager in the Australian head office of an international company. It was in that context that she again sensed the call to fulltime ministry. It came in the form of an associate pastoral role in the church in which she found faith, which was nurtured through a deep mentoring relationship between the senior

minister and his wife with she and her husband. Regarding the significance of that relationship she says, “...they invited us into their lives; and so we shared many late nights around the meal table...they invited us into their family.” In time, it was recognised that she was called to take on the mantle of senior leadership. The previous senior leader is still part of the leadership team, but no longer on staff. She received her formal theological training through Tabor College, and Forge Victoria.

They have discovered the social underbelly of the Ringwood-Croydon area of outer eastern Melbourne, ministering through a fully functioning Café in downtown Ringwood with childminding and play facilities; participate in a community soup-kitchen; provide support groups for single mothers and other underprivileged people; and participate in community based projects of various kinds. They also give missional expression into Cambodia every year where they take a team that does eye cataract surgery; have established a micro-business project there; oversee the training of a team of midwives; and work with the Cambodian government for better living conditions.

4.5 Overview of Findings from the Interview Materials

The twenty-five interviewees yielded varying degrees of detailed stories, impressions, and reflections on transformational experiences at different points on their Christian journeys. Some had grown up in Christian families and had found faith early in life; others had drunk at the wells of unregenerate living before coming to faith. The age range of this cohort was between mid-twenties through early eighties, with the preponderance around the late-thirties to mid-fifties, and a gender spread of fourteen men and eleven women.

As previously mentioned, initial analysis of the interview materials garnered seventeen *parent* or *generative* headings, from which a further 178 *child* headings and thirty-eight *grandchild* headings were gleaned; in all amounting to 233 headings. Further intensive and reflective analysis produced forty-four *substantive responses* from which ultimately emerged the *six transformational themes*. These six emergent transformational themes are: Personal Bible Engagement; Small Group Interaction; Empowering Leadership; Missional Expressions; Conversational Prayer; and Holy Spirit Encounters.

The following page, in three columns, shows the ultimate transitions from the seventeen generative headings to the forty-four substantive responses to the final six emergent themes.

17 GENERATIVE HEADINGS

44 SUBSTANTIVE RESPONSES

SIX EMERGENT TRANSFORMATIONAL THEMES

	Individual & grouped Bible engagement	
	Group Bible engagement	
	Bible engagement in camp settings	
	Journaling as part of personal engagement	Personal Bible Engagement
	Transformation of perspectives through Bible	
	Transformation in ministry focus through Bible	
	Relationality & informality in small groups	
	Need empowering leadership in small groups	
	Meals as a strategy through small groups	Small Group Interaction
	Questions, dialogue & challenge in small groups	
	Bible study in small groups	
	Accountability in small groups	
	Leaders identifying and expressing core biblical values	
	Leaders identifying biblical practices that inculcate values	
Asking the hard questions	Leaders who consistently model what they preach	
Background details	Leaders modeling kingdom living through relationships	
Bible	Leaders competent in vision-casting and direction	
Church	Leaders competent teachers of the Word	Empowering Leadership
Conversion stories	Leaders recognising and releasing the gifts of others	
Crises	Leaders must be well trained	
Dialectics	Leaders competent in the gifts of the Spirit	
Education	Leaders producing long-term fruit in lives of others	
Holy Spirit	Leaders need self-awareness and staff weaknesses	
Leadership		
Mission	Missional community work	
Praxis	Short-term mission trips	Missional Expressions
Small Groups	Street witness, drama, coffee shops, schools	
Spiritual disciplines	Beach missions	
Spiritual formation		
Strategies for transformation	Daily prayer	
Transformational experiences	Praying in tongues	
	Praying while driving	
	Corporate prayer	Conversational Prayer
	Silent prayer	
	Praying together as a couple	
	Praying for the salvation of a friend, relative, colleague	
	Praying when there is a particular issue	
	Intercessory prayer	
	Gifts of the Spirit	
	Power of God's presence	
	Speaking in Tongues	
	Inner healing and release	Holy Spirit Encounters
	Revelation and direction	
	Intimacy with God in prayer, worship, and daily living	
	Hunger for God's Word	
	Some reticence on part of church leadership	

Figure 3: Flowchart from Generative Headings to Emergent Themes

4.6 The Six Emergent Transformational Themes

The data gathered and analysed have yielded rich insights into these people's Christian journeys and the transformative impact that they have had on their lives. I will endeavour to show that these six categories are necessarily dialectically interrelated with each other, creating the dynamic required for God's transformative purpose, or praxis, to be realised through them. The following is an examination of each of the six grounded findings from these twenty-five Christians, including the four senior leaders, participating in four quite different local churches, which will be further examined in the following chapter in the light of the theological truth and adult educational principles that we have already engaged with in chapters two and three.

4.6.1. Personal Bible Engagement

One of several things that caught my attention during the interview process, prior to commencing formal analysis, was the number of times people mentioned the impact that reading the Bible had on them, in some cases, directly bringing them to faith in Christ.

Of the twenty-five interviewees, twenty-two commented that personal Bible engagement, which included both individuals and groups, had in some way been spiritually transformational in their faith journey, and was strongly emphasised by most. Several comments, in response to questioning about what effect reading the Bible had had, bear this out: "Often we would read alone and then get together and just talk about it and share. So that was really, really powerful." Another man, who had been a committed atheist, said: "I started reading the Bible. I started with Matthew and I read through to the end of the New Testament, and then I started at Genesis and I read through to the end of Malachi. I had just such a hunger to read God's Word." An older lady, having been a 'nominal' Christian for many years, reported: "And in reading that Bible, it was like my eyes were opened to what was in the Scriptures. I suddenly realised Jesus...it was not a religion, it was a personal relationship, and that he had died for me." A young lady enthused: "It was just really exciting. We would read the Bible and then we would talk about it and go, this means this to me, and what does it mean to you? I read this, and did you read that, and in the process I got to know the Bible really well." The joy of discovery and the impact of divine truth expressed by these congregants bespeak a transformational power inherent in God's word as they

personally engaged with it. People reported numbers of different ways in which they would personally engage with the Bible, whether reading devotionally or studying it more intensely; individually or corporately. Devotional reading included the discipline of journaling for some, introducing the notion of personal reflection and application. More intense Bible study took the form of study groups in homes, or specific instructional classes as part of the local church program. Others enrolled in Bible Colleges, ‘just to gain more knowledge.’

Two other significant areas through which personal Bible engagement impacted seven participants were transformation of personal perspectives, and transformation of ministry focus. Two senior leaders made specific comments regarding the way reading the Bible transformed their understanding of the gospel, and biblical ministry:

“I began to read just the parables, and all of a sudden discovered that Jesus was talking about a kingdom Gospel...we’ve actually only got half of the Gospel. We’ve had one that said more about what we’ve been *saved from* rather than what we’ve been *saved for*. So this Gospel of what we’ve been *saved for*...that’s actually the predominance of Jesus’ message.”

The other explained:

“I remember reading the story of the woman whose son died; the widow woman in Luke...it says that his heart broke for this widow woman. And I realized in reading this story that my heart had never really broken for somebody else...and something broke; finally something broke for me; and it was around caring enough.”

Another participant spoke of transformational ‘insights’ of receiving direction through God’s word. It reveals the dialectical tensions inherent within the process of *both* reading the Bible *and* hearing from God through the Bible: “I read the Bible and it’s the instruction book, and I’ve really got to use that; is this the right thing? And you’ve got the Spirit side of it when you’re asking for a more individual personal thing, and you’re asking for something and waiting for an answer; so I can see the value in both of those sides.” Interviewer: “One’s subjective and the other’s objective?” “Yes, you’ve got this hard copy thing and the other one’s a bit more intangible and they work together.”

What is evident from each of these excerpts is that personally engaging with the Bible as God's Word can and does have significant transforming power in peoples' lives, bearing out the understanding that the "...word of God is alive and powerful."⁴⁰⁰ This is what it means to personally engage with the Bible, the word of God. It's not just about doing a Bible study, or regularly reading the Bible; ticking the religious boxes. Rather, it is about encountering the person of Jesus Christ through the words of the Bible; allowing his grace and passion to grip one's heart and mind as the Holy Spirit causes the words to come alive.

4.6.2 Small Group Interaction

With only three less people mentioning small group involvement as a transformative factor in their Christian experience (nineteen of twenty-five interviewees), this ranked as a very significant part of the mosaic of their journey. This also correlates with the sixteen respondents who rated 'group engagement' with the Bible a transformative factor in their spiritual journeys.

The primary elements surrounding small group involvement, arising out of the interview materials, included relationality, informality, and acceptance, often over a meal, with opportunities for questions, dialogue, and challenge as part of the process. This required an atmosphere conducive to open discussion, with the freedom to safely disagree, or respectfully challenge the views of others. The need for effective leadership was mentioned by ten interviewees, and the types of groups included discipleship, support, Bible study, and accountability groups.

One interviewee commented about an earlier group she was part of, highlighting the impact on her journey of consistently meeting together in a small group environment that was well led and centred around God's word:

"I had two fantastic years of meeting with a group of young people every Sunday night...a Bible study group. He (the minister) was magnificent in going into God's Word... So that was a really rich discipling ground, and there was just a group of fifteen of us."

⁴⁰⁰ Heb 3:7-11; 5:14; 9:8; 10:15

The same woman spoke about the transformative elements of her current small group: “What helps make a great home group? When a group of people who are particularly honest and open and transparent, come together and earnestly seeking to pray for one another and support each other in their life-journey; that is a gift!”

Another man, responding to a question regarding transformative effects of meeting regularly in a small group, said: “There have been moments, I think. The good thing is we discuss the practical principles; and then it has a daily life application.” And his wife added, “I enjoy the discussion, and it’s good to know that people are struggling with the same issues that you’re struggling with; that’s really good.” I will discuss in far greater detail the importance of dialogue and the opportunity to wrestle both individually and corporately with life-issues in the light of Scripture in the next chapter.

Another significant element relating to involvement in small groups, mentioned by eight participants, was the opportunity for questions, dialogue, and challenge. A senior leader made this telling observation in response to a challenging situation: “So something had to force the question before we are prepared to look for the answers.” A young mother recalls the transformational impact of searching and challenging questions:

“One of the most pivotal times for me was when I was a young adult...you’re searching deep questions and you’re admitting things to a group of people that you have to build up a level of trust with. That couple...weren’t afraid to speak some truth...that really challenged how I spoke, how I treated my parents, and how I live life just with some real core character things....it was confronting.”

One younger interviewee commented about her need for dialogue within a small group context in order to maintain ongoing transformation in her daily living: “But in terms of wrestling with theological concepts and ideas, and who God is, and what he’s doing...what the direction of my life is, these days has to be worked out in dialogue with people who I trust.” Another young man referred to transformation in his thinking instigated through discussions in the small group he attends: “We spent a month talking about God is green...that has probably changed my view on...how we treat the environment...about the kingdom and transforming for good...” Different again, another young adult commented: “Sometimes we have really good discussions, and other times everyone just sits around and it’s just a

comprehension question, and we really can't be bothered doing that." The point being that comprehension alone does not produce transformation. Unless there is genuine interactive engagement that leads to actual dialogue, there will be no challenge to existing mindsets; no development in thinking; no broadening of perspectives; no opportunity for the Holy Spirit to bring conviction and enlightenment, and consequently, no movement towards transformation.

There also appears to be a significant relationship between the first two emergent transformational themes of personal Bible engagement and small group interaction. The confluence of these two elements was highlighted in comments made by participants regarding the transformative effects of both shared meals and church camps. We will summarise these comments and then draw some possible conclusions regarding their apparent effectiveness.

Nine participants mentioned the relational openness that was fostered over a meal when approached as an integral part of Christian living, creating transformative opportunities in their lives. A young man reflected on his introduction to his small group: "They were the most hospitable people. We...ate together you know for an hour...so in terms of it being a great relational, pastoral care sort of environment...it was fantastic." Another young lady related the impact of being invited to a small group that finally led to her rediscovering her faith:

"...my sister started going to this new church in Ringwood and they would have this meeting...they would start with having the small group around for dinner, and I really liked the people that were going to that small group... And then I guess gradually I realized that there was a bit of a gap missing there and I wasn't very happy, so I ended up going one night."

A meal, shared by friends around either a family or restaurant table, is by definition, a small group. Both Urban Life and New Community Ringwood have a definite strategy that involves meals as a specific means of creating opportunities for discussion and sharing life at a deeper more intimate level, thereby intentionally giving space for transformative moments to occur. Possibly stemming from her own experiences being mentored by her previous senior Pastor over many evening meals, the senior leader of Urban Life comments: "The

other type of small group we run is *Get Togethers*, or G.T.'s, which are just a shared meal. They're just so life giving and natural with who we are as a people." She explains the strategy behind these meals: "I got sick of seeing small groups where people were happy to preach at each other...but they didn't really enter each others' lives. Now it's a common thing; I don't drive that, but hospitality has really become a high value amongst us, and having people in our homes." This is supported by a comment from her about a couple who were recent additions to their church: "And they said, 'Look we've been Christians for twenty years, and we've eaten in more people's homes in the last three months than we have in the last twenty years.'"

Another participant explains how their small group developed out of a relationship with a friend of a friend, who was dating a non-Christian man. Over a cup of coffee, the young man's comment about his recent visits to church was, "This is what church is meant to be like! If I'm going to explore Christianity this is the place to do it." From that very relational beginning, a small group started. The group leader explains:

"It was built around his journey and also he and his girlfriend not being connected anywhere. We eat together once a fortnight – a huge meal, red wine, and at some point the conversation turns to spiritual matters... We'll put the coffee on and actually study the Bible together and then have dessert and a laugh and pray for each other."

Camps were also mentioned by thirteen interviewees as having had transformational impact in their lives. One older participant referred to this by saying:

"I think for me growing up, Christian camps were absolutely a key. It's community – it's everybody under the same roof for seven days, and so your relationships get a whole lot deeper. ...and people get the opportunity to express themselves about their faith journey in an authentic sort of way, and that impacts on people."

Notice the emphases on community, deeper relationships, dialogical expression, and authenticity; the things that *impact* on people. These get to the core of what is needed to make life real.

One of the senior leaders revealed: “I think my real conversion with Jesus was experienced on a two week camp down at Phillip Island....moving my faith in Him from the head to the heart.” Another older interviewee explained a perspective transformation that he experienced:

“I thought I understood what repentance was, but I think I learned on that camp that repentance was more than this intellectual, ‘Look God, I’m sorry for my sins;’ but that we are sinful people. God is holy, sin is evil. I was experiencing the strong conviction of the Holy Spirit with regard to sin, for possibly the first time. That was formative for me.”

So what is it about the ‘camp environment’ that makes them so effective? As one interviewee, a children’s worker, said: “...you have a kid on a camp; you get more opportunity to put into their lives than teaching them CRE for a year.” The ambient elements that apply in the typical church camp environment would be:

People are more informal in camp-mode, so are more relaxed;

They are living in close proximity with others over a short but intensive time period, so it is highly relational;

They are sharing life over meals where conversation flows easily and relationships are strengthened; and,

Campers often reflect, over meals or on walks, on what has been taught during some consolidated teaching time, listening to and discussing relevant truths from the Word of God as it relates to their lives.

These are the elements of life around which real interactive and dialogic learning takes place; in other words, it creates an excellent learning environment, and significantly, these are some of the basics of adult education.⁴⁰¹

The same can be said about shared meals as a specific strategy outside of the camp setting of which nine interviewees spoke. Many of the ambient elements inherent in camp settings also exist around the meal table, with the exception of extended time. The capacity for intelligent

⁴⁰¹ Malcolm Knowles, ‘Contributions from Adult Education,’ in *Adult Learner - A Neglected Species* (Gulf Publishing, 1984), 43-63

speech and our need for community are expressions of the image of God in humanity.⁴⁰² The dialogical nature of conversational communication is embedded within the DNA of the kingdom of God, and when these gifts are fully utilised in the pursuit of his glory; the replication of the image of Christ within us; his transforming life and power inherent within his Word and Spirit “...is at work within us.”⁴⁰³

It is not just about religiously reading one’s Bible, as important as that is, but as we personally wrestle with the text, allowing God’s word to challenge us deeply through the convicting agency of the Holy Spirit, and combining that with lively dialogue with others who are also actively and personally engaging with Scriptures; perhaps also utilising an ‘engagement tool’ like journaling; these people discovered that their spiritual lives were becoming energised and transformed.

4.6.3 Empowering Leadership

Interestingly, while ranked third with seventeen responses, this theme had by far the most nuances, creating eleven of the forty-four substantive responses, on what empowering leadership should look like, and how it should function. Based on the interview materials I am defining ‘empowering leadership’ as a quality of leadership displayed by the senior leader and his/her leadership team. The primary elements of this quality of leadership that have emerged from this research are the ability to identify and express their core biblical values; the practices that support and inculcate those values; and an authentic modelling of Christlike characteristics within their own lives. Coupled with this are the capacities to effectively cast God’s vision for the church to the congregation, competently teaching them the principles of God’s word in such a way that inspire long-term fruit in the lives of the congregants, and recognising and releasing the ministry gifts within the lives of the congregants in missionally effective ways.

The senior leaders had their own thoughts on these issues, but each outworks them in different ways, and is supported by their congregants at varying levels. From what I have been able to glean, Urban Life and New Community have done the most work on these areas,

⁴⁰² Wolfhart Pannenberg, *What is Man? Contemporary Anthropology in Theological Perspective*, trans. Duane A. Priebe (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1970), 14-27; Grenz, *The Social God and the Relational Self*, 192-204; Grenz gives a thorough overview of the various interpretations of the *imago dei*; Karl Barth, *The Doctrine of the Word of God*, I, 1 (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1949), 273

⁴⁰³ Eph 3:14-20; Phil 2:12-13; 3:20-21

in terms of articulating their mission and strategies to their congregants. New Community express their ministry philosophy a little more succinctly, but Urban Life seems to have secured greater buy-in from their congregation. North Ringwood Uniting have a clearly articulated philosophy of ministry, with very good volunteer support, but perhaps not quite as much philosophical congruence internally, and Ringwood Church of Christ take a very broad, inclusive approach, encompassing a variety of perspectives, and have some great programs that connect well with the community, but perhaps unintentionally have created more of a silo mentality within each perspective.

The two major elements that emerged under this transformative theme were: identifying and expressing core biblical values, and identifying and clarifying biblical practices that support and inculcate those biblical values. The point here is to discover any connections between leadership vision and values, and the degree of empowerment resulting within the congregants. For ease of understanding what the connections might be, we will look at them together, congregation by congregation, alphabetically, encompassing both the senior leaders' journeys and the congregational responses.

4.6.3.i *New Community Ringwood*

Deep questions had begun to arise about the relative ineffectiveness of traditional church practices, which led to further questions of what the gospel that Jesus preached really was, and questions regarding the real purpose of the church. The senior leader's theological framework began to shift when he saw from studying Jesus' parables of the kingdom, through personal Bible engagement, that Jesus' call was to live within his kingdom and demonstrate it on earth.

"I found that my training and understanding of the theological framework of *kingdom* had been very limited. So that revelation forced me to go again at the understanding of *gospel*...there's this hunch that we've actually only had half of the Gospel...what we've been *saved from* rather than what we've been *saved for*."

This theological shift is outworked through being formed by a new understanding from Scripture of life in God's kingdom, and then modelling Jesus' kingdom values in his own life, becomes integral to empowering his ministry of leadership within the congregation. This, in turn, empowers other believers, new and old, to be formed by Jesus' kingdom values through

various biblical spiritual disciplines developed within corporate accountability structures that become a way of life. At the same time, this ‘kingdom way of life’ encourages the demonstration of the missional expression of kingdom values within the broader society in ways that invite missional conversations and build redemptive relationships. So, in regard to *identifying and clarifying biblical practices that support and inculcate the biblical values*, he says: “My role is to model things through the practices of how do we go about helping people understand prayer, and spiritual formation, and teaching along that context. So...key areas here for us: first ask the question; how does formation really happen.”

In light of this, and as an expression of empowering leadership, they have developed a very specific strategy which they call their “Way of Life – a framework for sustaining a life that conforms to the way of Jesus.” It is built around four elements: Immerse – we will consistently immerse ourselves in the Scriptures and in prayer; Share – we will share our lives generously with others; Act – we will act to transform our world for good; and Rest – we will make regular times of rest a pattern in our lives. They hold each other accountable to this ‘way of life’ by asking each other in what ways they have expressed these commitments throughout the week in their small group meetings.

A young woman spoke of the training she had received at New Community: “He’s (the pastor) really big on learning how to communicate your story with people who don’t know Jesus. It’s been really challenging...there’s always been something on communicating your story.” A young man shared on the methodology this senior pastor uses to develop his younger leaders; another expression of empowering leadership: “...we just sat around tables; we had cake and coffee, and discussed things...there weren’t really any big formulas or any issues like that; a part of it was an encouragement to do life with people.” His comment about the effectiveness of that approach is revealing: “Yeah, that move from me knowing it here (the head)...but you’ve got to move it from there (the head) actually to here (the heart) to make it happen and come out.” And finally, a young dad commented on the benefits of empowering leadership at the small group level: “There’s an enormous amount of value I think in home groups when they’re well led.”

4.6.3.ii North Ringwood Uniting

The senior leader here approaches his ministry from a life-stage developmental perspective, drawing on author/thinkers such as Levinson, Fowler, and Clinton, to develop his “...framework thinking.” He does not directly spell out his *core biblical values*, but they are implied within what he sees as his primary purposes. He expresses them this way:

“I think there are three things: its falls to me to be the vision-caster, to cast *the vision* – to paint the picture of God’s preferred future for us. ...to speak *the culture* – the how I do what I do, how I speak, and how I act towards the other is culture forming. The third key role is the role of *empowerment* – empowering people into their gifts of ministry. I do a lot of work in that area in terms of education, teaching and the like.”

Referring to Levinson’s work,⁴⁰⁴ he explains how he applies biblical practices that support and inculcate the biblical values:

“Males by and large, after the initial flame of expectation for life in their 20’s and 30’s, the flame starts to die, and for many they simply drift to the end. So, how do we promote ongoing maturity? We need to provide missional opportunities; ...then people start to ask the theological question...they pursue deeper insight...until the questions form, they won’t ask. So we’ve started a school of ministry.”

He summarises his approach by saying, “I teach my model of the human person and how the gospel meets us, as well as our vision and values. So I just teach my theology.” The outworking of this philosophy of ministry is reflected in the comment made regarding one of the ‘mission teams’ returning back home: “They were confronted with extreme poverty that’s unsettled a lot of them. So now they’re asking different questions about their lifestyle; that’s transformative.” This level of impact expresses an empowering quality of the leadership in firstly, creating the opportunities for teams to go, and secondly, in inspiring congregants to take a step of faith. The School of Ministry has also proven to be an example of empowering leadership in that it has provoked many searching questions that instigate research for answers. As one congregant said, “Some of the short course ones have been really good because they’ve...achieved something, and I’ve come away really inspired, and so then it’s

⁴⁰⁴ Daniel J. Levinson, *The Seasons of a Man’s Life* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1978)

had that change.” They provide some well developed courses: *Belonging* – a new member’s class; *God’s Positioning System* – a ministry shaping course; *Leadership Development* classes around the concepts of Vision, Vocation, Vitality, and Values; along with a number of other courses relating to biblical studies and character development.

4.6.3.iii *Ringwood Church of Christ*

The team leader explains the inclusive perspectives that this congregation encompasses:

“There’s a spread from people who are not looking for the Holy Spirit to overwhelm them at the drop of a hat, because justice issues are very important to them. And we have people who are much more charismatically attuned...they all somehow manage to survive together.”

His pastoral gifting in ministry comes through clearly as he shares his heart for his people:

“...the pastoral work that I would practice...finding out the practical issues – if they don’t have food; maybe they have stress at home; they’ve got parenting or family issues... But the other part is that you actually hear the resident spiritual season in someone’s life.”

So the *core biblical values*, while not specifically spelled out, apart from the fruit of the Spirit being developed in congregant’s lives, revolve around the practical and spiritual needs of the people, both inside and outside the church, being pastorally and missionally met.

Following on, the *biblical practices that support and inculcate the biblical values* become the applying of whatever ministry opportunities are suitable to meet those needs. These involve specialised prayer ministry; a number of proven and freely available courses dealing with emotional and spiritual development, marriage enrichment, and family relationships, delivered via DVD; and several effective missional outreaches into the local community and the Philippines. The re-visioned and re-formatted youth ministry is a great example of the intentional application of *biblical practices* in order to achieve genuine discipleship.

4.6.3.iv *Urban Life*

The senior leader sees her primary role, with her team, as building an environment in which people can encounter the personal God and discover a set of kingdom values that can be lived

out, which reflect the DNA of Jesus' gospel. Accordingly, the leadership team have developed a clear ministry philosophy around these kingdom values, and practical strategies to implement their ideas; but they didn't come easily:

“...we really thrashed through what our values were, and what we wanted them to be, and what we would love people to experience...about two years ago I said to my guys, so how do we live these? What do they look like? How does this get converted into what we do?”

The picture here is that of a leadership team wrestling with the need to clearly understand and articulate their biblical purpose, and having done that, to then endeavour to empower the congregation to engage with it and learn to faithfully express it. They have identified their core biblical values as: “Spirituality – live our lives listening to God to become more like Him;” “Community – live our lives in meaningful connected relationships;” and “Mission - live our lives as sent into the world by God.”

In an effort to measure the evidences of their espoused *core values* in their lives, they have developed what they call their *core practices*, which support their primary focus of missional living, and bring a degree of accountability to the process. Her comment on this process: “We reflected on our values, which said that if we want to be able to measure these in our lives, what would these look like? And can I say that was one of the most difficult, challenging things because it's so confronting.”

The name given to this developmental measuring tool is Exemplar – employing the inherent analogy of ‘map making.’ Its key objective is: “...to create an environment in which practices and attitudes can be formed that will help you participate as a missionary in your world.” The format of Exemplar is a year-long commitment of weekly involvement, consisting of alternating whole-of-group ‘learning evenings’, and individual/couple ‘coaching evenings.’ The learning evenings are structured around action-reflection, involving questions to be wrestled with in the context of group participation; the coaching evenings revolving around a shared meal with an assigned coaching couple who help the individual/couple wrestle with all that God is challenging them about in their journey, and inviting each other to participate in their missional spaces. Within the coaching relationship there are specified readings to reflect on, personal devotional journals to be written, missional practice questions to be discussed,

and missional projects to be developed and fulfilled. The expected outcomes are: that each will have a clear definition of their missional context; and that each will have developed the framework and the practices that will make their action as a missionary an active, continuous part of their ongoing life.

Other activities within the life of the church include: *Life Groups* – weekly gatherings of small groups in homes for prayer, encouragement from the Bible, and personal support; *Get Togethers*, or G.T.'s – a weekly shared meal for social interaction; *Community involvement* of various kinds generating missional expressions; and a *Sunday gathering* for corporate worship, preaching, and encouragement. Each of these activities is intentionally structured to *support and inculcate the biblical values* and drive the overall objective of encountering Christ daily, and developing mature and missional followers of Jesus. Each of these is an expression of empowering leadership since they create opportunities for growth, development, and spiritual transformation.

Inherent within this emergent transformational theme of Empowering Leadership was the recognition that what is preached and demonstrated in attitude and actions has a direct influence on whether the biblical imperative of transformation is occurring in congregant's lives. Here are some reflections from interviewees on the impact of empowering leadership in their experiences.

One of the senior leaders' overheard an interesting comment in their church foyer: "I was talking to a group of adults, and a child tripped over behind me on the floor, or something, and started whimpering. I stopped my conversation with the adults and turned around picked up the child and comforted her until the mother came. I overheard the whisper, 'He's just lived out what he preaches.'" He told of another recent occurrence, in response to the question, "How would you describe transformation taking place within a congregant's life?" to which he gave the immediate answer, "When theory translates into action;" to which he then added: "I was preaching...about values, and one of the guys...said, 'I was going to buy myself another Alfa Romeo. I can't do it now in light of what you said this morning, I've got to give the money away.' That's transformation!"

Another participant commented about the transformative effect that a previous senior pastor had on his thinking through his example of personal interest: "He took me on a holiday with

his boys at one point for a weekend away; and around at his house, hanging out and shooting hoops. That was pivotal in my faith in that I saw someone, who I saw as a man of God, who had integrity and he had time...he was a picture of Jesus to me.” A young woman similarly reflected on the challenge to her thinking and resultant change in her behaviours because of the example and input of her group leaders: “The main thing I learnt in that specific discipleship thing was the characteristics of Jesus, and of God, and of being a Christian. I think it’s just that they accepted us; they loved us; they were still willing to tell us things and give us some values.” And another young lady: “It was partly to do with how good the leaders were...had great relationships with us...and offered the freedom and trust to ask anything.”

The inter-relatedness between these first three emergent transformational themes of biblical engagement, small group interaction, and empowering leadership are evident, particularly where there are well-developed ministry philosophies, and corresponding core practices.

4.6.4 Missional Expressions

Missional expressions universally involve opportunities through personal relationships, mediated both from those relationships, and/or for those relationships; some can spontaneously arise and they can also be intentionally developed. The opportunities that these interviewees developed ranged from cultivating relationships within one’s broader family, or in the workplace and local neighbourhood, to community work, such as soup-kitchens, backyard blitzes, and community clean-ups in schools or parks. Other connections were created through involvement in support groups, such as helping young mothers, or recovering substance abusers, etcetera. Another intentional experience mentioned was short-term mission trips, which frequently confronted and exposed, often for the first time, the materialistic and self-centredness of Western culture in paradigm-shifting ways. Other specific missional opportunities were provided through schools ministry, street dramas, and beach missions. There were seventeen respondees within this emergent transformational theme, the same number of respondees for empowering leadership, the differences being the eleven substantive responses supporting empowering leadership, and the four supporting the missional expressions theme. Community work in its various forms ranked highest with ten respondees under missional expressions.

One senior leader explains their church's rationale: "So, finding an area that is missional in its context, everything we do in that we badge as missional. So all of our practical hospitality work; it's not about 'four spiritual laws' spirituality; it's about relational integrity, and then building a context of how we do it." Another senior leader shared how God opened her eyes to the real needs in an affluent city, exemplified by the need for a community soup-kitchen: "I was really cynical about it because, I was like...you live in the Eastern suburbs, in one of the wealthiest cities in the world; who's going to come to your soup-kitchen? I remember I was shocked when I found...a family who were living out of a car. And from there we just went looking." Another of the male participants explained the impact on his own life as he struggled to understand what expressing the kingdom of God meant for him: "The concept of the kingdom of God has been something that I have been wrestling with for maybe a couple of years. It has led me to do things like...the soup-kitchen in Croydon...just my outlook of being a missionary in the workplace...has been a big transformation."

There were nine respondees who either experienced personally or saw the impact of short-term mission trips on others. The team leader at Ringwood Church of Christ explains part of their thinking behind preparing and sending people on short-term mission trips: "The last trip had two to three months of quite intensive discipleship training, planning, and reflection around it. ...if there's no engagement there is not much reason to grow. If there are no goals set, usually people just atrophy and puddle around, so it is a major thing..."

This is a major key that each of the senior leaders seem to understand: "...if there's no engagement there is not much reason to grow. If there are no goals set, usually people just atrophy and puddle around..." A young woman expressed the significant impact that these short-term mission trips had on her and others who went with her:

"Exposure to a developing country is always transformative for your faith; especially a faith community in that context; and transformative, not just for me, but me in relationship to that group of people, and has had a flow-on effect to how we actually partner this church with that church. A whole lot of things shift; your whole world view; to head into the slums in Manila. That's fairly confronting."

A young man related the impact that a short-term mission trip had on his life:

“I spent five weeks smuggling Bibles into China and doing tract distribution inside China. I certainly found a worldview that for me made sense; it was actually about risk, mission, camaraderie; it struck a chord with me and put legs on my faith.”

We have already mentioned the impact of short-term mission trips on the congregation at North Ringwood Uniting: “We just had a team come back from Zambia. They were confronted with poverty, extreme poverty, that’s unsettled a lot of them. So now they’re asking different questions about their lifestyle; that’s transformative.”

A further nine people found missional expression through beach missions, discovering them also to be spiritually transformative. A young woman shared the challenge she faced in sharing her faith publically and the decision it finally caused her to make for personal missional action:

“I started doing beach missions... That was quite scary for me because it was very overtly saying to the world, look here I am; I’m doing this. And I also came to the conclusion that...if I wasn’t prepared to go and do it kind of on my own street corner...would I be prepared to do it anywhere else?”

Another young woman reflected back on the impact of being involved with beach missions with her family:

“I remember I grew up on beach missions every year down at Wilson’s Prom. And I remember just seeing the passion that they had and the fun they were having and thinking I really want that in my life. That impacted me a lot, I think.”

A middle-aged lady recalled the transformative impact of doing street-drama as part of an outreach team: “...a really rich discipling ground...a group of fifteen...we’d go into the country and do street drama and that... It was a really accelerated, saturated experience.”

Summarising, it is apparent from these people’s stories, and also from the biblical accounts of Jesus’ disciples, both pre and post the cross, that missional expressions under the direction of the Holy Spirit, have powerfully transformative effects in both the doer and the recipient. For

several, they were also connected with insights from personal Bible engagement, and/or the influence of empowering leadership.

4.6.5 Conversational Prayer

Prayer, including personal devotional prayer, corporate prayer meetings, spiritual warfare, praying in tongues, and praying in various situations, was responded to by sixteen of the twenty-five interviewees. Although it does not fit every situation, I have named this emergent theme *conversational prayer* because that was the kind of prayer that most seemed to be expressing. Some spoke of “talking with God and God talking back,” or “conversations with God,” or “God talking a lot” when unable to get to sleep. Another phrase was “sentence prayers,” or the thought, “How do you expect to have a relationship with God if you’re not talking to Him?” Interestingly, most expressed a level of dissatisfaction with the quality of their prayer experiences, and a degree of ambivalence about the frequency and consistency of their praying.

One person expressed a range of thoughts, feelings and experiences surrounding her praying, from the transformative to the very mundane:

“I have had moments of really emotional kind of prayer, and prayer with other people that I think has really changed stuff. Every day I pray...like in the morning I have a little prayer time. And then...throughout the day...just that sort of sentence prayers. My prayer is probably based on...that sort of ACTS acrostic stuff.”⁴⁰⁵

Another lady mentioned the pressures of being a mother and the premium on her time that that creates. Her solution was a very practical one: “...and driving the car, particularly after I’ve dropped the kids off, and then driving to work. I have great conversations with God and some ideas come in and also late at night if I can’t sleep. He’ll talk to me a lot then because there’s nowhere I can go.” Two young ladies shared regarding their experiences; one finding a more dynamic sense of God at work in people’s lives through group prayer; the other confiding her preference for a more contemplative approach to having time with God: “There have been definitely experiences in small group prayer that have been really powerful. And I think you...catch that vision, and their transformational, because you remember the

⁴⁰⁵ The ACTS acrostic stands for Adoration; Confession; Thanksgiving; and Supplication

motivation of it all... So that's been powerful." And the other: "So things like prayer, fasting, and other areas of contemplation – I actually find a more contemplative approach works for me. I'm quite happy to spiritually retreat and spend some significant time doing that."

An older lady spoke of her passion for corporate prayer: "I love corporate prayer; we don't have enough of it. I think that corporate prayer has a power that we underestimate and ignore... I think that prayer meetings are important." While a younger person talked with excitement about praying and reading the Bible together with another close friend: "There was one person that I was particularly close to and we used to meet often and pray and read the Bible. It was just really exciting."

Two young mothers told of different transformative spiritual warfare experiences they were involved in; transformative both for them as pray-ers, and also for the recipients of the prayers. The first involved both she and her husband while praying for a young lady who had been involved in the occult and had tried to kill herself because she was hearing voices telling her to do so:

"But we were praying with her and she was starting to get very agitated and she started saying things like, 'No, no, he's getting really mad, he's getting really mad, you'd better stop, you'd better stop.' And I was saying, 'God, this is the rubber hits the road time.' So we just kept praying and eventually she settled down. Some days later...We went and knocked on her door and she was there, and she was good; her mother came to the door and she said, 'I don't know what happened but I've got my old Amanda back;' and you could see in her eyes that she had a light, and it was like, wow!"

The second involved a frightening but powerful experience, when working at a Christian summer camp in the USA as a tennis coach, which left a lasting impression on her:

"And there was this one particular time...when this girl was shrieking, and they couldn't stop her from shrieking, and the leader of the camp got a bunch of us together to sit down in an area away from her and just pray. And I've never felt God's presence as strongly as what I did that time, and I think that the power of

God that day...really stuck with me... She stopped! She was only maybe seven or eight..., there was a real spiritual battle going on... I'd never experienced anything quite like that before."

Finally, a middle aged woman spoke in tones of reverent awe as she expressed her deep appreciation for the power of intercessory prayer as she looked back over the transformations that had taken place in her and her husband's lives through the intervening years:

"She was an old dear that used to be a missionary in Egypt during the war. And I'm convinced that we are where we are because she was an intercessor extraordinaire. I could see she had a depth of faith that I didn't have and I wanted to know the secret. This is at the stage when I didn't have a personal relationship with Jesus."

In summary, prayer is different things to different people, and for some, it can be different things at different times for the same people; as these interviewee's stories reveal. Prayer can be mountain-top-type experiences sometimes, but most of the time it is simply talking with God. However, as some of these responses point out, prayer that is experienced as transformative is not necessarily as easily explained.

4.6.6 Holy Spirit Encounters

The final emergent transformational theme, with fourteen respondents, was the supernatural realm of the Holy Spirit's ministry and influence in the lives of these believers. These encounters encompass arenas including the gifts of the Spirit; the awareness of God's presence; intimacy with God in prayer and worship; praying in tongues; psychological healing; etcetera. Of significant interest, both mentioned and implied, was the influence of the so called Charismatic Renewal in each of the participating congregations, although not all would necessarily see themselves as 'charismatic' in the classical sense.

The element of greatest mention, with twelve respondees, was the gifts of the Holy Spirit, acknowledged by varying responses from all four congregations. A woman commented on her experiences at a previous traditional church, which highlights the various perspectives

regarding the ministry of the Holy Spirit, his outworking in the different experiences of different people, and the tensions it can create if not handled wisely by leaders:

“The question was raised with our minister...does it come at conversion or is it a separate experience, and he really was of the opinion that it...didn’t need the separate experience...and neither of us had had a separate experience yet we were experiencing gifts of the Holy Spirit...God gave me words of knowledge for people and I’d act on those; so that was a really exciting time.”

Another important element mentioned was that of the presence and power of the Holy Spirit. A middle aged man describes an experience with the Holy Spirit a number of years earlier while working in the USA:

“And seeing these people worshipping God like they did...seeing my wife filled with the Holy Spirit like she was, just made me even hungrier, that this was something I needed...something that was lacking in our Christian life, and I started crying out to God because I wanted his Spirit like that. And...a couple of months later I was filled with the Spirit...it had a huge effect...it was a sense of much closer intimacy with God as well, in prayer, in worship, just in general living.”

Another interviewee reflected on a powerful encounter with the Holy Spirit during his water baptism while involved with YWAM during the 1970’s: “I’m the first one up, so I get into the pool, and I come up, and I’m an absolute helpless raving drunk. I was so drunk in the Spirit I couldn’t stand; I was filled with the Spirit in spades.” He applied this unusual experience to his equally unusual background during a subsequent missional conversation with another person. “By the time I was fifteen I’d spent a quarter of my life in institutions in one form or another; psyche hospitals, orphanages, or whatever. One of the things that I always reacted against...was injustice; things that weren’t right.” He used his story as an illustration while talking to another person who had experienced extreme trauma, explaining, “But that’s what the whole point is; what the whole process led to for me was an understanding that it doesn’t matter where you’ve been or what’s happened to you, no matter how bad it is, no matter how unsettling it is, God is capable of taking what has happened to you and transforming it, to take the sting out of it;” a remarkable encounter with a powerful application.

One of the younger participants recalled a particularly impacting ‘youth event’ in which she encountered the presence of God in a different dimension: “Probably one of the biggest transformational things that I would suggest would be when I was probably in Year Twelve, I think....and it was really intense this evening, just really incredible kind of worship time, and I remember just the emotion of that. Like, I’d been in other situations like it but I felt it, and I felt it all as though it was to its fullest extent.”

Speaking in tongues was another experiential demonstration of the presence and power of the Holy Spirit for five interviewees from three of the four congregations. A young mother shared an unexpected and initially disconcerting experience which she needed to process with her pastor to in order to gain a better perspective on it:

“I had an experience a few years ago where I was healing a lot from some pretty traumatic events that happened in my teenage years, and all of a sudden started speaking in tongues, and had to sort through that with our senior leader...why me, and all that kind of stuff...but have been able to incorporate that I suppose into my personal prayer times as well.”

With her pastor’s help, she is still journeying with that, and discovering what it actually means for her, as she points out, “(Pastor’s name) has been doing quite a bit of teaching... about spiritual gifts and stuff like that, so that’s been a good exploration.”

Also, a lady who had grown up in the Salvation Army, and is now at one of the participating churches, shared her interesting experience that had taken place previously in Perth:

“My parents got filled with the Spirit, when I was about sixteen or seventeen. And I went along to a Leighton Ford crusade meeting, and was most curious to hear a pastor next to me, who I knew, speaking in tongues. I said to dad on the way home, what was he doing? I knew it couldn’t be bad because it was Uncle Fred; so he explained, and during the course of those meetings, they said anybody who wants to be filled with the Spirit come out. So I went out. Nothing really dramatic happened, and then I was quite disappointed because I didn’t actually start speaking in tongues. And then a couple of years later, I was at a meeting where a friend of

mine was really distressed; she was so distressed she couldn't tell me what it was that was distressing her because she was crying too much. I said, 'You know Lord, I just pray for her'; and then all of a sudden I was speaking in tongues..."

She explained the results of this over time: "And so I slowly at first, and then increasingly, started to explore what this meant, and I mean, I was extremely shy, I wouldn't talk to anybody. And the first thing the Lord had me do was stand up in church and give prophetic words;" and,

"So gradually just over the years, my relationship with God deepened... I went through a period where I started to realize that some of the prophetic words that I was bringing were...an identification of inner issues...it's either a healing, or a word, or some kind of miracle, something that touches them right where they are."

That experience appears to have opened up a new arena of ministry opportunities for her over a significant period of time. Another man shared his experience of this phenomenon:

"For me, the most dramatic experience was the baptism of the Holy Spirit. I went forward and got prayed for...the pastor said...continually seek it. So I did, non-stop; on the way to school, on the way home from school, during lunch breaks; until I started to pray in tongues. It was a very dramatic personal transformation. From that point on I suppose, I'd grab the dog after tea and go for a walk and I'd be in prayer for an hour or an hour and a half, praying in tongues."

Yet another significant demonstration of the Holy Spirit's presence and power was the element of inner healing and release, mentioned by four respondents. One of the senior leaders related an element of his conversion experience in the context of some dramatic circumstances which he shared that could only have been Holy Spirit orchestrated:

"I'd made some choices that...they didn't actually end my life but they could've damaged me in a lot of different ways; and now I have seasons of choice. What does that mean? I ended up with what I would call a complete Holy Spirit conversion day."

His point being that the Holy Spirit's ministry released him from guilt and confusion resulting from previous poor decisions, bringing him to the place of realising he did have choices, and he was being empowered to make them. Another young man revealed how God's loving presence released him from deep bitterness resulting from his parents much earlier divorce, transforming his whole life:

"I know God took me as a very dysfunctional, broken person and poured his love into me, and that has shaped me and set me on a completely different path and will for the rest of my life no matter what I'm doing... It was during that time that I really experienced the Holy Spirit in a healing way. I felt like God kind of weeded out the rejection and the hurt and all that kind of stuff."

This was transformation combining both spiritual and psychological healing. Similarly, the experience of the young lady who had been wounded through some previous church involvements, and had been going to her sister's home group for an evening meal for some months, but had now come to a corporate gathering for the first time, shared: "And that was the night that they were having a Prayer Chair, and...I found myself sitting on that chair, heart racing, sobbing my little heart out, and I've been there ever since." This young lady found God's transformative and healing grace in his presence through the faithful prayers of new friends and believers – the Holy Spirit at work in her life.

A final element of *Holy Spirit Encounters* that emerged was what could be called revelation and direction. Each of these four accounts is inherently transformational in their impact and meaning to these individuals. A former atheist shares an insight that came to him:

"I guess you'd call it a vision that I had, which was of God's holiness. And again that was just a mind blowing experience of what God is really like. And yes, he's loving, and he's compassionate, and he's kind, and he's just, and he's all those things; but he is also holy."

A young lady shared about some specific insight and direction she received from God that empowered her to act in a way she had not done before in a ministry setting:

“One night I...felt like I really had...a vision or whatever; ...we were really struggling with what to do during church time; and having Bible study before or after...and there was just this flash of...who had to be singing, and this was going to happen, and that was going to happen. And I rang up my friend who was helping and said, This is it, this is how it’s going to go...and it’s okay because...I knew so confidently that it wasn’t my idea.”

An older participant commented on her realisation of God’s omniscience, as a very new Christian, through the practical circumstances of her being in Australia and her husband working in Europe at the time. The context was both of them receiving the same teaching in their respective Bible study groups: “For me it was the first thing I think where I could point to in my life and say, ‘There has to be a God!’ There is no way coincidentally we could be studying the same life transforming stuff at opposite sides of the world at exactly the same time.” A revelation of God’s omniscience *is* transformational.

Summarising this emergent transformative theme of *Holy Spirit Encounters*, if we truly desire to see an increase of evidential transformation taking place in the lives of believers, it cannot be through the diminution of the person, power, and ministry of the Holy Spirit, but a sincere determination to better understand his ministry within our lives, within the church, and within the world. It is evident in each of these Holy Spirit encounters that the one thing we cannot do is control the Holy Spirit. As Jesus taught Nicodemus, “The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit.”⁴⁰⁶ But what we also see is that those who are willing to be open to God, seeking his face in worship and prayer, create the environment within their own lives where God is able to move more freely in and through them in supernatural ways that can sometimes be hard to explain, but nonetheless very real. We cannot *make* this happen, but we certainly can *posture ourselves*⁴⁰⁷ before God in ways that will increase our openness to his ministry in and through our lives.

⁴⁰⁶ Jn 3:8

⁴⁰⁷ Heb 11:6; Matt 21:21-22; Mk 11:22-24

4.6.7 Summary of Emergent Transformational Themes

It is interesting that these findings should be book-ended by *personal Bible engagement* and *Holy Spirit encounters*, with the former being more easily identified by the interviewees than the latter. Personal engagement with the Bible, God's written Word, is eminently more accessible and understandable to the human mind than is a spiritual experience with an unseen Person. However, this Christian reality exemplifies the dialectical relationship between the objective *written Word* and the subjective *Holy Spirit experience*, which is nonetheless attested by the written Word.⁴⁰⁸ We can describe this differently as the *written Word* of God becoming the *spoken Voice* of God through the ministry of the Holy Spirit; as mentioned previously, this is how faith 'comes'. Bloesch succinctly explains, "The Word derives its efficacy from the Spirit, and the Spirit teaches what he has already disclosed in the word of Scripture. Since faith is a work of the Spirit in the interiority of our being, the truth of the gospel is not only announced from without but also confirmed from within."⁴⁰⁹ It is also noticeable that these *six emergent transformational themes* are in dialectical relationship with each other. In other words, each is in creative tension with the others, informing, shaping, and adjusting each other in a dynamic matrix of continual transformational influence as Word and Spirit interact on and with human thought and action within the context of relational and dialogical forums.

In short, we can tentatively say that the possibility of ongoing adult spiritual transformation occurring within congregant's lives is greater wherever any combinations of these six emergent transformational themes are being exercised.

Chapter 5: Practical Ministry Implications and Applications

5.1 Introduction

The six emergent transformational themes; Personal Bible Engagement; Small Group Interaction; Empowering Leadership; Missional Expressions; Conversational Prayer; and Holy Spirit Encounters, that have been identified, now require additional inquiry as to how

⁴⁰⁸ Jn 3:8; Rom 8:16; 1Cor 2:6-13; 2Cor 3:3-6; Eph 6:17; 1Thes 1:4-6; 2:13

⁴⁰⁹ Donald G. Bloesch, *A Theology of Word and Spirit – Authority and Method in Theology* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1992), 14-15, 76-81, 203-206

these can be practically applied to developing the ministry of adult spiritual transformation in local church settings. This will be done by looking at the implications and applications of each theme in the light of the theological and adult educational materials that have already been explored.

5.2 Theological Implications of Emergent Themes

The six emergent transformational themes now need to be scrutinised in the light of the theological foundations that we have already laid. Are the six themes congruent with our theological assertions?

We have already noted Jesus' own example and methodology of interaction with the Twelve as he demonstrated, taught, trained and formed his values within them. He clearly modelled 'personal Bible engagement' through his thorough knowledge and use of many Old Testament references, and his ability to reinterpret Scripture, and expose deeply entrenched but inaccurate Jewish assumptions about Scripture, God, and righteous living.⁴¹⁰ Likewise, he was the master of 'small group interaction' having chosen a group of just twelve to be the primary focus of his earthly discipling ministry. 'Empowering leadership' succinctly sums up the style and the impact of Jesus' ministry in reproducing his values, methodology, and mission, both into the lives of his disciples and those who were challenged by his 'authority.'⁴¹¹ Between the, "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men," and the, "Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation,"⁴¹² is a remarkably effective and empowering training process that we must learn more from. 'Missional expressions' were a constant thrust of Jesus' ministry, in word and deed, through which he demonstrated the reality of *who* he was, *what* his purpose was, and *how* he intended to fulfil that purpose.⁴¹³ We see Jesus in 'conversational prayer' with his Father as the source of his faith and strength for his mission, and teaching his disciples to do the same.⁴¹⁴ And finally, the 'Holy Spirit encounters' in Jesus' life,⁴¹⁵ which Luke in particular portrays for us, give ample reason for

⁴¹⁰ Matt 5:17 – 6:24; 23:1-39; Lu 24:25-32, 45-49; Jn 7:14-24; 8:12-59; 12:37-41

⁴¹¹ Matt 7:28-29; 22:15-46 Mk 1:27;

⁴¹² Mk 1:17; 16:15

⁴¹³ The four Gospels give continuous testimony to Jesus' missional expressions

⁴¹⁴ Lu 3:21-22; 5:15-16; 6:12-13; 9:18, 28-36; 11:1-4; 22:39-46; Jn 17:1-26

⁴¹⁵ Lu 1:26-38; 3:21-22; 4:1-30; 5:17-26; 6:17-19; 11:14-20 with Matt 12:28; Rom 8:11; Heb 9:14; the whole of Jesus' earthly life – conception to resurrection – was a continuous encounter with the Holy Spirit

Luke's insistence on the same need for the church in Acts to be equally anointed and empowered for Christ's continually effective ministry through his body.

We also looked briefly at the formational processes of the primitive church, and within that context, discover a strong correlation with the six emergent themes. Luke's narrative reveals the preaching of the Word under the fresh anointing of the outpoured Spirit producing, within the disciples, 'devotion' – meaning a persistent commitment to purpose.⁴¹⁶ In this case, it is Christ's continuing purpose for his people, the church. In order to be his transforming agents in the world, as embodiments of his Word and Spirit, they needed to develop disciplines that would empower and maintain their devotion; their persistent commitment to the mission of Christ. Luke describes how this developed throughout the early chapters of Acts, beginning at Acts 2:42-47. The "apostles' teaching," that the early church received, is the basis of our New Testament; the revelation of Christ as foretold in the Old Testament, announced by Jesus, preached and taught by the apostles, and ultimately becoming the completed written Word of God; they 'personally engaged' with their equivalent of our Bible.⁴¹⁷ They were also committed to "the fellowship;" the mutual association of those responding to the preaching of Christ; 'small group interaction' within their homes for the teaching of the apostles' doctrine and caring support, as well as in larger temple gatherings.⁴¹⁸ This flowed naturally into shared meals in homes, within which 'conversational prayer' around the "breaking of bread and prayer" took place.⁴¹⁹ The 'empowering leadership' of the apostles and others is clearly evident throughout this period,⁴²⁰ as are the 'Holy Spirit encounters' they experienced,⁴²¹ and their continuous 'missional expressions.'⁴²² The degree of congruity between Jesus' example and that of the primitive church mentioned in Chapter Two, and the six emergent transformative themes are evident.

⁴¹⁶ Wilhelm Mundle, 'kartereo', in *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, Vol. 2, 767-768

⁴¹⁷ Acts 2:42-47; 5:42; 6:7; 12:24; 1Cor 15:1-11; 1Thess 2:10-13;

⁴¹⁸ Acts 2:46; 5:42; 6:1-7; 10:23-48; 12:12; 28:16-31; see also Robert Banks, *Going to Church in the First Century* (Jacksonville, Florida: SeedSowers, Christian Books Publishing, 1980) for a credible reconstruction of a New Testament house church.

⁴¹⁹ Acts 2:46-47; 16:29-34; 1Cor 11:17-34

⁴²⁰ Acts 2:14-47; 3:1-26; 4:1-21, 23-35; etc.

⁴²¹ Acts 2:1-47; 3:1-26; 4:1-21, 31-37; 5:1-16; 8:4-25, 26-40; 9:17-19; 10:9-23, 44-48; 19:1-7

⁴²² Acts 2:40-41, 47; 3:1 – 4:22, 33; 5:12-16, 17-42; 6:7 – 7:60; 8:4-25, 26-40; 9:20-31, 32-43; 10:23-48; etc.

5.3 Andragogical Implications of Emergent Themes

Understandably, the concerns of adult educators are not going to precisely coincide with the six emergent transformational themes; for example, a secular adult educator is not concerned with missional expressions, prayer, or Holy Spirit encounters. However, there certainly are points at which they do intersect. While not specifically interested in personal Bible engagement, they are interested in genuine engagement with texts in general, with group dialogue around those texts, and a vested interest in empowering leadership.

‘Engagement with texts’ holds a fundamental place within good andragogical practice. Mezirow sees communicative learning as “...sharing ideas through...the written word...,”⁴²³ or alternatively, a “...substantive set of resources...”⁴²⁴ from which learners are able to respond through open questions. Adult learning, according to Freire, involves the necessity of inviting engagement, reflection, and action on specific content, thereby “problematizing...their existential situations,” and promoting “...dialogue, which requires critical thinking, and is capable of generating critical thinking.”⁴²⁵ In adult educational settings, where people bring their own life-experiences and personal worldviews to the text, we must “...invite learners to examine it, question it, refute it if they have the means, and make it theirs through a real struggle.”⁴²⁶ Garrison, Anderson, and Archer confirm this in the dialectical interplay between teacher, social, and cognitive presences. Wrestling with the text is fundamental to adult learning.

‘Group dialogue’ is also recognised as essential to the process of adult learning. Freire insisted, “...education *is* communication and dialogue. It is not the transference of knowledge, but the encounter of Subjects in dialogue in search of the significance of the object of knowing and thinking.”⁴²⁷ He says elsewhere, “The educator’s role is to propose problems about the codified existential situations in order to help the learners arrive at an increasingly critical view of their reality.”⁴²⁸ This is achieved through the teaching and learning transaction, a dialectical process of “...dialogue between those who are participants in the process,” which Jarvis, on Freire, sees as an incarnational approach in which teacher

⁴²³ Mezirow, *Transformative Dimensions*, 75

⁴²⁴ Vella, *Taking Learning to Task*, 10

⁴²⁵ Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 73-74; Vella, *Taking Learning to Task*, 5, 9

⁴²⁶ Vella, *Taking Learning to Task*, 44

⁴²⁷ Freire, *Education – The Practice of Freedom*, 137-138; italics mine

⁴²⁸ Freire, *Cultural Action for Freedom*, 36

and learner interact in a reciprocal co-learning, and co-teaching process.⁴²⁹ Mezirow also emphasises the necessity of group dialogue as part of the learning process, through which one is able to establish or debunk validity claims, and thereby transform previous interpretations through critical reflection on their previously unexamined assumptions,⁴³⁰ as do Garrison, Anderson and Archer.

‘Empowering leadership’ is the third element of the six emergent transformational themes that we are exploring in the light of adult education. Shor reflects on his own experiences, having built on the Freirean model of dialogical and empowering education, saying,

“An empowering teacher does not talk knowledge *at* students but talks *with* them... Dialogue is simultaneously structured and creative. Student-teacher mutuality is the affective centre of the method. The teacher leads the dialogic curriculum with the students participation...balances leading with listening to students...”⁴³¹

For Freire himself, the empowering leadership of a teacher requires him to take the lead in lowering himself to the level of the students, inviting the students into mutual dialogue so that they can begin to speak their own minds, which creates the opportunity for the teacher to *problem-pose*, giving the student the freedom to enter into a *problem-solving* dialogue. He says emphatically, “This teaching cannot be done from the top down, but only from the inside out...with the collaboration of the educator.”⁴³² Also, we noted in *Community of Inquiry* (Chapter 3, pg.73, Fig. 2), the empowering role of the *teaching presence* providing the necessary leadership. It is my contention that, in essence, the six emergent transformational themes are congruent with the fundamental andragogical principles of adult education.

5.4 An Assessment of the Original Hypothesis

In the light of all the above research it is time to assess the validity of my original hypothesis that was based on my assumptions formulated over some thirty years of pastoral leadership ministry. My hypothesis stated that the main reasons for the poor quality of adult spiritual transformation lie in:

Insufficient exercise of empowering leadership

⁴²⁹ Jarvis, *Twentieth Century Thinkers in Adult Education*, 272; Mayo, *Liberating Praxis*, 51

⁴³⁰ Mezirow, *Transformative Dimensions of Adult Learning*, 65-69, 190-191

⁴³¹ Shor, *Empowering Education*, 85-87

⁴³² Freire, *Education – The Practice of Freedom*, 48

Inadequate educational philosophy and corresponding andragogical strategies
Little appreciation of the dialectical nature of Christian life in our fallen world
Lack of dialogical methods that foster critical reflection and reflective action, and
Minimal and/or ineffective personal engagement in the basic spiritual disciplines

My reading and research since having written this hypothesis, have only confirmed the conclusions that I had already drawn. However, in my interactions with the specific twenty-five people from four specific congregations, whom I interviewed, including the four senior leaders, I do need to make some qualifications.

The majority of my interviewees are *not* experiencing a lack of empowering leadership. However, some leaders are more proactive than others in certain areas of their leadership expression. Considerable work has been done by some in the area of educational philosophy and andragogical strategies, whereas others are not as intentional in their application of educational principles, nor understanding the significant differences between pedagogy and andragogy as different learning philosophies requiring different approaches.

The issue of the dialectical nature of Christian life in our fallen world is clearly not well understood, nor would I expect the average Christian to express the creative tensions inherent within Christian living in that particular way. However, my subsequent readings have only enhanced my conviction of its reality, and the importance of it to our understanding. If we are to raise the bar of effective and sound theological thinking in the lives of those that we minister to, helping them move toward God's goals of adult spiritual transformation, then we need to understand its dynamic, embrace it, and help our congregants to do the same.

Each of these churches utilise the social concept of small groups to foster dialogical engagement, however, some are using them far more effectively, better understanding the dynamics that are involved, and intentionally creating dialogical forums of transformational opportunity. The intentional use of meals as a forum for meaningful dialogue and relational development was particularly noted by Urban Life and New Community Ringwood.

Finally, whether or not individuals are engaging sufficiently in personal spiritual disciplines was a multi-various picture. Most recognised they could and should be doing more; some acknowledged they had been more diligent in the past than they are currently; but all

acknowledged they had experienced transformation at different times as they were engaged in some form of biblical spiritual discipline.

In conclusion, while there is always room for improvements, I have been encouraged with the level of substantive responses from the individuals I engaged with, the effectiveness of the churches they represent, and the openness of the ministers of those churches.

5.5 Potential Applications of the Six Emergent Transformational Themes

A wide range of materials have been explored encompassing the pastoral, theological, and adult educational fields. The average local Australian church congregation may not be inclined to challenge the inconsistencies within the consumerist culture in which it is embedded – a culture intrinsically hostile to much of Jesus' message of Kingdom values and priorities. Therefore, there are some very real tensions presented to local church leaders as they grapple with the need to foster critical reflection and reflective action capabilities, and to strategise and structure processes in order to nurture biblical spiritual transformation within their congregants and in their relational forums.

In the light of Christ's goal for every believer, and in response to our *six emergent transformational themes*, a congruent philosophy of ministry needs to be sought for implementation with complementary strategies to nurture the ministry of adult spiritual transformation in local congregations. This would involve embracing the concept of dialectical tensions within an overall dialogical methodology that fulfils biblical praxis; the biblical imperative of progressive conformity to the image of Christ, commenced in regeneration but only fully realised in resurrection, being outworked through the intentional and collaborative re-scripting of believer's lives in alignment with the Kingdom gospel of Jesus Christ.

This can only be achieved through God's grace, utilising the inevitable crises of living in a fallen world as growth opportunities through the application and empowerment of the Word and the Spirit, within relational forums, in order to develop reflective and critically discerning thinking that results in transformed attitudes and actions. The purpose of this approach is to create forums and opportunities through which congregants can examine the conflicting issues of their lives, including the impact of their past experiences, in the light of God's Word. Within this environment, they can explore and examine taken-for-granted

assumptions, which the Holy Spirit may reveal, that have previously distorted their understanding and hindered their progress in general life, and in Christian growth. Coincidentally, it is within this dialogical environment of engagement and wrestle with God's Word, and the mutual support of Christian love, that the capacities for critical thinking and reflective actions flourish. This requires us now to explore practical applications of each of the six transformational themes in local church settings.

5.5.1 Applying Personal Bible Engagement

Twenty-two of the twenty-five interviewed acknowledged the transformative impact of this theme in their lives in some way. We have also noted that both theologically and in adult education, there is a necessary stress placed on actively engaging with source texts as a primary means of communicating meaning and stimulating learning. So the question is not *should* the Bible be personally engaged, and neither do we need to question *why* the Bible should be engaged here, as we have already established that it is God's word, the revelation of his will, and has been given to us for our instruction and transformation. The issue is *how* do we best personally engage with God's word.

Bible engagement occurs both individually and corporately, but corporate engagement necessarily requires the individual engagement of those involved. So whether individually or corporately, the individual is engaging; it is the environment and the nature of engagement that are different. Furthermore, both biblical and adult educational practices reveal that both realms of engagement with relevant texts provide the best learning environment.

Brueggemann understands that the Bible as God's Word reveals the gospel of Jesus Christ as the *script* that must replace the *failed script* of fallen humanity.⁴³³ This is crucial; it is only as we engage with God's word, in the light of the Holy Spirit, through reading, study, meditation, discussion, and reflective application, that we position ourselves to hear what God is saying, and gain insights on what he sees of us, and for us. Mezirow's grounded study with women retraining to re-enter the workforce discovered that all experienced a 'disorienting dilemma' of some sort. This triggered a re-reading of the texts of their own lives; a critical reflection; which caused them to seek out new horizons that led them to corporate

⁴³³ Brueggemann, *The Word that Redescribes the World*, 45-54

involvements, which subsequently instigated perspective transformations in their thinking and the discovery of new ways of living.⁴³⁴

Personal Bible engagement is an example of the imperative nature of the *task* of biblically renewing our minds to and through the truth of God's word. As Foster pointed out; the farmer, although he cannot make the grain grow, must prepare the ground in order to provide the right conditions that allows the grain to grow. "The Disciplines allow us to place ourselves before God so that he can transform us."⁴³⁵

5.5.2 Applying Small Group Interaction

We have already observed that both Jesus and Paul utilised the small group principle to great effect. Also, both Mezirow and Freire recognise the usefulness of small groups, but it was Freire who harnessed the dynamics available within a small group to create a transformative learning environment to its maximum potential. This was further confirmed by the later findings of adult educators applying the *Community of Inquiry* model (See Fig. 2, pg 73).

The key components from these various authors revolve around the dialectical interplay between a teacher/facilitator, who creates a learning environment by inviting the learners into his/her knowledge through mutual dialogue, and the willingness of the learners who enter into the dialogue as participants. Within the church small group setting, this style of dialogue allows for textual wrestling and respectful argumentation and rebuttal; what Mezirow calls 'validity testing;' in a manner that not only explores the real meanings of the biblical texts but also potentially exposes any taken-for-granted assumptions that those involved may hold which are contrary to biblical truth. It is in this context that the capacity for critical reflection needs to be and indeed can be developed. As Freire noted, "Only dialogue, which requires critical thinking, is also capable of generating critical thinking."⁴³⁶ It is this dialectical and dialogical process which can create the required dissonance between where one's thinking *is* as opposed to where it *needs to be* in the light of biblical truth, which the Holy Spirit is able to energise into genuine ongoing spiritual transformation.

⁴³⁴ Mezirow, *Transformative Dimensions*, 167-169

⁴³⁵ Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, 6-11

⁴³⁶ Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 73

5.5.3 Applying Empowering Leadership

As observed, seventeen interviewees responded to this theme, creating eleven of the forty-four substantive responses, reflecting the significance being placed on empowering leadership by those people. As noted, Jesus said, “Come, follow me, and I will make you fishers of men,”⁴³⁷ implying a deeply empowering process, which unfolds throughout the Gospels. Adult educators also acknowledge the importance of empowering leadership. Freire exercised empowering leadership by deliberately discarding the traditional roles of teacher as *subject-expert* and students as *objects-ipients*, and entered into a dialectical and dialogical partnership of “...teacher-student with students-teachers”, becoming “...one who is himself taught in dialogue with the students, who in turn while being taught also teach.”⁴³⁸ The *Community of Inquiry* model also confirms the necessity of an empowering ‘teacher presence’ (See Fig. 2, pg 68-69). Empowering leadership within the church small group context becomes the role of setting the overall textual content with a solid understanding of its theological framework, then inviting the group into a mutual journey of discovery within the parameters of their life-situations and experiences. This will involve respectful sharing and debate, allowing perspectives to be shared and developed, as conversation goes back and forth. Sometimes lines will be drawn that appear unresolvable at that point, other times a deep and rich consensus will emerge. The important point is that participants are *empowered* to discover their own perspectives, always within the guidelines of revealed Scripture, allowing a freedom to wrestle with and discover biblical truth for oneself within an interactive and communal environment in collaboration with moderating leadership.

5.5.4 Applying Missional Expressions

Jesus’ invitation to his would-be disciples to follow him, not only implies an empowering leadership role by Jesus as mentioned, but also an invitation to collaborate with him in his mission of ‘fishing for people.’⁴³⁹ Also, Jesus’ last command to his, by now, fully trained disciples carries the implicit understanding that they were being com-missioned to continue; and in time for the church to complete; the mission which he had commenced and coincidentally trained them for.⁴⁴⁰ God’s intention involves believers being on a journey of

⁴³⁷ Mk 1:16-17

⁴³⁸ Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 60-61; Mayo, *Liberating Praxis*, 51

⁴³⁹ Mk 1:14-18; Lu 19:9-10; Jn 3:16-17; 10:9-18; 17:15-18

⁴⁴⁰ Matt 28:18-20; Jn 15:26-27; Acts 1:1-8

transformation toward conformity to the image of Christ, affecting society in the process, and culminating in a transformed new heaven and earth.⁴⁴¹ Mezirow and Freire also see themselves involved in a ‘mission,’ however, from a purely educational perspective. Their mission involves educating people to become more critically reflective and better able to purposefully dialogue with others, thereby becoming better equipped to problem-pose, problem-solve, and develop transformative personal and communal reflective-actions, leading to transformed lives and societies.⁴⁴²

There is a correlation between these two redemptive and educational perspectives, since both seek transformation *of* and *for* humanity, but at different levels, and for different end-goals. Adult education, on its own, can at best address the important cognitive, conative and environmental dimensions of human thought and life,⁴⁴³ but lacks the dynamic of the revelatory self-disclosure of God’s eternal mission in Jesus Christ *for* and *as* humanity.⁴⁴⁴ Herein lays the imperative of missional expressions for Christians, as *sent people*,⁴⁴⁵ since they are simultaneously transformative and transforming; transformative for those who hear and see our good news and receive God’s transforming grace, and transforming within ourselves as we partner with Christ in his transformational mission. As noted, several of my interviewees acknowledged the reality of this ‘double’ transformational effect, and my personal experiences from over twenty short-term mission trips on four continents bear this point out.

5.5.5 Applying Conversational Prayer

From a biblical perspective, the significance of prayer; communication between God and believer; cannot be overstated. While all my interviewees who responded on this point would agree with that statement, most also acknowledged a degree of ambivalence regarding the daily outworking of this important element of Christian life. A consistent and effective prayer habit is a discipline that requires and reflects spiritual maturity. However, as the Willow Creek researchers discovered, spiritual growth is *not* about increased church activity, but increased personal relational closeness to Christ. This again reveals the dialectical nature

⁴⁴¹ Matt 5:1-16; Phil 2:12-16; 1Pet 2:1-12; Rev 21:1-7

⁴⁴² Mezirow, *Transformative Dimensions*, 206-215; Freire, *Cultural Action for Freedom*, 21-37, 51n.2

⁴⁴³ Mezirow, *Transformative Dimensions*, 14

⁴⁴⁴ 2Cor 5:14-21; Eph 1:3-14; 2:13-22; 3:10-12; Heb 1:1-4; 2:5-18; 5:7-14; 10:5-18; 12:14-29; 13:20-21

⁴⁴⁵ Matt 28:18-20; Acts 16:15-20; Jn 17:18; 20:21-23; Acts 1:1-8; 13:2-4

of Christian life in a fallen world, as reflected in Haughton's paradoxical statement, "Without the long process of formation, there could be no transformation; yet no amount of careful formation can transform."⁴⁴⁶ Prayer is similar; without prayer there is no relationship with God, but no amount of prayer on our part creates that relationship. It is not the *doing* of our praying that is the issue, but our *being* in a love relationship with Christ out of which the *doing* of our praying emerges in Person to person, and person to Person conversations. Personal and group prayers are spiritual disciplines that must be nurtured in the lives of believers through experiential opportunities. Children learn best by hearing their parents pray passionately, and adults are no different in this regard. Jesus deliberately allowed his disciples to hear him praying to his Father, stimulating their request to be taught how to pray.⁴⁴⁷ The supernatural or spiritual element inherent within the relational activity of prayer can never be overlooked, diminished, or manipulated. God is the instigator and empowerer of prayer, but we must be the willing and disciplined collaborators if it is to contribute to our ongoing spiritual transformation. The application of this reality must first be modelled by empowering leaders; from the pulpit, in corporate prayer gatherings, by small group leaders, mentors, and parents, when and where appropriate.

5.5.6 Applying Holy Spirit Encounters

As with effective prayer, Holy Spirit encounters are supernatural in nature, and therefore cannot be manufactured or manipulated. However, because of the subjective nature of spiritual experiences, there must be a solid theological grounding of teaching provided for congregants in order to lay effective foundations from which to 'test' the validity of spiritual experiences.⁴⁴⁸ We must also acknowledge that it is not in our power to 'apply' the Holy Spirit; he is sovereign and free, working in total harmony with the Father and the Son, in the governance of their kingdom, utilising the multifarious church as their primary vehicle of redemptive and collaborative expression. Our responsibility is to be open to his encounters with us, hearing his voice and receiving his direction, so that he can 'apply' us to his will and purposes.⁴⁴⁹ Our taken-for-granted assumptions regarding the Holy Spirit and his ministry,

⁴⁴⁶ Cited by Andrew Grannell, "The Paradox of Formation and Transformation," *Religious Education*, Vol. 80, No. 3, summer (1995): 384

⁴⁴⁷ Lu 9:18, 28-36; 11:1-4

⁴⁴⁸ 1Jn 4:1-3; Matt 4:1-11; 2Cor 2:9-11; 10:1-5; Eph 6:10-18; 1Tim 1:18-20; 2Tim 3:16-17; Jam 3:13-18; 4:5-10; 1Pet 5:6-9

⁴⁴⁹ Acts 8:26-40; 9:1-6; 10-19; 10:9-48; 13:1-4; 16:6-10; 17:11-12

developed through our church culture, previous teaching, and personal experiences, can either help or hinder his freedom to ‘speak’ into our lives and congregations, and like all our assumptions, they need to be exposed to our critical reflection in the light of the God’s word in communal dialogue, as happened in the early church.⁴⁵⁰

In summary, there is an evident dialectical relationship between these six emergent transformational themes, each interacting with and on the others in creative tension. Our personal engagement with, and critical reflections on God’s word, influences our small group dialogue, as can our small group dialogue influence our biblical engagements. Either or both of these can influence our responses to empowering leadership, missional expressions and conversational prayers. Also, personal Bible engagement without an enlightening encounter with the Holy Spirit can only produce empty intellectualism at best, and a binding legalism at worst. We could beneficially work our way through all the possible combinations of these six emergent transformational themes, but I believe the interactive principle has been sufficiently established.

5.6 A Strategic Praxis Model that Nurtures Spiritual Transformation

Having identified six emergent transformational themes and critiqued them in the light of theological and adult educational principles, we have arrived at the point where a ministry model is required in order to further develop the ministry of adult spiritual transformation. I have already suggested that a congruent philosophy of ministry would need to embrace the concept of praxis as an absolute starting point; commencing with the end-goal of conformity to Christ’s image as the primary and praxial reference point of all ministry. By definition, Christian praxis involves the continual dialogue between *words* of faith and *actions* of faith, in dialectical tension with each other; or as Paver described it, “...reflected-upon action and acted-upon reflection, both rolled into one.”⁴⁵¹

As previously mentioned, Jesus, Paul, Mezirow and Freire all advocate the necessity of personal critical reflection on taken-for-granted assumptions, which include the false beliefs that every person has been ‘scripted’ with, from family values, cultural environment, church background, personal experiences, and demonic influences, that produce unhelpful God-

⁴⁵⁰ Acts 2:1-41; 11:1-18; 15:1-21

⁴⁵¹ John E. Paver, *Theological Reflection and Education for Ministry – The Search for Integration in Theology* (Aldershot, England: Ashgate Publishing, 2006), 57; see also 2Cor 3:3

images, debilitating self-images and unrealistic expectations of self and others. From a Christian perspective it is ‘knowing the truth,’ the Person of Jesus who is the Truth,⁴⁵² mediated through his Word enlightened by the Spirit of Truth, who empowers us to break free from limiting and self-destructive thought and behaviour patterns. Also, each agree that personal critical reflection, while absolutely necessary, is not sufficient on its own. Critical reflection must lead to reflective actions; the crucial element inherent within both repentance and biblical praxis; and that dynamic of critical reflection and resultant reflective action occurs most effectively within the context of group dialogue and communal action.⁴⁵³

In an effort to integrate the six emergent transformational themes with the dialectical and dialogical dynamics of biblical praxis, I am suggesting a strategic praxis-based model that encompasses all six elements. The diagram below (Fig. 4) is formed around the four *action points* of Bible Engagement, involving personal Bible engagement within the context of daily living; Personal Reflection, involving critical personal and theological reflection; Group Dialogue, involving small group dialogue around critical theological and reflective wrestling; and Integrative Actions, involving integrative alignment with biblical values requiring actions as missional expressions.

⁴⁵² Matt 11:27-30; Jn 5:39; 7:37-39; 8:31-32, 36

⁴⁵³ Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 73; Don S. Browning, ‘Practical Theology and Religious Education,’ in *Formation and Reflection – The Promise of Practical Theology*; eds. Lewis S. Mudge and James N. Poling (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1987), 79; Jewett, *Romans – A Commentary*, 733. Mk 16:19-20; Acts 2:46-47; 5:42; 8:4-25; 13:1-5, etc.

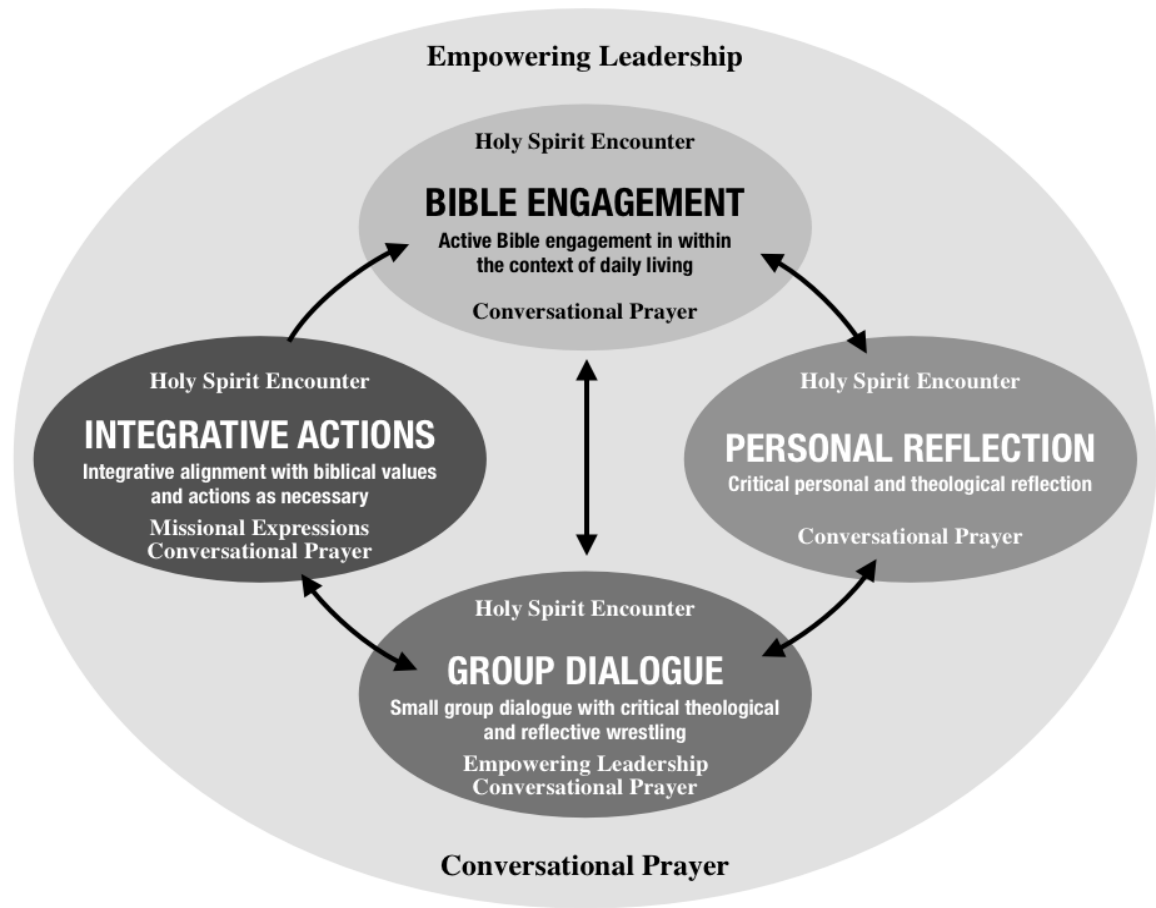


Figure 4: A Small Group Model within a Congregational Setting

In the context of a small group within a local church, this process must be encompassed and undergirded by both empowering leadership and conversational prayer by the broader church leadership. Further, each ‘action point’ must also be functioning within an encompassing dynamic of conversational prayer and Holy Spirit encounter, with the last ‘action point’ of integrative actions also becoming the primary point of missional expressions for those in that small group. This movement is circular in nature, reflecting the continuous and dynamic process of action-reflection-dialogue-wrestle-integrated action, as required. It also provides the possibility for two-way influence between Bible engagement and personal reflection, between personal reflection and group dialogue, and between group dialogue and integrative action, since a new biblical insight, which is at the root of any spiritual transformation, can be received at any one of these ‘action points’. The influence of empowering leadership is also particularly important *within* the small group dialogical process, alongside the conversational

prayer and openness to Holy Spirit encounters, in order to energise the transformational processes within the participant's lives.

As was pointed out in the theological chapter above, Paul's understanding of this transformative process consists in the dialectical relationship of creative indicative-imperative tensions between the *gift* of transformation and the *goal* of transformation, being processed through the *task* of renewing the mind by engaging with the word of God in the power of the Spirit, as the diagram (Fig. 5) below reveals:

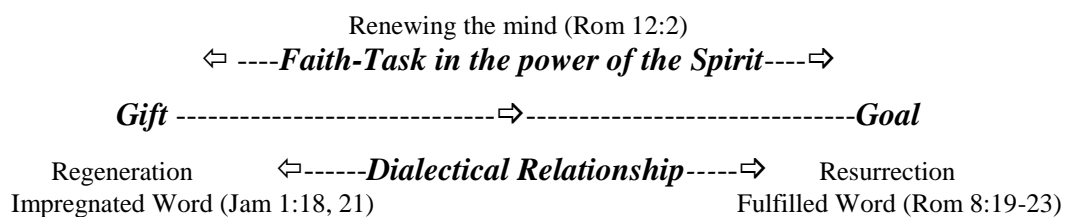


Figure 5: The process within and toward Adult Spiritual Transformation

5.6.1 Personal Bible Engagement in the Context of Daily Living

This first 'action point', Bible Engagement, can take place in a number of different contexts. It could be hearing the preached Word in a church service or on a CD or DVD; or personal devotional reading and study. It may be in a small group; or a casual conversation in which a biblical topic arises; or a word from God dropping into one's mind. The Word of God is "...living and active...it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart,"⁴⁵⁴ and as such, is quite capable of challenging the issues of the heart whenever the Holy Spirit sees the need. This is the place where we not only read the text of God's word, but equally importantly, we allow the text of God's word to read us, examining and challenging our thoughts, motives, and assumptions.⁴⁵⁵ And whenever one encounters the word of God, the response should be thankful prayer and praise.⁴⁵⁶ Any encounter with God through his Word should elicit conversational prayer, even if it commences with repentance, recognising and being open to the Holy Spirit's activity in the heart and mind, bringing confirmation and empowerment. This is the first action trigger point of transformational effect; faith comes by hearing a word from God.

⁴⁵⁴ Heb 4:12; Ps 119:105, 130; Jn 15:3-8; 17:6-8; Acts 2:36-37

⁴⁵⁵ Dykstra, *Growing in the Life of Faith*, 151-153

⁴⁵⁶ Gordon D. Fee, *Listening to the Spirit in the Text* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing, 2000), 5; Fee comments that "the proper aim of all true theology is doxology." See 1Thess 1:4-10; 2:13

5.6.2 Critical Personal and Theological Reflection

The second ‘action point’ occurs at the need to intentionally interact with the conviction, insight, challenge, question, or rebuke that God’s word has provoked within. This is so often lost in the busy-ness and “...worries, riches and pleasures...”⁴⁵⁷ of Western lifestyle in particular. In Brueggemann’s terms, our default ‘therapeutic and consumerist’ worldview, tends to cause us to shy away from difficult challenges. We have been trained to expect and seek out ‘therapeutic’ ways of medicating any sense of discomfort as a ‘coping mechanism,’ rather than tackling the often difficult and sometimes painful challenge of critiquing our own taken-for-granted assumptions. These assumptions about ourselves, our place within the world, and how we perceive that God and others see us, need to be critiqued in the light of God’s Word, and his call to demonstrate radical kingdom values in our words and actions through the power of the Spirit.

Jesus taught that words and actions come from the heart – our inner thought life; and if our words and actions are going to align with his kingdom values, then it is our *thinking* that must first be critiqued.⁴⁵⁸ Paul tackles the need for critical personal assessments on a number of occasions, using such terms as “...think of yourself with sober judgement,” “...examine yourself,” “...judge ourselves,” “...test yourselves,” “...be not foolish, but understand,” “...whatever is true...noble...think about such things.”⁴⁵⁹ Critical thinking is simply reflection on the situational realities of one’s life – *who* am I in terms of my true identity, *where* am I in life, *how* did I get here, and the *why* has it happened?⁴⁶⁰ It is only as people ask these questions, and search for and reflect on the answers, that they are able to uncover the taken-for-granted assumptions that their lives have been predicated on, that when examined in the light of Scripture, can be revealed as false, distorted, and often destructive. Individually, we are the only ones who can commence that process; as seen in the parable of the prodigal, after engaging in reflection and self-talk, “...he came to his senses...and went to his father.”⁴⁶¹ Significantly, it was his self-induced personal crisis of bankruptcy and hunger that brought him to that transformative insight under the providence of God. In Mezirow’s parlance, he

⁴⁵⁷ Lu 8:14

⁴⁵⁸ Matt 15:1-20; 12:31-37; Lu 6:39-45; Phil 4:4-9; Rom 12:2

⁴⁵⁹ Rom 12:2-3; 1Cor 11:28-32; 2Cor 13:5; Eph 5:17; Phil 4:8

⁴⁶⁰ Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 90; Freire, *Cultural Action for Freedom*, 36; Freire, *Education as the Practice of Freedom*, 43-49

⁴⁶¹ Lu 15:11-20; also see Peterson, *Minding God – Theology and the Cognitive Sciences*, 94-95, for the indissoluble connection between mind/brain function and spiritual experience

had a perspective transformation; however, from a biblical perspective it must go deeper than that, requiring a revelatory insight into his situational reality, followed by a willingness to repent, and to change his thinking, and then act on his repentance.

Here lies the pastoral challenge – we need to instruct and coach people in how to think critically, through personal and theological reflection, in light of God’s revelation in Christ, trusting him for Holy Spirit illumination through conversational prayer. This is the sharp edge of Brueggemann’s concept of de-scripting and re-scripting – no easy task; involving the creative tensions between the pole of our need to think critically, and the other pole of our need for Holy Spirit illumination and empowerment. Banks expressed the focus of Christian education needing to be on “...developing habits of critical self-reflection on spiritual formation, faith, leadership quality, and practice...we must bring the Scriptures into dialogue with our situation...,”⁴⁶² but we also need to pray for the Holy Spirit’s illumination. As congregants catch this and engage with it, it becomes the second trigger of transformational change through the Spirit’s empowerment and our conversational prayers.

5.6.3 Small Group Dialogue with Critical and Theological Wrestling

The third ‘action point’ is another essential element, adding the further tension of deliberate face-to-face dialogue, wherein we facilitate the discipline of validity-testing of insights being explored: are they truth-claims or false assumptions? Mezirow refers to dialogue as *communicative action*, by which “...implicit validity claims are made explicit and contested...through argumentation...,”⁴⁶³ in the form of constructive and instructive debate. Freire called this process, *problematization*, involving first, problem-posing through dialogue, before attempting to problem-solve; itself a dynamic dialogical and dialectical process.⁴⁶⁴

There are a number of pastoral challenges involved in this understanding. My experiences in local churches lead me to suggest that the training of small group leaders is a major point of effective breakdown. While small group leaders do not have to be theologians, they do need to know how to stimulate and effectively facilitate dialogue on theological issues as they relate to everyday life, and conversely, of practical everyday issues critiqued in the light of theological imperatives. This requires, firstly, a congruent ministry philosophy that frames

⁴⁶² Banks, *Reenvisioning Theological Education*, 159

⁴⁶³ Mezirow, *Transformative Dimensions*, 68

⁴⁶⁴ Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 60-74

the modelling and training processes, followed by clear instruction and participatory training of small group leaders in the exercise of collaborative dialogue, and adequate supervision of their functional effectiveness. Unless this is organically modelled by senior leaders, and frequently refreshed in-house, it will not become the normative practice.

This, I believe, was the reason behind the greater effectiveness of New Community Ringwood and Urban Life in achieving greater awareness and ‘buy-in’ from both their leaders and congregants. It requires critical thinking on the part of the senior leaders in the first place, and persistent application, but it is essential that participants *wrestle* with their own issues in the light of God’s word; the creative tension between their current reality as one pole of the dialectic, and the biblical imperatives as another, which the Holy Spirit is able to ignite through his encounters. As Freirean advocates Vella and Shor maintain, it is the cognitive crisis of “...a real struggle...” through which ownership and transformation in thought and behaviour occurs, when conducted in an open environment of leader-participant mutuality.⁴⁶⁵ This then, is the third trigger of transformational change under the Holy Spirit’s guidance.

5.6.4 Integrative Alignment with Biblical Values appropriately Actioned

This final ‘action point’ in the cycle is the actioning part of the action-reflection-adjusted action praxis, and is another common point of breakdown. The Western worldview is predicated on Greek philosophy, and like the Greeks of old, loves to theorise but often falls short on the practice. It is important that people *act out* transformationally through the reflective processes, not just *learn from* informationally.⁴⁶⁶ At the heart of biblical praxis are the biblical imperatives of *do, go, speak, pray, preach, make disciples, grow, be transformed*. “Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says.”⁴⁶⁷ After all the insights and challenges; all the critical personal and theological reflection; all the small group dialogue and debating back and forth, having been encouraged by empowering leadership, and bathed in conversational prayer; there must come Spirit-empowered action. This is action that has been shaped through Spirit-breathed critical dialogue in the light of God’s eternal truth, among friends seeking transformation, producing changed attitudes, and

⁴⁶⁵ Vella, *Taking Learning to Task*, 42-44; Shor, *Empowering Education*, 85-87

⁴⁶⁶ Banks, *Reenvisioning Theological Education*, 160

⁴⁶⁷ Jam 1:22; *gines the de poietai* – Be doers; present imperative

new perspectives, which are now being demonstrated through missional expressions into needy communities and questioning minds.

The pastoral challenge here is to exercise empowering leadership and conversational prayer in such ways as to encourage each individual to make decisions, and then plan to *act out* those decisions on the basis of new perspectives and changed attitudes, in both personal and group contexts with missional expressions. This could include the establishment or expansion of personal spiritual disciplines, or a greater commitment to explore new approaches to spiritual disciplines such as Bible engagement and devotional prayer. An approach that I have personally found exceptionally helpful over many years combines focussed Bible reading and meditation with journaling in a format using the acrostic S.O.A.P. – Scripture, Observation, Application, and Prayer.⁴⁶⁸

Another strategic tool that has proven essential in my own experience, again over many years, is triplet same-sex accountability groups meeting for prayer, encouragement, and accountability, giving each other freedom to ask the hard personal questions. In one particular group, functioning weekly for the past ten years, we have seen marriages restored, addictions confronted and overcome, physical miracles take place, and new life-directions and ministries open up. Real relationships, built over time, are essential and transformative.

Other responses would mean taking seriously the biblical call to intentional missional expressions by developing inclusive relationships with the intent of appropriately sharing one's faith, but without making their acceptance of faith a condition for the relationship. This could take the shape of strategically becoming involved with community groups like Rotary, Lions, or Probus. It could mean exploring opportunities for more grassroots community involvement through the local sporting clubs, welfare agencies, or community programs. Or it could involve a short-term mission trip, whether doing village evangelism, visiting an orphanage, or building a school. A small group could corporately decide on missional strategies they could engage in, whether a 'Matthew style' BBQ, a community-based project, a backyard blitz they could facilitate, or some other creative missional expression. According to Jesus, what is not *done* has not been *learnt*.⁴⁶⁹

⁴⁶⁸ See Appendix 7.

⁴⁶⁹ Lu 10:25-37; Jn 13:12-17

So, these four ‘action points’ of Bible Engagement, Personal Reflection, Group Dialogue, and Integrative Actions, surrounded and supported by empowering leadership and conversational prayer, provide a praxis-based process with which a local congregational leadership team could formulate and strategise within a congruent philosophy of ministry and mission toward developing the ministry of adult spiritual transformation.

5.7 Prospective Aspirations

As with any research and ongoing study, I quickly came to the realisation that I had uncovered more material and further areas of research than what I could feasibly engage with in this thesis. A brief outline of further areas of research that need to be pursued will suffice at this point.

Fowler’s work on stages of faith and the cognitive development that he outlines have given me insight into potential reasons why many adults do not progress transformatively, if they are locked into immature levels of cognitive processing. Research needs to be carried out into this area to help people identify at what level they are operating cognitively. For example, a diagnostic questionnaire could be developed, similar to those used in management profiling, that would enable the level of thinking; be it *mythic-literal*, *conventional-synthetic*, *individuative-reflective*, or *conjunctive*; to be identified, providing a starting point from which to work with people toward greater engagement with spiritual transformational processes. Based on both Fowler’s and other’s research into these areas, it is evident that some adults still think with overtones of *mythic-literal* thought forms, and many adults never progress beyond adolescent *conventional-synthetic* thought forms. Some of this can be attributed to traumatic experiences either in childhood or adolescence, freezing them emotionally at that level of emotional development, which obviously require professional psychological assistance. However, they are still going to require Christian educational assistance after psychological barriers have been identified and restored, at which the research I am suggesting would be of real benefit.

Further, from a teaching perspective, I see the need for more work in better understanding learning types and processes. Banks suggests a three-stepped sequence of courses facilitating “...learning how to learn; learning how to use learning for others; and practicing the learning

this involves,”⁴⁷⁰ as a way of helping people understand the elements of better learning, appreciate different learning styles, identify one’s own learning style, and so be better equipped to teach in ways that promote better learning at every point.

Coupled with this is an area that adult educator Stephen Brookfield has championed, that of developing critical thinkers, utilising analyses of personal critical incidents to help learners explore their taken-for-granted assumptions. This would involve developing exercises which help people to: 1) identify the assumptions underlying their thoughts and actions; 2) scrutinise the accuracy and validity of these in light of how they connect, or not, with their experiences of reality; and finally, 3) reconstitute these assumptions to make them more inclusive and integrative,⁴⁷¹ in the light of biblical imperatives.

Clearly, these are very much along the lines of what I have already suggested in my thesis, but taking further steps to specifically design exercises that could facilitate these purposes as heuristic tools. Since God’s revealed goal for all his people is conformity to the image of Christ, we have both the privilege and responsibility of collaborating with him in further developing the ministry of adult spiritual transformation, encompassing the physiological, psychological, social, and spiritual arenas of life.

5.8 Summary Conclusions

After sharing my personal concerns regarding a perceived general lack of spiritual transformation taking place in many churches and Christians’ lives in Chapter One, our journey to date has taken us through a theological investigation of the biblical imperative of spiritual transformation in Chapter Two. This investigation incorporated the relationship between both spiritual formation and spiritual transformation, and the inherent elements of physiological, psychological, and social formations and transformations involved in both the normal human maturational processes toward adulthood, and growth toward spiritual maturity in Christ. We also engaged in a brief historical overview of how the church has engaged in these processes throughout history. The conclusion drawn was that biblical adult spiritual

⁴⁷⁰ Banks, *Reenvisioning Theological Education*, 161

⁴⁷¹ Stephen Brookfield, “Using Critical Incidents to Explore Learners’ Assumptions,” in Jack Mezirow and Associates, *Fostering Critical Reflection in Adulthood – A Guide to Transformative and Emancipatory Learning* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1990), 177

transformation is a simultaneous and dialectical process comprising the *gift*, the *goal*, and the *task*.

In Chapter Three, we engaged with Adult Educational theory and practice, notably through Mezirow and Freire, including others, to explore andragogical principles toward transformative education, discovering that andragogy is significantly different to pedagogy because of the different learning needs and abilities inherent within adults when compared to children and adolescents. During that process we also uncovered some common threads between adult educational theory and practice, and the emerging discipline of Practical Theology, specifically identifying the usefulness of the concepts of dialectics and praxis.

My research aims, processes, and findings were explained in Chapter Four, having engaged with four local churches in the Ringwood area of Melbourne's outer-east, and interviewing twenty-five people, including the four senior leaders and five or six congregants from each of those churches. From that process emerged the six transformational themes of personal Bible engagement; small group interaction; empowering leadership; missional expressions; conversational prayer; and Holy Spirit encounters.

These emergent transformational themes were critiqued, in Chapter Five, in the light of theological imperatives, and the methodologies of Jesus and the Apostles, and then in the light of adult educational theory and practice. In each case they proved to be in fundamental agreement. Applications were found in both Adult Education and Practical Theology that bore remarkable similarity to relevant elements of the six emergent transformational themes. A participatory and reflective strategic praxis-based model was formulated and explained to suit application in a congregational setting toward developing the ministry of adult spiritual transformation. This involves the four 'action points' of personal Bible engagement within the context of daily living; critical personal and theological reflection; small group dialogue with critical theological and reflective wrestling; and integrative alignment with biblical values, actioned as necessary. These are supported by empowering leadership and conversational prayer, leading to missional expressions in daily living. Each of these 'action points' become transformational trigger points in the ongoing process of adult spiritual transformation toward full conformity to Christ's image in the resurrection.

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Appendices

Appendix 1 – Introductory Letter to Ministers

Dear Rev/Pas _____,

My name is Adrian Turner, and I am pursuing doctoral studies through the BCV Post Graduate School under the supervision of Rev. Dr. Charles de Jongh.

I would like to extend to you and your congregation an invitation to participate in a research project I am conducting that could provide significant insights into adult transformation through Christian education and formation processes. My research proposal requires me to work with six local church congregations and their ministers. I have chosen your congregation to potentially be one of those because of your known commitment to Christian maturation and missional expression.

My passionate concern revolves around what I am calling ‘the biblical imperative’ – “be transformed by the renewing of your mind” (Rom 12:2). My own 30 something years of pastoral experience have caused me to question whether we are being as effective as we could be in our endeavours at Christian formation, and if there are not better strategies that we could utilise that would nurture a more ‘transformative’ environment for our congregations.

My personal studies so far have led me to recognise that certain elements of Transformative Adult Education Theory can be of great assistance to us in our Christian education and formation processes. It would be very helpful if firstly, I was able to engage with you to discover what strategies and processes you already have in place, and secondly, what are the elements of those processes that your congregants are finding transformatively helpful.

The simplest way to achieve this would involve an initial interview with you to more clearly explain my purpose and passion, and understand your processes. This would be followed by a simple congregational survey, using a questionnaire distributed with your newsletter, the last question of which invites volunteers to engage with me in a personal and confidential interview. The purpose of the interview is to discover individuals’ perspectives regarding their experiences in Christian education, their peak transformational experiences, and any personal spiritual disciplines they have found transformatively helpful.

My project requirements are for from five to seven volunteers from each congregation who are over 18 years of age, of good standing and significant association, and are genuinely representative of each church. I will be guided by concerns you may have as to the psychological or maturational suitability of any who may volunteer.

I will contact you by telephone within a week to answer any questions and discuss any concerns, or should you wish to, I can be contacted on 0430 356 353.

Yours faithfully,

Adrian F. Turner

BCV Contact – Rev Jeff Pugh: P.O. Box 380, Lilydale, Vic 3140 Phone: 03 9735 0011.

Australian College of Theology Ethics Committee, Suite 4, Level 6, 51 Druitt St., Sydney 2000. Phone: 02 9262 7890

Appendix 2 – Minister’s Interview Questions

Minister’s Interview Questions

1. Tell me about your sense of ‘call’ into pastoral ministry

2. Tell me about your personal peak transformational experiences and the impact that they have had on your life.

3. How would you describe your ‘primary purpose’ as a minister to the congregation?
(What other purposes operate?)

4. How would you describe ‘maturity’ within the lives of your congregants?

5. What are your expectations of ‘transformation’ within the lives of your congregants?
(What would transformation look like to you?)

6. Tell me about the strategies you use to develop Christian maturity
(Educational/discipleship philosophy, strategies, and end goal)

Appendix 3 – Doctoral Research Project Information Sheet

Doctoral Research Project Information Sheet

A church-based Research Project being conducted under the auspices of the BCV Post Grad School has been approved by your local church leadership. The purpose of this research is to endeavour to gain a better understanding of how we may improve the effectiveness of our Christian education and formation processes.

The way I have chosen to approach this issue is firstly through a simple Congregational Survey in which I invite the whole congregation to voluntarily participate. This survey will give a broad insight into individual perceptions of the impact of personal Christian experiences, and the Christian educational or discipleship training opportunities that you have enjoyed in your local church. Up to this point the survey remains anonymous.

The second element of the research process involves how you respond to the last question of the survey. It will invite you to consider volunteering for a personal and confidential interview with me, of approximately one hour duration. These will be informal and semi-structured interviews in which respondents will be invited to share their stories of Christian educational opportunities, peak transformational experiences, and any helpful spiritual disciplines you may have discovered during your walk with Christ. The purpose of these interviews is to endeavour to discover what has been happening ‘transformationally’ within the lives of individual believers, and to what degree our current strategies of education and formation are effective in nurturing an environment and practices that are conducive to Christian transformation. These interviews will be tape-recorded so that I can analyse them in more detail at a later time, but will remain confidential, and stored securely until transcriptions are made, and then the tapes destroyed.

In accordance with The National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research, the interviews would be individually prior arranged at mutually convenient, comfortable, and safe time and place. You would not be expected to answer any question you did not feel comfortable answering; you could withdraw freely from the interview process at any time; and retrieve any information you had divulged no later than two months before research is submitted. At all times after your interview your identity would be kept anonymous. You would also be given access to the results of the research after its conclusion, should you so desire. Qualified counsellors are available should they be required after the interview process.

Should you decide to volunteer, your selection will be based on the following criteria: you must be at least 18 years of age; of good standing and significant association within the local congregation; and genuinely representative of the congregation in the eyes of your senior minister. To register your desire to voluntarily participate in a personal and confidential interview, please fill out your name and contact details at the bottom of the survey form, and hand in to your Church Office.

Looking forward to the possibility of engaging with you in this Research Project,

Adrian Turner
Doctoral Student

BCV Contact – Rev Jeff Pugh: P.O. Box 380, Lilydale, Vic 3140 Phone: 03 9735 0011.
Australian College of Theology Ethics Committee, Suite 4, Level 6, 51 Druitt St., Sydney 2000. Phone: 02 9262 7890

Appendix 4 – Congregational Survey Form

Congregational Survey Form

Church-based research regarding transformational Christian Education

1. What impact on your life do you think your Christian journey has had?

Rank from 0 to 10

None 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Significant

2. How would you describe the events of your life that had the most impact on your faith?

3. Who or what has provided you the most help in your Christian experience?

4. Have you engaged in any courses or other opportunities that your church provides for personal growth? If so, please describe them and rank their effectiveness.

Rank from 0 to 10

Poor 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Extremely

5. Would you be willing to volunteer for a confidential personal interview of approximately one hour, in order to be part of a Doctoral Research study relating to personal spiritual development in local suburban churches?

If Yes, Your name _____ Phone No. _____

If you choose to participate in this research please return this completed survey to:
Adrian Turner, c/- your Church Office within two weeks.

Appendix 5 – Research Participant’s Consent Form

Research Participant’s Consent Form

Researcher’s Name: _____

Research Participant’s Name: _____

Date: _____

Place of Interview: _____

Church Membership: _____

I the undersigned am willing to participate in the research being conducted by Adrian Turner under the auspices of the Post Grad Program of the Bible College of Victoria. I am over eighteen years of age, participating voluntarily without any pressure from the researcher or other sources.

I understand that:

- No payment is involved for my interview
- I may withdraw from the interview process at any time, and do not have to answer any questions that may be discomforting from my vantage point.
- This interview will be conducted in strictest confidence and none of the material I may divulge will be made known to any other participants. I understand that my personal identity and any identifying characteristics will be obscured in the research if I so wish.
- The interview will be tape recorded for later analysis. The tape will be destroyed at the conclusion of the research process.
- If anything I say is included in the final research I understand that I have the right to vet it, and if needs be, withdraw it no later than two months before submission of the research paper.
- I will be shown the final product of the research or a prepared summary of the research findings if I so desire.
- The researcher may interview me in this session and contact me later if the data I have divulged needs further clarification.

Signature of research Participant: _____ Date: _____

I the researcher acknowledge the right and commit myself to abide by this understanding.

Signature of Researcher: _____ Date: _____

Appendix 6 – Personal Interview Questions

Personal Interview Questions

1. Tell me your ‘faith’ story – how did you come to have faith in Christ?
2. Tell me about the most transformative events in your Christian experience, and how have they influenced your life?
3. Tell me about any Christian Education or Discipleship Training courses have you undertaken, and in what ways they benefited you.
4. How would you describe any ‘small-group’ experiences you may have had? Have they been transformative or not? If so, in what ways?
5. Tell me about your personal experiences of ‘worship’, ‘prayer’ and ‘bible reading’.
6. Have you discovered any other ‘spiritual disciplines’ that have become helpful in your personal spiritual development?

Journaling with SOAP

A great way to come clean!

Scripture - Choose a relevant verse or two from your daily devotional reading

Observations - Write your observations in *third person*

- Ask what was being said?
- By whom?
- To whom?
- What did it mean back then?

Application - Write your application in *first person*

- What is it saying to me?
- How do I feel about that?
- What am I going to do about it?
- Who am I going to tell?

Prayers - Keep it simple but from the heart

Once you have finished your SOAP, give it a relevant title, and then enter the Title and the page number in the index in the front of your Journal.

Title : _____

Scripture : _____

Observations: _____

Application: _____

Prayer: _____
