PRACTICAL THEOLOGICAL ECCLESIOLOGY:
GROUNDING, INTEGRATING, ALIGNING AND IMPROVING
ECCLESIAL THEORY AND PRAXIS IN THE
CHRISTIAN BRETHREN COMMUNITY IN AUSTRALIA

by

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SUMMARY

This thesis addresses the division that exists between theory and praxis. Theology in general and practical theology as a specific discipline has allowed this division to arise and indeed grow. The problem facing us is that faith communities now operate out of blind theory and/or blind praxis. To address this situation a reintegration of the theory and practice of the entire ecclesial praxis is needed. This thesis proposes “Practical Theological Ecclesiology” as the way forward. Practical theological ecclesiology is defined as:

The dynamic critical purposeful engagement with the human-divine interactive life of the ecclesial praxis to: ground, integrate, align and improve its essence and expression dimensions as the revelational incarnational sign of God and his purposes in and for the world and directed toward his eschatological kingdom goal.

Practical theological ecclesiology addresses both the abstractness of pure ecclesiology and the pragmatics of the praxis through the development of an operational ecclesiology model that integrates the essence, expression and goal dimensions of the ecclesial praxis. By applying the operational ecclesiology model to praxis, practical theological ecclesiology, through the tasks of grounding, integrating, aligning and improving, uncover the gaps that exist in and between the theory and praxis of a faith community. The resulting analysis provides ecclesial pictures of what is, compared to what should be, according to the operational ecclesiology model. The areas of ecclesial life which need to be grounded, integrated, aligned and improved are therefore exposed for ongoing work. Historical and contemporary research of the Christian Community Churches of Australia, provide the data for a case study which illustrates the potential and the analysis process of practical theological ecclesiology. The research underlines the importance of having an integrated operational ecclesiology, of grounding and integrating the theory, of aligning of theory and praxis, and of providing improvement direction for the praxis, thus removing theory and praxis division, avoiding both blind theory and blind praxis, and giving a clear pathway for the future.

KEY WORDS

DECLARATION

I declare that *Practical theological ecclesiology: grounding, integrating, aligning and improving ecclesial theory and praxis in the Christian Brethren community in Australia* is my own work and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references and this work has not been previously submitted by me for a degree at this or any other institution.

__________________________

David Andrew Smith

7th June, 2016
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Practical theology as a discipline has largely focussed on serving to enhance the communicative actions of the church. In order to accomplish this both the underlying theory of the praxis and the operational praxis itself are considered and placed in a dynamic theory praxis relationship, with a view toward improvement and alignment (Heitink 1999:148-154; Wright 1992:10). However, instead of there being a “mutually supportive and dialectical unity between academia and ecclesia, there is a dichotomous gap that seems to be growing even wider” (Groome 1987:55). Today, theory and praxis remain divided.

As a result there often exists within the church a state of blind practices; a situation where some or all of the communicative actions of the church continue without, or separate from, well-developed underlying action theories. Here practical theology comes to the rescue and through its dynamic approach seeks to uncover or provide a theological theory for each of the communicative actions in operation, thus alleviating the state of blind practices (Heitink 1999:152). But on further reflection we find that while having achieved the formation of informed practices, we could still be left open to the charge of operating from a blind praxis. Blind praxis is where the operational praxis, while informed by separate theories of communicative actions, operates without an informed, integrated, and substantive ecclesial theory. The result is a state where many possibly informed yet disparate practices are in operation, but have not been integrated by a well-developed, unifying, and holistic praxis theory. This produces a community of faith that lacks theological substance or cohesiveness and is without a foundation for unity, review, or renewal, in terms of an integrated understanding of the essence of what the church is called to be, to reflect, and to become.

To address this we need to move from practical theology to practical theological ecclesiology (Heitink 1999:275-291). In the past practical theological ecclesiology, as with Heitink, has been viewed as a sub-discipline of practical theology dealing with the actions of the institutional church separate from the concepts of individual or public Christianity. Practical theological ecclesiology, according to this thesis, should not be viewed as a sub-discipline but be redefined to become the discipline that addresses not just the institutional section of the praxis but the praxis in its entirety in a holistic way. Practical theological ecclesiology addresses both the abstractness of pure ecclesiology and the pragmatics of the praxis through the development of an operational ecclesiology model that integrates the essence, expression, and goal dimensions of the
comprehensive praxis. Practical theology at its heart attends to the grounding, alignment, and improvement of communicative theories and practices. Practical theological ecclesiology, on the other hand, has the entire community of faith in view and seeks to ground, integrate, align, and improve the entire ecclesial praxis with a substantive holistic integrative operational ecclesiology. This approach uncovers the gaps that exist in and between the theory and praxis of a faith community, to unify theory and praxis, to provide an integrated praxis theory and to reduce or remove the existence of blind praxis and also blind theory.

This problem came to my attention upon reflecting on the situation of my own denomination, the Christian Brethren. The faith community, now called the Christian Brethren, arose out of the separatist and nonconformist environment of the early 1800s in Great Britain and Ireland. It was a reactionary movement against the state church, the Church of England, which could be described at the time, in practical theological terms, as operating from a theory divorced from its praxis, a blind theory, a church system disengaged from the shifting context of the time. The Brethren founders reacted against the condition of the established churches of the day and their disregard for society. The movement reacted to the perceived Anglican excesses of structure, clergy control, and a lack of moral integrity. In response they sought a return to the Bible and to the practices of the New Testament church as a guide for the movement, becoming anti-creedal, anti-structural, and following a largely primitivist philosophy.

The Brethren movement developed a unique ecclesiology and practice which has been added to and changed through time. The reactive formation and the anti-creedal stance of the movement militated against a full and formal approach to a denominational ecclesiology and to developing solid theological foundations for their communicative actions. Speaking of the Free Churches, which would include the Brethren, Kärkkäinen notes that “many of those newer Christian traditions have not yet produced much theology of the church. Even if in everyday life they do, of course, live out their ‘churchliness’” (Kärkkäinen 2002:16). In fact the Brethren moved one step further taking on a reactive anti-scholarly stance. Regarding such a stance, Wright comments that “much of Christianity is afraid of scholarly learning.... But, granted that learning without love is sterile and dry, enthusiasm without learning can easily become blind arrogance” (Wright 1992:10). This possibly places the Christian Brethren in the dubious category of not only being a movement without substantial ecclesiological or praxis theory and therefore operating out of blind practice, but of being open to the charge of employing blind arrogance to cover its apparent theological ignorance.
For the Brethren, the apparent lack of any significant communal operational ecclesiology to serve as a unifying foundation for the movement has led to the practices of the Christian Brethren dominating as a directive force. Further, due to the shallow or absent ecclesial theory to underpin their ministry approaches, the movement has since fragmented around practice variation. The result is a pragmatic movement operating largely out of local theologies based around practice, without being grounded in a substantial integrated operational ecclesiology and praxis theory. Therefore, if not blind arrogance, the movement has followed the surrounding culture which is “steeped in pragmatism ... [and the] church has not been immune to the effects of such pragmatism” (Hill 2012:265).

This poses a further problem for the movement when it faces challenges, needs to adapt, or seeks to answer the question, “How do we improve?” Without a foundational integrated ecclesiology, and with its praxis divided from substantive theory, the question of advancement is left floundering, reliant on praxis reflection at best. This environment provides fertile ground for traditionalism, ideology, pragmatism, or division, bringing a splintering or weakening of the movement rather than leading to strength, cohesion, and unity.

The problems of:

- an ecclesiology and praxis divide,
- a largely blind practice and blind praxis mode of operation,
- an underdeveloped and ungrounded ecclesiology, and
- a difficulty in the ability to critique, adapt, improve and respond to challenges,

have plagued the genesis of the movement and weakened and hindered its development and advancement throughout its history.

The problems outlined above in relation to this specific movement are not isolated. In fact any denomination as a whole, or any local faith community, will at times and in varying degrees suffer from the same problems. This thesis addresses these problems by providing an integrative approach called practical theological ecclesiology, centred on a new integrative operational ecclesiology model. The development of the practical theological ecclesiology model and approach will be presented in this thesis over the next four chapters focussing on – the problem, the solution, the tasks, and the case study.
Chapter two highlights the problem and the need for change. We trace the historical disintegration of theology, the development of the theory and praxis divide, the resulting problems of blind theory and blind praxis, the insufficiency of current practical theological approaches to fully address the problems in an integrated and holistic way, and thus the urgent need for practical theological ecclesiology to integrate theory and praxis.

Chapter three presents practical theological ecclesiology as the integrative solution. In developing practical theological ecclesiology a suitable praxis frame must first be defined. Many different praxis frames have been employed at different times by practical theology and theologians generally, to address various aspects of Christian life and practice, such as: clerical, focussing on leadership; ecclesiastical, focussing in the institution of the church; global, focussing on social change; and faith, focussing on the formation of the individual. We choose and define the ecclesial praxis frame, a frame that is holistic, including all the core elements of the other frames, is inclusive and integrative, includes essence, expression and goal dimensions, and serves as the appropriate research domain for practical theological ecclesiology. With this praxis frame determining our borders an operational ecclesiology model is then constructed. This construction work considers what an operational ecclesiology is and what dimension an operational model should consist of in order to serve the ecclesial praxis. The strengths and weaknesses of previous operational ecclesiology models both within practical theological ecclesiology, practical theology, and ecclesiology in general, are considered before developing a final integrative operational ecclesiology model for practical theological ecclesiology to use to ground, integrate, align and improve ecclesial theory and praxis.

Chapter four presents the four tasks of practical theological ecclesiology: grounding, integrating, aligning, and improving, and outlines the process of research analysis that will be used for each task. These four tasks, in summary, serve to ground the essence, expression and goal theory, integrate the three ecclesial dimensions, align theory and praxis, and provide a way forward for praxis improvement.

Chapter five puts the tasks of practical theological ecclesiology and the operational ecclesiology model to the test. This chapter presents a case study that incorporates historical research of the early Brethren, and contemporary research of the Christian Community Churches of Australia, the Christian Brethren community in Australia today. This research provide the data which serves to illustrate: the potential of practical theological ecclesiology, the importance of having an
integrative operational ecclesiology, and the benefit of carrying out the grounding, integrating, aligning, and improving tasks on the praxis. All this serves to bring theory and praxis together, avoid both blind theory and blind praxis, and provide clear direction for the future.

This thesis shows that practical theological ecclesiology, through the use of an operational ecclesiology model, can bridge the divide between theory and praxis and move a faith community toward having a comprehensive, grounded, integrated, aligned and indeed improved theory of their ecclesial praxis.
2 THE PROBLEM

Theologians and practitioners have over time shifted theology from its roots as an integrated pursuit, to a fractured science which perpetuates a theory and praxis divide. There has been a continual splintering of theology into separate theory and praxis disciplines and specialisations resulting in the creation of possible states of blind theory and blind praxis (see Figure 1). The first state, blind theory, places a focus on and gives priority of authority to theological theory, the second, blind praxis, to action, practice, experience and the praxis.

Figure 1 The Theory Praxis Problem

Practical theology as a discrete discipline within the field of theology has always sought to provide a much needed bridge between theory and praxis, to bring integration and reduce the possibility of blind theory or praxis. However, it too has fallen short of providing a comprehensive integrated and uniting solution.

To highlight the problem we will first trace the historical development of the concept of theology with a specific focus on how the divide between theory and praxis has developed and given rise to the problems of blind theory and blind praxis. We proceed to then consider practical theology’s unique contribution to the task of bridging the gap and outline the work that remains.

2.1 THE DIS-INTEGRATION OF THEOLOGY

The history of theology is the history of God shaped active reflection. It first finds expression in the Old Testament through the Hebrew for “Word”, dabhar, and the unifying concept of Torah.
Unlike English today, where words can be separated as a thought or an idea over against any necessary effect or action, *dahbar* is “an extension of a person into the outer world, one that has effects” (Veling 2005:xii). For God, word creates, it creates life. In the Old Testament word does not sit separate from action, word lives. In the Jewish rabbinic tradition, God’s word, the Torah “is always about the *way one should live*” (Veling 2005:14). The Torah is faith in action for God. The New Testament expresses this same thought through the marriage of faith and works. Theology, involving the intimate relationship of theory and praxis, is “the core of the entire philosophical enterprise; it involves the relations of consciousness to being, of subject to object, of idea to reality, of word to deed, of meaning to history” (Lamb 2012:149). But this all important relationship has been shattered.

### 2.1.1 Theology as Wisdom

In the early years of the church the term theology was rarely used in Christian circles because of its common inclusive use in referring to pagan gods. Theology or *theologia* was first understood simply as the “knowledge of divine things” (Congar 1968:29). While the usage of the term was limited, *theologia*, as a concept referring to the “knowledge of God” (Farley 1983:22; Schaff 1893:77), was “very much part of the Christian movement and Christian (patristic) literature. In other words a salvifically originated knowledge of divine being was part of the Christian community and tradition long before it was named theology” (Farley 2001:33). To distinguish Christian theology from mystical or any other form of pagan theology Eusebius (260/265 – 339/340) entitled one of his last works *On Ecclesiastical Theology* (Congar 1968:30). He thereby set the frame of reference for *theologia* within the faith community of God.

So how did the early Christians understand theology? “Early Christian practice suggests ... at the most basic level [theology] was understood as a *habitus* of the Christian believer ... the implicit world view that guided the temperament and practice of believers lives” (Maddox 1990:651). That is, theology was a knowledge “habit of the human soul” (Farley 2001:31) that attends faith. It was a faith “disposition of mind and heart from which action flows naturally ...” (Forrester 2000:5). There was considerable debate as to the nature of the knowledge habit of theology, and “if there is a dominant position it is that theology is a practical, not theoretical, habit having the primary character of wisdom” (Farley 2001:35). Theology as wisdom was conceived not as an end in itself, but as formative in the life of faith, as the “discipline of study, instruction, and
shepherding directed toward forming theology/habitus in believers” (Maddox 1990:651). Further, for Farley, theology is caught up in the purposes of God, as habitus it is directed toward “the sake of God ... for God’s appointed salvific end of the human being” (Farley 1983:27).

Putting these thoughts together we can say that the early understanding of theology as habitus was:

The formation by wisdom knowledge of the life and practice of the faith community for God.

At its genesis then, theology pursued wisdom knowledge, with the goal of this wisdom knowledge being formational for, the individual life and practice of faith, and the life and practice of the community of faith, oriented toward the purposes of God for his people. “Theology in this sense cannot be anything but practical” (Farley 1983:27).

While integrated under the overarching concept of theology as habitus, prior to the development of specialist fields, there existed an understanding of theory and practice distinct from each other. “Theory meant that aspect of the habitus, or wisdom, in which the divine object evokes acknowledgement or belief. Practice meant that aspect of the habitus, or wisdom, in which the divine object sets requirements of obedience and life. Both reside within the single existential habitus called theology” (Farley 1983:27). As such theology as a faith pursuit involved “the whole person rather than a simple act of intellectual assent.... Contemplation could not be separated from action, any more than faith could be separated from the Church, the community of faith” (Forrester 2000:34). Here theory and praxis while distinctly articulated are viewed as inseparable.

As it grew in usage the term theologia took on two different senses. “First, theology is a term for an actual, individual cognition of God and things related to God, a cognition which in most treatments attends faith and has eternal happiness as its final goal. Second, theology is a term for a discipline, a self-conscious scholarly enterprise of understanding” (Farley 2001:31). Originally held together as a discipline in service of life wisdom for the faith community, theology as a scholarly enterprise has over time gained priority over theology as wisdom for a life of faith.
2.1.2 Theology as Science

For many centuries theology, as *theologia*, also known as *sapentia*, united the theoretical and the practical (Pannenberg 1976:232), “a divinely enabled sapiential knowledge, [and] a practically oriented habit or disposition” (Farley 2001:54). However, under the influence of Aristotelian scholasticism the question was asked “whether theology ... was *scientia speculativa* or a *scientia practica*” (Ebeling 1978:114). This question forced theology to be viewed scientifically and from its ability to be verified. The answer henceforth divided the field. Ebeling asked obvious pertinent question, “Is theology ultimately oriented to the consideration of the truth for its own sake or to the good so that it initially verifies itself in behaviour?” (Ebeling 1978:114). If theological verification is sought through truth deposits then speculative theology was the bank. If theological verification prizes faith life transformation then practical theology provides the road map. The former was chosen by most. By “the 12th century the cathedral universities in particular were ... adopting an Aristotelian model of a theoretical science ... aimed at assimilating rationally demonstrated and ordered knowledge for its own sake” (Maddox 1990:652). Science became connected to the verifiable temporal world, and wisdom “with the eternal, with God as the highest good” (Heitink 1993:106). Theology by this time was losing the wider sense of wisdom for life, primarily referring to the pursuit of theological scholarship in the name of science. Theology as knowledge for life, moved to theology as knowledge about life.

Aquinas (1225-1274) affirmed this position proposing that “sacred doctrine is concerned principally with God.... [S]acred doctrine is more speculative than practical, since it is concerned with divine things more fundamentally than with the actions of men” (Fairweather 1954:39–40). The faith and reason stance of Aquinas was debated by such thinkers as Bonaventure. For Bonaventure (1221-1274) it was clear that “all divisions of knowledge are servants of theology” and that the goal of all knowledge and therefore all theology is that “faith may be strengthened, *God may be honoured*, character may be formed, and consolation may be derived from union of the Spouse with the beloved ...” (Bonaventure 2001:61). The goal of theology for Bonaventure was practical faith formation for God’s glory. In the same vein Duns Scotus (1266-1308) “acknowledged God as the ‘doable knowable,’ ... the object knowledge which may be reached by a doing which is true praxis” (Lamb 2012:155). That is God is only known though the active praxis of faith. Such divergence of approaches “resulted in a split between views of theology as a speculative discipline and as practical knowledge” (Fulkerson 2012:359). As speculative theology
gained precedence, theology of a more moral, practical and formational nature was moved to being a genre rather than residing at the core of theological pursuits.

The Reformation largely reacted to the pure speculative theology of the medieval period. Luther himself stated, “True theology is practical…. Accordingly speculative theology belongs to the devil in hell” (Luther 1967:22). It is clear that by Luther’s time there was a clear distinction between pure theology and a theology of practice. Following Luther’s lead, “Practice now meant the actual carrying out of life as such, so that theology was designated as exclusively practical precisely for the sake of the primacy of the faith that defines and decides life” (Ebeling 1978:115). Calvin also resisted the theology/science textbook approach and wrote his theology “largely for lay catechesis” (Maddox 1990:654), having life formation and practical outcomes in mind. However, the influence of the Reformation was short lived as the influences of Orthodoxy and Pietism “served to separate again the discipline of doctrinal reflection and the guidance of Christian life” (Maddox 1990:655).

It was the categorisation for education and a change in the view of the nature of theology that formalised this division. Firstly, regarding categorisation, Gundling, in reflecting seventeenth century debates “on whether theologia is a prudence, wisdom, or science,… assigns disciplines of wisdom and prudence to the practical side and disciplines of instrumentality and principles to the theoretical side” (Farley 2001:95). Among others, Gundling succeeded in dividing the field of theology into “sciences of theory and sciences of practice…. This language and this twofold division became standard for the rest of the eighteenth century” (Farley 2001:76). It therefore became “common in both Protestant and Catholic schools to designate texts which dealt with Christian actions “practical theology” as distinguished from “theoretical theology” which dealt with Christian beliefs. Such a distinction was apparently modelled on Aristotle’s (384 BC – 322 BC) differentiation between theoria and praxis” (Maddox 1990:657). It was this theory and practice organisational separation that precipitated a formal change in viewing theology. This dualistic organisation of theology ensured that theology became “viewed not as itself a habit, a knowing, a wisdom, but as an object, a set of truths” (Farley 2001:78), applied to the practice. Theology, as a science, was placed alongside medicine and law being concerned with “theory as directed towards the goal of practice” (Forrester 2000:35). This development of a more theoretical critical focus also shifted the focus of practical theology. “It changed the moral category concerned with life, rule, and duties, to a clergy category…. Practical theology has thus become a term for ministry or clergy disciplines” (Farley 2001:78). As a result, theology as wisdom for life formation
had been transformed and separated into pure theoretical theology and practical theory for the clergy. The divide was set: the university chose theological scholarship and theory, and the seminary – clerical preparation for the praxis.

2.1.3 Theological Disciplines

The emergence of science and the modern university, with its “emancipation of thought and inquiry” (Farley 2001:41), created an environment of objective theological scholarship over against the subjective faith based praxis. This was an environment where, “Theory represents the orientation of the subject-towards-objectivity ... [and] praxis represents the orientation of the subject-towards-subjectivity” (Lamb 2012:150). This new landscape “privileged reason based sciences over what were perceived to be authoritarian-based religious convictions ...” (Fulkerson 2012:360). This objective approach also served to “entrench in the interpretation of religion - the critical principle. And with that, theology the habitus and theology the one science were replaced by theological sciences” (Farley 1983:24), further transforming the situation.

Within academic institutions this critical shift precipitated the development of the theological encyclopaedia with its various divisions and arrangements (Schaff 1893:10–11). Over time these specialist theological sciences or fields “have come to be called the ‘fourfold,’ that is, Bible, church history, theology/ethics, and the practical/ministerial field” (Fulkerson 2012:361). This move eventually lead to dogmatic or systematic theology becoming known as “theology proper,” precipitating the view that all other disciplines were secondary to the work of systematic theology. Bible and church history became data to be constructed into a true theological product, with practical studies being the product applied into a situation. With the moving of the practical aspects of theology from formation to application the prioritisation of pure theology was complete and the clericalisation of the practical had begun. With this “pluralisation into sciences, theology as a disposition of the soul toward God simply drops out of ‘the study of theology’” (Farley 2001:43). Here, theology is no longer a unifying discipline but a “generic term for a cluster of disciplines” (Farley 2001:81), “an aggregate of disciplines whose unity is their pertinence to the tasks of ministry” (Farley 2001:43), rather than formation of the faith community. Theology as habitus, God wisdom shaping the life of faith, transitioned into theology as science, knowledge separate from life, and has now become theology as “strategic, technical knowledge” (Farley 2001:44), serving the ministry actions of the church.
2.1.4 Theological Faculties

Thus the “boundary between theoretical and applied knowledge in theology was established with the study of Scripture, doctrine, and church history in one category and the practical disciplines on ministry in the other” (Graham in Paver 2006:11), with life or community formation sidelined. This gave rise to the development of separate theological faculties with scholarly specialists to head up theological research and clerical education. The division of theology and the disciplines continued with practical theology being further divided into the major functions of church ministry: “homiletics, catechetics, liturgics, church jurisprudence and polity, and pastoral care (Farley 1987:3–4). Here the focus shifted further, from the applicational teaching of theology for clerical ministry, to the teaching of techniques or tasks required to fulfil the necessary functions of ministry. The result is that the teaching of practical theology had become largely divorced from the teaching of systematic theology. With the institutionalisation of both theoretical theology and practical theology and their orientation primarily toward clerical education, the relating of theory to the praxis for community transformation was overlooked. According to Farley “if theology is related to practice simply by way of clerical leadership, it does not have an essential praxis element related to [the] world as such. ‘Theology’ in other words does not refer to the self-understanding of the community of faith as it exists in relation to the world” (Farley 1983:27). Through the uptake of the functional clerical approach, all theological connection to the faith life of the community is lost from view.

Today the academy serves as the primary producer of theology. But the question must be asked of the producer of theology – “To what end?” Current theological faculties are largely busy producing to increase critical theological knowledge and to educate current and future academics. The practical or ministry focussed faculties, of which practical theology forms part, are directed toward the education of the clergy and the technical improvement of their associated functions and actions. According to Lindbeck, theology is now divided into two dominant approaches; “the cognitive-propositional and the experiential-expressive” (Lindbeck 1984:16), (Ward 2012:59). We are now in a situation where academic theology produces cognitive theological theories with pure research as the goal, and separately, practical theology serves to produce technical advice to inform and improve the actions and expressions of clerical ministry. With such an apparent division we can generalise and say that theology has become increasingly blind and disconnected from the praxis, and the praxis increasingly blind and ungrounded in theology.
The historical movements within theology have served to separate theological theory from the praxis, leading to: possibilities of blind theory and blind praxis, the setting of theological theory primarily as the master of truth and praxis as master of activity, has shifted the focus from life wisdom and community transformation, to that of educating academics and informing the practical tasks of ministry. It seems that, theology as truth, and praxis as the context of grace, has been divorced. The progressive divorce of theology and praxis over time is shown in the following chart (see Figure 2).

![Figure 2](image)

### 2.2 THE RESULT – BLIND THEORY AND BLIND PRAXIS

The theory praxis divide now presents a blind theory and blind praxis problem. When we say blind theory and blind practice we don’t have in mind that total blindness from any theory or praxis can exist. So what do we mean by blind theory and blind praxis?

Practices are theory laden (Browning 1983:6), or bearers of theology (Cameron et al. 2010:51). “Practice is its own proper ‘articulation’ of theological conviction and insight” (Cameron et al. 2010:51). Similarly, for Swinton and Mowat, “all human practices are historically grounded and inherently value-laden” (Swinton and Mowat 2006:19). Browning actually uses the phrase “theory laden” seeking to rule out

the widely held assumption that theory is distinct from practice. All our practices, even our religious practices, have theories behind and within them. We may not notice the theories in our practices. We are so embedded in our practices, take them so much for granted, and view them as natural and self-evident that we never take time to abstract the theory from the practice and look at it as something in itself. (Browning 1983:6)
Whether known and considered or not, every action is an expression of an implied or underlying theory. Likewise, every theory is constructed within or is influenced by an actual or implied context. No theory is developed in a void.

A precise definition of blind theory and blind praxis in the context of practical theology will be provided later. However, at this point, by blind theory we mean that the theory has not formally recognised or considered the underlying praxis, and by blind praxis we mean that the praxis has not formally acknowledged or recognised the underlying theory, either espoused or operant (Cameron et al. 2010:54).

The historical drifting apart of theory and praxis and the resultant pre-eminence placed on either theory or praxis is at the heart of the blind theory and blind praxis problem before us. Mudge and Poling summarise the landscape, “On the one hand, the academic theological world seems preoccupied with its own problems of methodological coherence and reality reference. On the other, faith communities whether oriented to the centre, the left or the right – function with scant attention to theology of the scholarly, critical kind” (Mudge and Poling 1987:xiii). Ogletree in affirming the problem states that the “separation of academic and practical studies ... is an unsatisfactory state of affairs. When we allow these two interests to undergo separate development, we impoverish and distort them both” (Ogletree 1983:83). This separation, producing situations of blind theory and blind praxis (see Figure 3), results in issues of abstraction and irrelevance to life on the one hand and of grounding in true life on the other.

Blind Theory
Disconnected
Unreflected

Blind Praxis
Ungrounded
Unreflected

Figure 3  Blind Theory and Blind Praxis

Blind theory is disconnected theory; a theory that is not connected to a clear vision of and for the praxis. It is a theory which does not seek a clear connection with the life of faith, failing to account well for individual, communal, or global activities and purposes of faith.

Academia, in this space, carves out its own path, developing and dispensing a theology and hence an ecclesiology in abstraction from the ecclesia or the ecclesial context. Swinton and Mowat
suggest that here, “the interpretive activity of the Christian community is subsumed to the
distanciated presumptions of academic questioning” (Swinton and Mowat 2006:14). Such
theology, developed through the suppression of the praxis and the distancing of the reflection, is
unrelated theory. “It suffers from a tendency to discuss practice in highly abstract ways. Practice
gets turned into a ‘theory’ that functions in theology like a philosophy” (Ward 2012:59–60). This
problem is compounded when unrelated theory also becomes unreflected theory; a theory
constructed without specific reality points, standing free from challenge by praxis. Such
unreflected theory tends to become static and ineffective when there is a change in the context
(Pieterse 2011:50). Further a static unreflected theory is also in danger of drifting toward an
unquestioned ideology.

Along with being unrelated and unreflected, according to Swinton and Mowat, this separation of
theory from practice has also taken the soul out of theology, leaving it “trapped in an internal
classification which ultimately makes a difference only to a select group, without necessary
relevance for the Christian community or the continuing mission of God in history” (Swinton and
Mowat 2006:18). As a result academia becomes self-serving rather than “engaging the pressing
questions of human existence. We lose a sense of connection between critical thought and vital
life concerns” (Ogletree 1983:83). Barth describes this position as “being no more than an idle
intellectual frivolity ... being aloof from life and of doubtful value ...” (Barth 1956b:787). The result
can be the construction of a beautiful theoretical body of knowledge without the life of the Spirit
whose works rests within the reality of the faith community.

Such theory, abstract and unrelated, constructed without due consideration of the praxis,
unreflected, applied dispassionately without regard for the specifics of the praxis, and soulless,
disconnected from the life of the Spirit community, is a blind theory, an ecclesial theory blind to
the ecclesia.

On the other hand blind praxis is ungrounded praxis; a praxis that drifts on the current of its own
concerns, not grounded in a clear understanding and vision of its own history, its life of faith, and
its eschatological future. It is a praxis wandering without a clear goal, having no distinguishable
telos, unable to bring cohesive wisdom, discernment, and light to individual, communal, or global
activities of faith.

The isolation of theory from practice together with the development of an academia blind to the
praxis has resulted in the formation of historical and current reactionary movements. Historical
critics of blind theology include, “monastic, Reformation-Protestant, pietist, puritan, activist – [movements who] contend that theology effects a distanciation from the experientiality and activity of faith. These complaints have contemporary expressions: existentialist, liberationist, deconstructionist, ecclesiastical, clergy-oriented, political” (Farley 1987:8). These reactionary movements, seeking mostly practical rather than theoretical outcomes, have often resulted in praxis approaches that operate without significant reflection on or grounding in a substantive underlying theological theory. This creates the possibility of a place where “theological understandings are displaced by unexamined assumptions and premises” (Ogletree 1983:83). In such a case we agree with Bloesch, “Devotion without doctrine is blind” (Bloesch 2006:18). “The problem with this attitude is blind practice” (Pieterse 2011:50), and in such a blind practice situation, where practices are both ungrounded and unreflected, one will often find ineffective practices due to problems that the practitioners are not aware of; problems that hinder the advancement of the gospel. Such problems are difficult to address without a clear reflection and reference process that finds its grounding outside the walls of the praxis.

Further, where practical thinking takes leave of theology, the “authenticity of any particular practice is determined not by anything inherent within the practice itself, but rather by the effect that it has” (Swinton and Mowat 2006:18). In such cases we tend to shift our focus from questions of essence, calling and purpose, becoming “preoccupied with technique ...” (Ogletree 1983:83), effectiveness, and results which “leads to an understanding of practice which is individualistic, technological, ahistorical and abstract” (Swinton and Mowat 2006:18). Practical concerns increasingly become isolated, disconnected, narrow, and blind to theological substance and therefore devoid of holistic purpose and life.

When theory and praxis are separated academia loses its connection with the reality of the faith community, and the practical life of the faith community is cast from its theological moorings. We then find ourselves in the unfortunate place where we can truly say, “That may be good in theory, but it doesn’t work in practice.” Thus both disconnected and unreflected theory and ungrounded unreflected praxis situations must be avoided, lest we find ourselves in places of academic idolatry and ideology or the wholesale worship of tradition or pragmatism. Ogletree underlines the danger of blind theory or blind praxis situations concluding that “both the abstraction of academic undertakings from life realities and the reduction of practical knowledge to technique conspire to confirm and reinforce dominant patterns of an existing world, transforming theological substance into ideology” (Ogletree 1983:83).
Schleiermacher, in attempting to avoid such blind theory and blind praxis approaches, states that “without a theory, progress comes about more or less at random” (Schleiermacher 1988:119). He goes on to say that,

Unexamined opinions are dangerous to the church. Only searching inquiry, the interplay of historical and philosophical theology, can lead to an understanding of the church which is worthy of a truly reflective theory of practice. An understanding of this sort will be one that can identify if and when ‘church life’ is actually in keeping with the nature and purpose of the church, indeed, with the very essence of Christianity itself.” (Schleiermacher 1988:27–28)

What we with Schleiermacher are searching for, is where a connected and reflective theory exists together with a corresponding grounded and reflective praxis (see Figure 4).

**Figure 4  Reflecting Theory and Praxis**

Using Schleiermacher’s words above, this creates a situation where the “church life” (praxis) is in keeping with the “nature and purpose of the church” (theory). That is a place where:

The expression of the faith community reflects the very essence and goal of the church; a situation where the essence, expression, and end of the church are grounded, integrated, aligned, and open for improvement; a place where theory and praxis reside in unity, where the continuing revelation of Christ lives in his body, the church, by the gracious Spirit of true life.

This is our goal. We now turn to consider practical theology. Practical theology has set itself forth as the potential theory and praxis bridge to help us overcome the problems of blind theory and blind praxis. However, as we shall see the bridge is unfinished and we must develop a more cohesive approach that will ensure the life expression of the faith community reflects the very essence and eschatological goal of the church. In search of a theory and praxis integration we turn to consider the various pathways taken by practical theology from Schleiermacher to the present day in order to uncover the path to be taken and the work that is left unfinished.
2.3 PRACTICAL THEOLOGY – THE UNFINISHED BRIDGE

When theology, as *theologia*, was considered a *habitus*, a wisdom knowledge, “practice was built into theology by definition” (Farley 2001:132). At this time theology constituted Christian life and community. The scholastic movement’s division of speculative and applied theology, the move into the fourfold disciplines and the functionalisation of practical theology have splintered the landscape. History has opened the theory praxis divide, creating the possibilities of the blind theory and blind praxis problems before us today. The need of a theory praxis bridge to span the divide has not gone unnoticed. According to Jannasch, practical theology as a specific discipline came into being “when the other theological disciplines, as they grew more independent, threatened to distance themselves from their churchly task” (Firet 1986:3).

The term “Practical Theology” was first introduced as a designation for distinct theological study by Gesbert Voëtius (1588-1676) in 1667 (Schaff 1893:448). However, not until Schleiermacher (1768-1834), considered the father of modern theology and the pioneer of practical theology, did practical theology rise to theological prominence as the “bridge between academic theory and life practice” (Schleiermacher 1988:13–14). The modern pursuit of practical theology continues to set itself the task of bridging the theory praxis divide. Browning suggests, “There seems to be a growing hunger to make theology in general more relevant to the guidance of action and to bridge the gap between theory and practice, thought and life, the classical theological disciplines and practical theology” (Browning 1983:3). Through the “theory of praxis” (Schleiermacher 1988:89) or more recently “theory of action” (Heitink 1993:1) approaches, practical theology has attempted to find an integrational pathway that is both theological and unifying. “Practical theology’s task is to make practice more theological – and in that way it makes theology more practical” (Cameron et al. 2010:17). Veling also proposes that practical theology attempts to heal these divisions so that “theological reflection can regain its intrinsic connection to life. So that we can overcome the artificial distinction between thinking and acting and become more serious about both” (Veling 2005:5).

The body of work addressing these and other associated issues has grown rapidly. But has practical theology truly succeeded in providing an effective bridge to span the theory and praxis divide? Has it negotiated the issues of theory or praxis priority that have been highlighted? Has it developed a true “theory of praxis”; a holistic, integrated and theologically dynamic approach to
the life and action, the presence and practices, the essence and expression of the faith community?

2.3.1 Schleiermacher

Schleiermacher, through his structuring of the theological pursuit, sought to clarify the relationship between theology and the church. The climate he found himself in was one where dogmatics was considered to be theology proper and all else an auxiliary science, and therefore practical theology considered as “applied theology” (Schleiermacher 1988:84). Schleiermacher was unsatisfied with this approach. “He was the first to set forth a vision of practical theology as a unified field of study...” (Schleiermacher 1988:7). He sought to avoid the theory and praxis divide through the development of an academically sound yet practically focussed theology. He delineated three fields of theology:

- **Philosophical theology** - focussing on a systematic presentation of the essence of the Christian faith and community.
- **Historical theology** - includes exegetical theology, and the study of church tradition, history and contemporary life.
- **Practical theology** - providing faithful guidance to the expressions of the church. (Schleiermacher 1988:21–22)

It was Schleiermacher’s desire that these fields operate in an interdependent rather than isolated fashion (see Figure 5) to avoid the divide that was prevalent in his day.

![Figure 5 Schleiermacher’s Division of Theology](image)
In Schleiermacher’s view the study of theology is only undertaken for the sake of the church. For him “Practical Theology connects Historical Theology with the active Christian life and gives Philosophical Theology its moorings in the actual experience of the church. In this way theological disciplines are protected from isolation no matter how technical their work” (Sleeth 1976:47). This was Schleiermacher’s original desire, embedded within his “theory of praxis” concept. He sought to unify the theological disciplines by placing practical theology as the “theory of praxis” within the context of the essential nature of the church (the praxis essence) and its teleological purpose (the expression goal), resulting in rules of church guidance “integrally related to the essence of Christianity” (Farley 2001:102). More specifically his practical theological work focussed on the “theological analysis of the purpose of leadership activity in the church. That purpose, according to Schleiermacher, is to insure the Christian faithfulness of the ministry of the church” (Schleiermacher 1988:21).

Schleiermacher’s Brief Outline sets forth two unifying themes for theology, one determined by the “clerical paradigm,”¹ the other by the “essence of Christianity” concept. The clerical theme considers that which is required to ensure the leadership of the church guides the church faithfully toward its purpose. The essence theme, “attempts to identify the defining characteristics of the faith constitutive of the Christian church. Its outcome is to be a clear conception of the ‘essence,’ the ‘first principles,’ or ‘Idea’ of Christianity, that is a conception of what makes the Christian religion what it truly is” (Schleiermacher 1988:21–22). The idea of the essence of Christianity provides the basis, purpose and goal for clerical leadership in the church. Schleiermacher here places theology in the context of the church community to serve as a formation activity guiding the leadership to progress the purposes of the church. Therefore the role of practical theology is to “make a difference in the lives of people, to help them develop as they should as individuals and as a community” (Schleiermacher 1988:27). For Schleiermacher the focus of practical theology is formation of the faith community through seeking “to delineate the means by which the faith community may preserve and perfect its integrity as the present gives way to the future” (Schleiermacher 1988:22).

¹ Farley defines his use of the term clerical paradigm to refer “to prevailing (post-Schleiermacher) Protestant way of understanding the unity of theological education. According to this paradigm, the disparate fields and courses are connected by their capacity to prepare the student for future clergy responsibilities” (Farley 2001:98).
In summary Schleiermacher’s process of integrating theology around the praxis is as follows:

1. Outline the nature of the praxis, the essence of the Church – philosophical theology
2. Outline the state of the Church praxis through describing “the condition of the faith-community in the past and the present” (Schleiermacher 1988:22) – historical theology.

While this process would seem at first glance to be a one way, linear, theory to praxis process, according to Duke and Stone, Schleiermacher actually sought a dynamic relationship between theory and praxis.

[T]he sort of theological reflection that Schleiermacher has in mind arises from the life of the Christian church. And it returns to that life. Its outcome is again a theology, this time a second-order expression of faith, which having scrutinised church practice for its Christianness, prepares for fresh engagement. Thus theology, by which Schleiermacher means Christian theology, is always Church theology, and it is studied because of and for the sake of Christian practice. (Duke and Stone in Schleiermacher 1988:17)

Thus, for Schleiermacher, Christian theology is studied to provide continuing fresh understanding of the life of the faith community. It constantly provides the appropriate faithful expression that must flow from the essence of being the faithful church. Such Christian theology then provides the basis for the activity of guiding the expression of the church now toward becoming the faithful expression it is called to be. Schleiermacher sought this “from life to life” approach (see Figure 6) as a unifying dynamic remedy to the separatist and applicational situation he encountered, criticising all who sought to “turn practical theology into a mere application of dogmatics” (Schleiermacher 1988:23).
Schleiermacher intentionally sought, through practical theology, to unify theology and at the same time to amplify the importance of the praxis as a corrective in a theory dominated environment. However, his distinction between practical theology producing rules for guidance and the other fields dealing with knowledge (Schleiermacher 1988:23) did not help. He also would speak of how “the field makes use of and applies the knowledge of Christianity it receives from other inquiries” (Schleiermacher 1988:23). As Burkhart comments of Schleiermacher, “while thought influences action, action does not really influence thought ... [and] acting remains subordinate to knowing.... In a word his own life and thought did not bring him to any systematic understanding of the interpretive dimension of praxis” (Burkhart 1983:53). His structured approach and his introduction of the clerical paradigm unfortunately resulted, not in integration and a dynamic interdependence, but in two largely unintended paths: applicationism through the dominance of theory, and pragmatism through the dominance of the praxis.

Marheineke (1780-1846) continued on from the work of Schleiermacher. He resurrected formation and chose to focus on the praxis of the church, with faith rather than clerical activity serving as the context for the “unity of knowledge and action.... As a disciple of Hegel, he formulated the goal of practical theology in a dialectical manner, separating the things that are temporal from those that are eternal. As a result, the theory-praxis relation became the object of reflection, and practical theology received its own independent status” (Heitink 1993:63). These integration and relationship questions continued from the middle of last century (Cahalan 2012:387). The discussion “framed the question of integration in two ways: first, as an issue
within professional education, understood as integrating knowledge and skills; second, as the relationship between theory and practice, or between the classical theological disciplines and the emerging practical fields” (Cahalan 2012:387).

The relationship and integration of theory and praxis still remains at the centre of practical theology today. For some it provides the opportunity for integration, for others, based on their prioritising preferences, it provides varying points of departure with varying theological and practical results. Anderson comments on the results of prioritising either theory or practice. “If theory precedes and determines practice, then practice tends to be concerned primarily with methods, techniques, and strategies for ministry, lacking theological substance. If practice takes priority over theory, ministry tends to be based on pragmatic results rather than prophetic revelation” (Anderson 2001:14). We now follow these pathways and then explore the dynamic relationship suggested by Schleiermacher and Marheineke in seeking a solution to the theory and praxis divide and the resulting problem of blind theory and blind praxis.

2.3.2 Theory for Praxis – The Pre-eminence of Theory

Theory for praxis is the path taken by theologians where pre-eminence is given to theory over praxis. It is, construct the theory first, and apply it to the praxis second; a linear approach. It is a search for truth which can then be disseminated into the praxis. At its extreme it is domination by theory to a receiving praxis (see Figure 7). It is the basis of a blind theory.

![Figure 7 Theory for Praxis](image)

Although “the earliest theologians regarded all theology as practical” (Heyns 1990: 85), from “Aquinas until the Enlightenment, practical theology was understood to be the application of the first principles of reason to experience” (Poling 1985: 10). As such practical theology as the
connection of theological interpretation to the experience and expression of faith communities was understood originally from a linear, applicational or hierarchical perspective.

Schleiermacher’s image of a tree, “with philosophical theology being the roots, historical theology the trunk and practical theology being the branches” (Lartey 2000:129), perhaps inadvertently, opened the door to this approach. As presented before, it is clear from his work that Schleiermacher’s intention was to proceed with an interrelated dynamic existing between philosophical, historical and practical theology (Schleiermacher 2011:8, §16; 14, §31). However, it is apparent that his ordered approach, “to begin with philosophical theology and to conclude with practical theology” (Schleiermacher 2011:14, §31), allowed for the development of such a hierarchy. Paver suggests that Schleiermacher’s theological approach “separates theory from practice, privileging rational and universal ways of knowing at the expense of other forms of knowledge” (Paver 2006:1). He continues, believing that Schleiermacher’s program to primarily bring theology to bear on the responsibilities and tasks of clerical leadership, “categorised practical theology as applied theology, where pastoral ministry is the outworking rather than the source of theological understanding” (Paver 2006:10). Lartey says of Schleiermacher’s approach: “The emphasis is upon content of a discipline and the method adopted is one of applicationism” (Lartey 2000:129). While these statements may overplay Schleiermacher’s intention which sought the “interdependence of the various parts of theological study” (Burkhart 1983:43–44), it seems unlikely that he achieved the position where practical theology would “feed information back to the other theological disciplines” (Woggon 1994:9).

Marheineke, under the influence of Hegel, chose a dialectical approach to the theory and praxis relationship in practical theology. However, even with his dialectical approach and the desire to place practical theology’s point of departure in the praxis, according to Lämmermann, “He arrived at a ‘theory for praxis,’ but not a ‘theory of praxis’” (Heitink 1993:64). Practical theology started, and many continued, in this path of relating theology to practice as the “academic and applied aspects of training for clergy” (Farley 1983:28). In his day, Schleiermacher’s attempt to elevate the praxis in practical theology to bring a dynamic balance largely failed, and his experiential focus was reacted against.

Karl Barth, in his Church Dogmatics, viewed all theology as the task of the church and rejected a division between theory and practice. However, his partitioning of theology into exegetical, systematic and practical, again reinforced a one-directional system where practical theology was
simply left to address the question, “How?” Directed towards God, theology for Barth was the systematic interpretation of God’s self-disclosure to the Christian church (Barth 1936:47–70). There was no role for human understanding, action, or practice in the construal of God’s self-disclosure. Accordingly, theology is practical only by applying God’s revelation as directly and purely as possible to the concrete situations of life. “The theologian moves from revelation to the human, from theory to practice, and from revealed knowledge to application” (Browning 1991:5). Following Barth, and the “influence of dialectical theology, revelation became the central pursuit of theology” (Immink 2005:9), increasing the cognitive-propositional realm and suppressing again the influence of the praxis on practical theology. “The only movement was a one-way deductive traffic from theory as the norm to praxis. Praxis was not given any say in theory formation nor did it serve as a corrective” (Heyns and Pieterse 1990:89). Theory and systematic theology held precedence over the praxis as a source of knowledge and therefore directed the flow of operation.

A clear picture of the operation of this approach to practical theology is given by van Oosterzee, declaring it “teaches the minister of the Gospel to apply ... the knowledge which he has already acquired in the theoretic domain” (van Oosterzee cited in Campbell 1972:218). More recently, Thurneysen, an associate of Barth, employed a “homiletical model” (Campbell 1972:220). For Thurneysen the “whole task of theology must be understood as the doctrine of the word of God” (Thurneysen 1962:11). He “located practical theology firmly within the framework of scripture, tradition and the ongoing preaching of the Gospel” (Campbell 2000:81). For Thurneysen, systematic and historical theology is concerned with the understanding and content of the word of God, and practical theology is bound up in preaching itself, the communicating and the hearing of this truth as such, and all the functions of the church related to it. He viewed all the functions of the church including his focus, pastoral care, as serving the word and proceeding from the word (Thurneysen 1962:53). Such an approach makes practical theology subservient to other schools of theology, placing practical theology as a mere outcome of dogmatic or historical theology. The Roman Catholic Church also operates from this perspective, viewing faith as a “response to supernaturally revealed truths which are ‘deposited’ in the Church, whose task it is to guard, defend, and propagate them” (Lamb 2012:156). In this context doctrine is formed through the “application of logic to the deposit ...” and practical theology becomes the various “applications of dogmatic theory and hierarchical authority” (Lamb 2012:156). As Campbell concludes: “The relationship between practical theology and historical and dogmatic theology was
seen largely as a deductive one, practical theology being understood as applied theology” (Campbell 2000:79).

Allison provides us with a clear example of the linear application approach prevalent today. Allison divides theology into five disciplines, historical theology, exegetical theology, biblical theology, systematic theology and practical theology, interacting as pictured in the following diagram (see figure 8):

![Allison's Linear Approach](Diagram from Allison 2011:32–33)

By following this process, in his view, “contemporary Christians, then are aided by historical theology as they interpret Scripture, do biblical theology, and construct their systematic theology. Ultimately this entire biblical and theological process is oriented toward practical theology” (Allison 2011:32–33). The one way direction of the arrows in the previous diagram (see Figure 8) confirms a one way theory to praxis flow of thinking. Such applicational approaches provide no place for context and praxis to inform theological development. In this paradigm “norms are absolute, necessary reality or ideality; here the reflex character gives primacy to theory” (Lamb 2012:151). This approach “undervalues the contribution which practical theology might make to the other forms of theology it also perpetuates the ‘second-class’ citizenship status of practical theology by making it only and always a derived discipline dependent on knowledge and theory from the other ‘more solid’ fields of study” (Lartey 2000:131).

In taking this approach neither “the lived faith of the community,... nor the historical context ... is taken seriously in the theological enterprise as other than points of application for the theory already assembled” (Groome 1987:57). Leaders prepared in such a paradigm are “formed to do
theology in their heads, they are not prepared to do it on their feet” (Groome 1987:57). Such an approach creates the exact environment in which theological theories are formulated without reference to the praxis, that is blind theories which result in a largely “top down,” “this is the right way,” approach.

Thus, we need to call this applitational and blind theory producing approach into question. It neither integrates theory and praxis nor avoids blind theory. As Sleeth says, “If theology is the servant of the church and its ministry, then praxis is constitutive of its very being. To conceive of theology apart from its role in the church’s witness seems by classification at least to encourage the not so humorous label, ‘impractical theology’” (Sleeth 1976:47). Similarly, Poling and Miller suggest that “theology must begin and end in the richness of historical-lived experience and interaction, and cannot be rooted in another separated world of ideas or revelation” (Poling and Miller 1985:65). Theory cannot be disconnected from or unreflective of praxis.

2.3.3 Theory from Praxis – The Pre-eminence of Praxis

The historical progression of theology “has tended to give theory priority over praxis.... For centuries theory determined practice without due regard to the latter” (Heyns 1990: 28-29). But, similar to the understanding that all praxis is necessarily theory laden, it is likewise held that theory cannot exist without originating from within a praxis and without reference to the praxis. Certainly pure theology often operates without reference to praxis, but academia, scholarship, or the clergy, operate as its substitute referential praxis. And so practical theologians who took the other path sought a more praxis oriented approach, having a strong desire to move from a propositional applitational approach toward facilitating, as Graham puts it, “a kind of dispositional understanding – an attentiveness – directed towards facilitating deeper participation in the life and practices of God in the world” (Graham 2013:150).

Practical theology, through Schleiermacher, arose out of a desire to remove the theory domination. Through his work the praxis grew in stature, seeking to find an operating equality and a connection of the praxis with theological theory. Through his corrective work he sought to focus all theological reflection toward the activities of practical theology and the praxis, to the point of stating, “It seems that we have now completely reversed the relationship among the disciplines. If the true goal of theology is to carry out an activity, practical theology could be said to be theology...
proper and the other [theological] sciences mere auxiliaries to it” (Schleiermacher 1988:89). Schleiermacher, however, sought to avoid practical theology from being only equated with praxis, seeing it as rather “theory of praxis”. While pursuing a situation, not “of subordination but rather more of equality” (Schleiermacher 1988:89), it seems, although unintended by Schleiermacher, that his work in prioritising the focus on practical theology over theoretical theology has also served to provide a doorway for a praxis dominated pursuit as a reaction to centuries of theory domination in theological circles.

C. I. Nitzsch (1787-1868), a disciple of Schleiermacher, defined practical theology as the “theory of the church’s practice of Christianity” (Heitink 1993:46). He shifted from Schleiermacher’s clerical focus, placing his point of departure in the “actual life of the church, its experience and action” (Heitink 1993:46). This created the possibility of viewing the church as subject, opening the way for the employment of empirical methodologies upon the church praxis, leading to the suggestion “that dogmatic and empirical knowledge should be correlated” (Van der Ven 1998:36). This, perhaps for the first time, created the space for the praxis to gain authority and have the ability to significantly influence theory development. The door was opened; praxis now released from the dominance of theory began the march toward its own domination of the field.

Hiltner, in his attempt at championing pastoral theology, states that “pastoral theology is an operation-centred or function-centred branch of theology rather than a logic-centred branch of theology” (Hiltner 1958:20). Campbell notes that “Hiltner’s division of divinity into logical and operational fields hardly solves the basic problem of how the present experience of the church is related to its historical basis as attested to in scripture” (Campbell 2000:81). Hiltner goes further suggesting that it is primarily reflection on pastoral activities that produces theological fruit. He states that the theologian should observe the praxis and “then [draw] conclusions of a theological order from reflection on these observations” (Hiltner 1958:20). Hiltner moves one step beyond the view established by Schleiermacher, that “other theological sciences exist to serve practical theology” (Campbell 2000:79) and places practical theology as the focal point with dogmatics drawing from and being shaped by the praxis as well as serving the praxis. This paradigm makes normative the “structural dynamics of individual and/or collective human performance; here the reflex character accords a primacy to praxis” (Lamb 2012:151).

The rise of the praxis authority together with the onset of a postmodern view of reality leads many, like Tracy, to view the praxis not as the place for theory to be applied but rather where
“praxis is theory’s own originating and self-correcting foundation” (Tracy 1981:169). For Tracy all theory is dependent on and arises from a praxis. In fact, according to Tracy, “Many contemporary theologians insist that all theory in theology must now yield to the demands of praxis” (Tracy 1981:168). He goes further to say, “praxis sublates theory, not vice-versa” (Tracy 1981:169). This prioritisation of the praxis is also seen in the work of Jürgen Moltmann who affirms, “the new criterion of theology and faith is to be found in praxis” (cited in Forrester 2000:26). Lamb concludes that for this school of practical theologians “Praxis is not only the goal but also the foundation of theory” (Lamb 2012:171). Praxis has priority; theory now arises from and is influenced by the praxis (see Figure 9).

Thus the praxis movement is complete, leading to the development of a human action-praxis focus. The praxis movement embraced the concept that the “eternal and infinite God is not found in theoretical constructs but in the emotive-intuitive experience of the believers” (Lamb 2012:158). And, as a result of “the increasing influence of the social sciences in the domain of practical theology, theologians increasingly avoided doctrinal concepts. [Instead] practical theological studies made an increasing use of anthropological categories, with the result that the life of faith was no longer analysed by means of the theological criteria from the faith tradition” (Immink 2005:9–10). This praxis focus has moved the key reference points of practical theology from “God to the human subject, away from revelation to experience, from the institutional church to the local community” (Immink 2005:8). While bringing the long sidelined faith formation into consideration, according to Immink, the popular human action-praxis oriented approach results in there being:

no metaphysical or theoretical framework that describes faith in God as an interactive relationship between the divine and the human subjects. The reality of faith is understood and analysed from the standpoint of the human subject, and the element of the divine
object remains a matter of perspective. There is no framework that allows for a presentation of God as a speaking and acting subject. (Imminck 2005:187)

Without such an interactive framework, the primacy of praxis over theory results in two movements: those who prioritise the needs of the people within the praxis, believing theory to be subservient if not irrelevant, and those who prioritise the existing praxis itself, believing the existing praxis already contains all truth. Both of these approaches result in a blind praxis, being ungrounded and unreflective of theological theory.

Firstly, those who sideline theory and prioritise the needs of the people within the praxis, lead us to an ideological or pragmatic praxis. With its Marxist tendencies toward “what counts is change in the world” (Lehmann in Heitink 1993:151), this approach addresses contextually determined problems without significant theological connection or reflection. The Catholic theologian Greimacher adds, “Though at times one is unaware of it, praxis always has an underlying theory. Praxis is always, at least in part, determined by theory. Failing to recognise this leads to an ideological praxis” (Greimacher in Heitink 1993:151). A human centred blind praxis approach therefore becomes the default point of departure in such practical theological studies, and experience, situation, ideology or pragmatics, the goal.

This praxis domination and the human problem centred approach have given rise to the field of “Action Research.” Action research is a social-scientific model of research which focuses on practices and the praxis toward “generating solutions to particular problems” (Swinton and Mowat 2006:256). “Action research is a systematic approach to investigation that enables people to find effective solutions to problems they confront in their everyday lives” (Stringer in Graham 2013:151). Such research is not theory or idea driven but problem and praxis driven. “It proceeds inductively from experience to reflection and thence to action” (Graham 2013:151). “Action researchers consider their work to transcend the immediacy of practical problems-solving towards a more expansive vision of well-being and human flourishing in which autonomy, self-understanding and self-actualisation are the ultimate goals” (Graham 2013:153). And as McNiff states, “it is a strategy to help you live in a way that you feel is a good way. It helps you live out the things you believe in, and it enables you to give good reasons every step of the way” (cited in Graham 2013:154). Under this approach, the problems which are given consideration are determined to be problems by those within the praxis. Effective solutions for the praxis are also aligned to the desires of the praxis. Using the praxis as the lens in the search for purpose,
meaning and improvement, confines the praxis to a life of self-determination within a closed system. Praxis therefore becomes “both the origin and the end of theological reflection” (Graham, Walton, and Ward 2005:170).

The suppression of theological theory in this way reduces the goal of practical theology to “the solution of some practical problem” (Oden in Campbell 1972:222). In such a pragmatic environment “the authenticity of any particular practice is determined not by anything inherent within the practice itself, but rather by the effect that it has.... The theological content, development and history of the practice are deemed insignificant. What matters is its pragmatic potential to do ‘good’ assumed to be defined by the positive effect of the practice” (Swinton and Mowat 2006:18). Following this approach, the concept of “good” is defined by contextual determinants anticipating the effect of the action itself, rather than “good” flowing from the entire praxis being grounded theologically through the inclusion of additional determinants external to the praxis. However, when the “good” effect of an action “is understood to be the goal and end in and of itself, practices ... begin to lose their true meaning, purpose and goal”(Swinton and Mowat 2006:19). Pushing further this results in “Whatever works must be right!” and “What value is theology to ministry?” approaches to ecclesial action, reflection, change and decision making. It takes us to a self-determined pursuit of ungrounded ideals. Firet puts it like this, “practical wisdom and personal experience cannot adequately serve as bases for a theory which is indispensable in protecting our praxis from a plunge into the arbitrary” (Firet 1986:7).

Regarding this eventuality Stadelmann sounds a clear warning, stating, “practical theology seems to be developing into a merely ‘pragmatic theology’ dominated by the social sciences, it is time to start remembering that basically it is and must be a theological discipline” (Stadelmann 1998: 219). Practical theology should not operate within such a pragmatically praxis driven model without a conversation grounded in theology. Without such a dialogue the praxis will not rise above the goals of efficiency, effectiveness, and the satisfaction of human desires. Practical theology cannot operate according to these goals alone, rather it seeks “to inspire and direct new modes of action/practice which will enable individuals and communities to function, not more effectively, but more faithfully” (Swinton and Mowat 2006:257). Practical theology also must pursue goals, not limited to or residing within the imagination of the praxis alone, but goals which, according to Swinton and Mowat are more connected to:
an end or *telos* that transcends all other particular forms of action. This *telos* constitutes the primary purpose and meaning of human life and the eschatological horizon of the practical-theological enterprise. For the practical theologian, action is not merely pragmatic or problem-solving, although it may contain elements of this. For the practical-theological action always has the goal of interacting with situations and challenging practices in order that individuals and communities can be enabled to remain faithful to God and to participate faithfully in God’s continuing mission in the world. Action, within the horizon of the practical theologian, is never action for action’s sake, but always action in the service of revelation and mediation of the gospel. (Swinton and Mowat 2006:257–58)

Praxis, and thus practical theology, has a higher call than self-improvement, it is action in service of revelation. As Veling states, “Practical theology can never be reduced to the appeal of the pragmatist, ‘Let’s get practical!’ Rather, practical theology is a response to the call of God in which we come to realize that our purpose for ‘being in the world’ is to respond to the ‘purposes of God.’ And sometimes, the purposes of God are very different to the purposes of the world” (Veling 2005:12–13). He continues saying, “While it is crucial that practical theology attend to the concrete *conditions* of human existence, it must seek to read or interpret those situations in the light of ‘the kingdom of heaven.’ ... When we pray ‘Thy kingdom come,’ we are subjecting the *conditions* of human existence, ‘on earth’ to the *unconditional* claims of God’s word ‘as it is in heaven’” (Veling 2005:18). Thus praxis was not created by itself or for itself. Rather praxis exists for a purpose beyond itself and its own ideological ideas, having a purpose that rests within God’s purposes expressed through revelation.

It seems apparent that this theory from praxis approach must escape its tendency toward becoming a closed system and become open again to theology, in order to seek God not pragmatics and to address the authority dominance that has been taken by the praxis. Swinton and Mowat also question the validity of attributing equal authority to situational considerations of the praxis such that the praxis can be given some form of epistemological priority over theology: “*How can a system of knowledge created by human beings challenge a system of knowledge that claims to be given by God?*” (Swinton and Mowat 2006:83). Stadelmann believes “as long as practical theology is really theology, neither human ideals nor human traditions nor empirical human theories can be the norm, but only the revelation of *God* as given to us in the Scriptures” (Stadelmann 1998: 225). This statement may provide a timely corrective, and a useful reflective norm for practical theological approaches that prioritise the situation of the praxis and
human need over the purposes of God. However, there is a caution, we cannot return the entire endeavour into a theory only approach, excluding again the valued input of the praxis.

Secondly, those who prioritise the existing praxis itself, often churches themselves, lean toward the confirmation and protection of the status quo. These people have either ecclesiastical and traditional tendencies or are “so comfortable with the existing state of affairs that they are fearful of all change. [For them] the status quo has to be preserved at any cost” (Heyns and Pieterse 1990:30). These have allowed the praxis in its entirety to drift from any reference to or reflection on theory, to such an extent that for them the current praxis is right. In their words, in their own minds and experience the existing praxis embodies the truth. Many, having rejected theological reflection, are unaware that their praxis contains an unacknowledged, interpreted and therefore subjective theory. According to Heyns and Pieterse, “Those who seek to eliminate theory are applying an unacknowledged theory and an ideological praxis. This is an extremely dangerous situation, since an unacknowledged theory cannot be verified. As a result it is difficult to evaluate the praxis. Existing praxis becomes the final word on the matter...” (Heyns and Pieterse 1990:28). Being blind to their subjective theory they have created a fixed blind praxis which becomes for them their ideology.

Both those who prioritise the needs of the praxis and those who glorify the praxis itself end up in a place of ideology. A place not open to a dynamic conversation with a grounded theological theory, because for them it is either irrelevant or of little import. Solving the problem, defending the cause or protecting the system becomes the goal. Praxis based practical theology must recognise the subjective nature of the human constructed praxis and the limited nature of its pursuits. It must allow theory to challenge its premises and call the praxis to account. It must exchange, change for the good, for faithfulness to God. It must bring its actions into the light. To avoid blindness the praxis must be grounded in and reflective of theory.

2.3.4 Theory of Praxis – Re-Integration

If practical theology follows the theory for praxis or the theory from praxis paths, theory and praxis remain separate, and the bridge remains unfinished, in need of further integration. The previous two paths have ended in problems of dominance rather than bringing about any
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effective model to fully re-integrate theory and praxis and avoid blind theory or blind praxis. On both the theory and praxis dominated approaches Campbell concludes that:

Such a relationship ... is not satisfactory for either side. On the one hand it removes the independent status of practical theology, making it into a subsection of dogmatics, whilst on the other hand it opens up systematic theologians to charges of irrelevance and inapplicability from practical theologians. The result of this uneasy relationship was the drifting apart of the two disciplines. (Campbell 2000:79)

Rather than pursuing the previous paths, many have sought a different road. They have pursued the reintegration of theory and praxis through a relational dynamic which leads toward balance and unity.

2.3.4.1 The Basis
Aristotle is often used as the basis for any thinking which contrasts practice and theory, “lived life as opposed to abstract ideas, or else man’s acting as opposed to his ‘mere’ thinking and reflecting” (Lobkowicz 1967:3). However, Aristotle, even though perhaps the first to separate theory and praxis, in no way sought to divorce thought from action. Rather, what the ancient Greeks “had in mind was a distinction between various kinds or walks of life” (Lobkowicz 1967:3). That is the contemplative (theory) life and the political (practical) life. Both the contemplative and the political, or practical, were lived out concretely through life itself. Aristotle admits a “practical knowledge,” but rejects the notion that there exists a “theoretical knowledge” merely about the praxis. For him, “the end of an enquiry into praxis is not knowledge but praxis itself” (Lobkowicz 1967:12). For Aristotle and the Greeks, the end of praxis contemplation is practical wisdom in action, not abstract theory.

The Apostle Paul’s resounding text (1 Corinthians 13: 2) affirms unity on this same issue. Paul reorients knowledge toward love as an integrated faith action, sounding a loud call for the intentional integration of knowledge and action, in the life of the faith community. James also calls for an integrated life that is lived through a dynamic of faith and action (James 2:14-26). For St. Bonaventure it was also clear that the goal of theology is the formation of the faith praxis. It is Bonaventure’s conviction that knowledge should move to love and to union with God” (Bonaventure 2001:13). Thus all knowledge leads to relationship, to love in action.

Aquinas advanced the speculative and practical divide stating, “sacred doctrine is more speculative than practical” (Fairweather 1954:40). However, he also preceded this statement
convincing, “The teaching of God is a single unified science” (McDermott 1991:2). Aquinas means there can be no distinction between pure and applied knowledge. He believed that any distinction is subordinate to the oneness of the knowledge of God. “For God in knowing himself knows all that he has made so that his teaching transcends the distinction between pure and applied knowledge” (McDermott 1991:2). Taking Aquinas at this point we should say that God’s knowledge is not static but teleological and eschatological in nature; that God pursues and achieves his eternal goals, and this is not separate from but flows out of the oneness of his perfect knowledge. Similarly, his revelation flows forth from this perfect knowledge to accomplish his eternal will. Therefore, as we are apprehended by God’s revelation by faith, we find not only the knowledge of God, but the very life of God, in which we together participate. We then concur with Duns Scotus in saying that God is the doable knowable (Lamb 2012:155). Knowledge of God is found in and through the life of faith. Therefore, for God, disciplinary distinctions based on theory and praxis are human not divine.

This was Schleiermacher’s goal, a united theory praxis dynamic. He sought a dynamic “from life to life” approach as a unifying remedy to the separatist and applicational situation he encountered. He sought interdependence within theological fields in order to provide, the “idea” of the essence of the church which is also the eschatological “ideal,” of the church. For him the historical “idea” and the future “ideal” provide the basis and the goal of practical theology. He then moves to set up an interactive framework for the guidance of leadership activity between the present historical reality and the eschatological ideal, “the final point in the future” (Schleiermacher 1988:93).

While, as previously mentioned, Barth’s work is usually considered as linear, maintaining the priority of revelation to situation, he nevertheless sought to embed a “dynamic interrelation between theory and praxis. The task of theology, as Barth construed it, is to clarify the presuppositions of church praxis. Praxis comes first, precisely because God is ‘no fifth wheel on the wagon, but the wheel that drives all wheels’” (Barth in Anderson 2001:14). For Barth, “Praxis and theory, Church and theology, love and knowledge, simply cannot be set over against one another in this kind of abstract way” (Barth in Anderson 2001:15). Barth described the “whole idea of a distinction between ‘theoretical’ and ‘practical’ as a primal lie, which has to be resisted in principle” (Barth 1956b:787). For him, Christ incarnate is the “presence and action of God” and the understanding of Christ as the light of life can be understood only as a “theory which is to be understood only with reference to its origin and goal in praxis” (Barth 1961:79). Likewise, Karl
Rahner suggests that theory “indwells the practice itself” (Veling 2005:4). Not meaning that we place theory into the practice but rather that it is only in and through involvement in the practice that we “understand its meanings and workings more deeply” (Veling 2005:4). It is only through faith participation that a greater understanding of faith is attained. It is only the active life of faith that seeks and finds understanding.

An example of this interactive unity comes through consideration of the event of the word. The word event does not find life through speculative theology, but rather the “word event belongs to the reality of life itself, and indeed as that which, in a certain respect, initially constitutes reality” (Ebeling 1978:118). Therefore, we say the word event is a dynamic event. It is incarnational. It is Christ. The word does not stand alone, but creates life. Likewise, practice, separated from the word, with its focus on action alone is not constitutive of life. Separated practice may provide action, but only action without greater meaning and purpose beyond effect, devoid of the life that comes from the word event, from Christ. Similarly Colwell contends, “The living narrative which is the church cannot be truthfully comprehended without reference to the story rendered through Scripture; and the story rendered through Scripture cannot be truthfully comprehended without reference to the living narrative of that story which is the church” (Colwell 2006:222).

Therefore, foundational to a Christian practical theology is the conviction that just as the word event brings life, so real life is only found through an integrated theory praxis event. For Ebeling, “The text of theology as such can only be expressed through engagement with its context. The situation with respect to the inner unity and wholeness of theology and the way in which this is related to the totality of experience are not two distinct problems” (Ebeling 1978:1). He cautions against any division stating, “Certainly a person must be warned against a flight into practice that seeks to outmaneuvre [sic] and suppress theological reflection” (Ebeling 1978:3). Conversely, one does not pursue theological study “by having a special theological hobby alongside one’s vocation, but only with that inner liveliness that allows theology and the experience of life to interpenetrate each other” (Ebeling 1978:3). For Lonergan, only an understanding of this interdependence of theory and practice “can assure that any individual or communal theological study of concrete issues will pay sufficient attention to the personal and communal self-correcting process of both self-transcending learning [theory] ... and self-transformative action [praxis]” (Tracy 1981:170). Schillebeeckx also confirms the interdependence of theory and practice stating, “Revelation transcends experience, but it can only be perceived through and in human experiences” (Schillebeeckx in Heitink 1993:84). So while there exists a transcending priority of
revelation theory to ground and guide the praxis, the reception of this revelation theory is always mediated via the transformative historical praxis.

Following this life line we must conclude that every form of theology is grounded in and mediated by praxis. And every operational praxis is expressing and reliant on some form of revelatory theory, acknowledged or otherwise. Some form of integration of theory and praxis is therefore unavoidable even if not recognised. Ministry is not conducted in a vacuum devoid of theology and context but is the convergence of context and informed intentional action. The context is shaped by prior historical convergences of praxis and theory, which is tradition. And grounded intentionality is the convergence of historical and current reflection, of both theory and praxis, which seeks to express true faith in action, here, now, faithfully, on the way to the eschatological ideal.

### 2.3.4.2 The Approach – A Theory Praxis Dynamic

Based on the above, both theory and praxis dominated approaches fail us. We must understand theory and praxis from the perspective of the interrelationship of the divine life with human life. And according to Anderson this is precisely where contemporary practical theology should be located.

Doing practical theology in the present culture, in which modern and postmodern thought vie for allegiance, calls for critical and cautious reflection on the hermeneutics of divine revelation. To subsume divine revelation under the banner of modern thought with its claim to universal truth is outright arrogance from a theological standpoint. On the other hand, to allow culture and convention to determine what is normative apart from the compelling and convicting reality of God’s self-revelation is only a thinly disguised form of modernism. Helmut Thielicke would call both attempts forms of Cartesian thought, whereby the human subject continues to serve as the criterion for divine truth.... Theory is no longer regarded as a set of mental constructs that can exist independently of their embodiment in the physical, psychological and social structures of life. Theory and practice inform and influence each other in such a way that all practice includes theory, and theory can only be discerned through practice. (Anderson 2001:21)

The non-relational, one sided, linear models of theory to praxis or praxis to theory must dissolve and be replaced by a “dialogical movement between concrete experience and abstract thinking [which] is essential to the method of practical theology” (Poling 1985: 66). Practical theologians convinced of this need for interdependence or interpenetration of theory and praxis, have not sought “theology grounded primarily in theory” (Anderson 2001:14) unconnected to praxis, nor
have they constructed a praxis dominated approach which drives pragmatic and ideological movements. Rather, they have sought to develop a theory praxis dynamic to bring integration and balance to the theory praxis relationship. Such theologians have pursued a “theory of theology grounded in praxis” (Anderson 2001:14); a grounded and integrated life event that highly values the authority of revelation theory and also acknowledges that this revelation theory is always mediated via the praxis. A relationship where theory is grounded in the praxis and the praxis is grounded in theory. This relationship requires a double accountability: “It demands that the theologian hold the practitioner accountable to the truth of God’s revelation in history and that the practitioner hold the theologian accountable to the truth of God’s reconciliation in humanity” (Anderson 2001:23). The practical theologian, therefore, “stands on the frontier between the insights of Christian wisdom, based on Bible and tradition, and the reality of the present” (Ballard and Pritchard 2006:64).

In pursuing such a theory and praxis relationship we are now taken back to consider again Schleiermacher’s original concept of “theory of praxis” (see Figure 10).

![Figure 10: Theory of Praxis](image)

This concept signifies a more complex understanding of the relationship between theory and praxis. It moves beyond the linear applicational approach of theory to praxis, recognising that all theory arises from a praxis context. It understands that each praxis is theory laden and cannot operate effectively without a reflection on the underlying theory. It proposes that theory and praxis should impact and verify each other through a critical dynamic conversation. Schleiermacher himself states, “when one desires the perfection of the church, one must desire that this perfection manifest itself in history” (Schleiermacher 1988:87). That is, perfection comes to life, theory is actualised in reality. And, as we now know, Schleiermacher envisioned the existence of an interdependent theory praxis dynamic, a continuing from life to life process, to
bring about this actualisation. Writing on Schleiermacher, Sleeth further affirms this integrational desire, “Indeed the scientific spirit and the ecclesial interest must be united in each person. Otherwise, the scholar would not be a theologian but simply one who works with theological subjects. And the clergyman would lack the skill and foresight of good leadership ‘degenerating into a mere muddle of attempted influence’” (Sleeth 1976:41). The end goal for Schleiermacher is not scholar or practitioner, but dynamic practical theologian.

This dynamic approach finds its development in the work of Paul Tillich. “Tillich presupposed a correlation between existential questions and theological answers” (Heitink 1993:78). “Tillich suggested that the human questions concerning meaning and existence, which are flung by humanity at the universe, encounter a response from the gospel in the revelation given by God in Christ. So a dialogue is set up between question and answer; and answers should correlate with, respond to and challenge the question” (Ballard and Pritchard 2006:64).

This provided the starting point for the modern critical, correlational, dynamic approach to the relationship between theory and praxis. The approach is critical, precisely because “theory and praxis always affect each other. Every kind of praxis has a built-in theory, and every theory is influenced by praxis” (Heitink 1993:64). The approach is correlational, in that its goal is “the correlating of the two poles, the revelation of God in Christ and the situation to which Christians must speak” (Rahner 1968:11). In pursuing a correlation between theory and praxis, it sees both as essential to and yet neither one is synonymous with God’s self-disclosure in history” (Groome 1987:65).

The approach, through being both critical and correlational, is therefore necessarily and importantly dynamic. That is theory and praxis must exist in an ongoing open relationship. Rather than a hierarchical relationship of priority, Campbell sees a lateral relationship, where “Practical theology juxtaposes concrete situations of witness, celebration and service with the findings and formulations of biblical, historical and philosophical subjects in the theological corpus” (Campbell 1972:225). He does this to avoid the dominance of either theory or praxis, seeking the ongoing dynamic “interplay of idea and action” (Campbell 1972:225). For Groome, the result of this dynamic approach is a shift in “the locus of theology beyond academia to the church in the world.... In essence it does this by a new modus operandi that maintains a dialectical unity between praxis and theory instead of the ‘from theory-to-praxis’ mode” (Groome 1987:64).
This dynamic approach puts in motion a constant interaction between theory and praxis to promote integration and balance in the work of those who undertake practical theology. This approach to practical theology says that while acknowledgement of revelation into situation is important, our life of discovery and learning frequently confronts us with a real question or crisis arising from the praxis. And it is these events which thrust us into a mode of reflection which seeks to discern an appropriate grounded response. This response discerning forces us to carefully consider or reconsider, our grounding, our knowledge of Scripture and tradition (theory), together with our understanding of all contextual and event aspects involved (praxis), as we reach out for appropriate and effective answers in the form of thoughtful event responses (theory laden action – theory of praxis). In this approach significant importance must be placed on maintaining an ongoing operational dynamic reflection between theory and praxis in order to achieve an informed balanced, integration and alignment between theory and praxis which assists in reducing blind theory and blind praxis.

Greimacher also affirms the close relationship between theory and praxis, stating, “Theory always receives the impact of history and is conditioned by society” (Greimacher in Heitink 1993:151). But importantly he takes this relationship further suggesting a dynamic relationship between theological theory and praxis which “is determined neither by a complete separation nor by an identification of the two, but by a bipolar tension-filled combination. The shift from theory to praxis, and vice versa, is a qualitative shift. Theory is in constant need of verification or falsification through praxis, while praxis must constantly be transcended by theory” (Greinacher in Heitink 1993:152). This critical dynamic conversation is the “dialectical movement from practice (action) to theory, to critical reflection on practice, to revised forms of practice developed in the light of this spiralling process. The data and the practice are constantly challenged, developed and revised as they interact critically and dialectically with one another” (Swinton and Mowat 2006:255). This sets up a tension filled critical engagement of theory with praxis and praxis with theory, in a continuing bipolar relationship. In attending to this, “practical theology is not an occasional, problem-solving technique but an ongoing way of doing theology and living the Christian faith” (Kinast 2000:61).

By allowing the bi-polar tension of theory and praxis to define the contribution of both revelation and praxis in any serious study of communicative actions, a theory or praxis only driven model is avoided. The relational critical dynamic approach questions the presumptions of the theory first applicational approach and “should prevent both uncritical adherence to tradition and passive
adaptation to factual situations. This prevents praxis from becoming ideological” (Heyns and Pieterse 1990:32). This relationship while moving toward the correlation of praxis and theory, never fully correlates, in fact it always finds itself in a moving tension, from what is toward what should be, as the apprehension of both revelation and situation changes and is challenged by the other. This continual challenging of understanding recognises the fact that,

theological language does not allow us, as human beings, to speak the last word or to formulate eternal truth.... This means that in our various actions we will more than ever have to depend on an intersubjectivity, in which people, on the basis of a shared commitment, become the veritable subjects of their own experience. This requires a constant interaction between text and context, theory and praxis. (Heitink 1993:153)

For Ballard and Pritchard this theory praxis dynamic is expressed as, “the means whereby the day-to-day life of the Church, in all its dimensions, is scrutinised in the light of the gospel and related to the demands and challenges of the present day, in a dialogue that both shapes Christian practice and influences the world” (Ballard and Pritchard 2006:14–15).

By pursuing such a balanced, critical, dynamic relationship we have the possibility of bridging the theory and praxis divide, and reducing blind theory and blind praxis. The result is a from life to life approach which seeks, a reflective faith community (dynamic) that lives faithfully in the world by the Spirit (praxis), according to God’s revealed purposes (theory).

As has been demonstrated, from its modern inception practical theology in relation to theology in its entirety, has been faced with issues of applicationism and pragmatism: to applicationism where academic theory is viewed as superior, as the source, and is merely applied to practical theology and to pragmatism and ideology where praxis superiority moves human action to the centre away from any openness or submission to revelation. This is particularly reflected in the relationship between ecclesiology and practical theology – where ecclesiology sets up theories of the church as an isolated pursuit, without connection to a specific or intended praxis, and where church praxis operates divorced from specific reference to ecclesiological theory. The dynamic correlational approach has sought to provide the much needed bridge between theory and praxis, moving toward the integration and alignment of the two, removing the possibility of blind theory and blind praxis. But has the practical theological pursuit gone far enough and actually achieved this union of theory and praxis.
2.3.5 Theory of Action or Theory of Praxis

To quote Schleiermacher, have we achieved a “theory of praxis,” or has modern practical theology stopped short and settled on a “theory of action”? Is it possible that practical theology could be accused of being too action based? Has practical theology focussed on developing theories of separate actions rather than pushing deeper toward the development of an integrated and substantive ecclesial praxis theory which serves to inform and guide all ecclesial actions in a foundational and cohesive manner? The issue of framing and defining the praxis, ecclesial or otherwise, will be taken up later. Let us now focus on the question of whether practical theology has fallen short of developing a theory of praxis through being too action centric.

Due to the dominant position of the theory to praxis approach, traditionally the task of practical theology has been viewed as, “the application of theology to specific forms of action ..., through the development of particular techniques.... Historically this has meant that Practical Theology has tended to focus on the technical actions of the church (techniques) rather than their theological content and intent”(Swinton and Mowat 2006:17), required for a comprehensive praxis approach.

As previously mentioned, Schleiermacher provided two unifying themes for theology, one determined by the clerical paradigm, the other by the essence of Christianity. This was his attempt to keep the expressions of the church connected with its theological essence, the nature of the church. However, in the development of his work, rather than the essence of the church operating as a significant unifying context, clerical actions took centre stage. Schleiermacher became the “chief formulator of the ‘clerical paradigm’ of theological education” (Schleiermacher 1988:19). For him “every action in the church and for the church for which rules can be given” (Heitink 1993:27) served as the operative unifying focus of his practical theology. While Schleiermacher may have intended practical theology to combine theory and praxis in a broad integrative ecclesial framework that encompassed the essential nature of the church, it is more correct to say that his work on “theory of praxis” was composed primarily of the study of all ecclesiastical actions. His work may be better referred to as the development of ecclesiastical “theories of action” for the ecclesiastical praxis.

The confirmation of practical theology’s move to an action focus came with Hagenbach and Pelt, who adopted a “practical theology is a theory for practice” (Farley 2001:106) approach. This approach, unlike Schleiermacher, actively excluded the essence of the church from being
influential in determining the church’s activities. While the nineteenth century was marked by practical theology as “applied theology” a momentary shift from the clerical to the ecclesiastical focus took place. There came “a rough consensus that practical theology names the science of the contemporary life and activities of the church” (Farley 1987:4). As a result one would have anticipated that practical theology would move away from the clerical technical approach, to the development of a unified community life and activity pursuit. Despite much promise, such a unified approach did not eventuate, rather, what appeared were “five discrete areas of pedagogy corresponding to the five major activities agreed upon by consensus” (Farley 1987:4), with each tending away from unity toward independence. These activity areas are “homiletics, catechetics, liturgics, church jurisprudence and polity, pastoral care” (Farley 1987:3–4). Following this path “practical theology became more and more a theological technology. Its concern was for methods for preserving and extending the Christian community, the science and art of the functions of ministry” (Farley 1983:32).

With the demise of the essence of the church as a foundation for action guidance, practical theology lost its footing as a science of Christian religion. Through much of the twentieth century “the clerical paradigm, became virtually universal in the understanding of the structure and course of theological study” (Farley 2001:94). Within this purely clerical paradigm, theology is no longer “something attendant on Christian existence but something clergy need in order to function as leaders of the church community. In the functionalist form of that paradigm, the leadership itself is defined by an assortment of discrete tasks, and a theology is a theory or a theory of practice about those tasks” (Farley 2001:130). The essence of church existence remains disconnected from leadership action undertaken on behalf of the church. And the wider receiving praxis is reduced to an action praxis focussed on honing its various leadership tasks.

Gerhard Krause was the first to describe practical theology as a “science of action” (Mager 2012:256). However, the modern confirmation of this tendency toward action theory rather than the broader ecclesial theory comes from Mette, who states, “Practical theology must be conceived of as a theological theory of action within a theology that is understood as a practice-oriented science” (Mette in Heitink 1993:102). Mette not only confirms the action theory focus, but also accentuates the theory praxis divide. Fiet similarly sees practical theology as being concerned with “communicative action in the service of the gospel” (Heitink 1993:130). Farley also believes that practical theology is cast in clerical terms as “the right procedures to be followed by the church’s leadership in its attempt to promote the health of the community of
faith” (Farley 1983:26). Many have followed this lead to the point where Heitink could conclude that, “A consensus has emerged among the specialists in this discipline that practical theology must be viewed as a theological theory of action”(Heitink 1993:102). And more recently Swinton and Mowat confirm that, “Practical Theology is certainly a reflective discipline, but above all else, it is a theology of action ... [and] is fundamentally action research” (Swinton and Mowat 2006:255).

The move from theory of praxis to theory of action is complete when the very thing that determines the Christianess of a ministry task is excluded from the conversation. Barth comments that such an action focussed practical theology separated from theology “is in danger of degenerating into ‘the theory of a trade’ which is oriented by every conceivable practical consideration but not by Scripture, history, and dogma, and which is therefore theologically empty” (Cited in Firt 1986:3). That is what occurs when the very nature, the essence of what it means to be a Christian community, is not employed in providing or contributing to a foundation for action. In this context, “functions of ministry are often taught without reference to explicit theological assumptions even though the rubric Practical Theology encompasses the individual functions” (Sleeth 1976:48). When “we hear of practical theology being described as a ‘technics’ or as ‘the science and art of the various functions of the Christian ministry’” (Farley 2001:106), we know that action theory rather than an integrative theory of the ecclesial praxis has taken centre stage.

According to Heitink, “Not all theologians have welcomed the introduction of the concept of a theory of action as a fitting description for practical theology. Some fear that this threatens the unity of the theological enterprise” (Heitink 1993:126). Pannenberg sees faith and not action as the focal point uniting theory and praxis as the “basis for models for a contemporary praxis of the church” (Heitink 1993:126). Bohren “fears that the concept of a theory of action detracts from the ‘praxis of the pneuma’” (Heitink 1993:126). The Catholic theologian, Dingemans, suggests that modern practical theology “is too much preoccupied with the social sciences and therefore tends to approach praxis too much from the angle of action, while we should also pay attention to the underlying intentions and the theological frame of reference” (Immink 2005:157). Ebeling sees this action focussed, essence-less trajectory, resulting in a practical theology that drifts from any theological connection to become primarily focussed on action for social concern. He states, “It would be disastrous if in the face of the theory-practice schema Christian faith were to adopt the
character of a theory of action and thus its verification would become a matter of morals and politics” (Ebeling 1978:118).

In my previous research I defined practical theology as:

The study concerning the improvement of human-divine interactive communicative actions involved in the service of the gospel. (Smith 2007:5)

Upon reflection this definition also lends itself to a focus on actions within the praxis rather than on the praxis in its entirety. My project considered the theology of preaching that should stand behind the preaching event. However, this preaching theory was not grounded in a wider ecclesiology or integrated into a larger ecclesial praxis. It now seems that rather than seeking to provide a theory of the ecclesial praxis as a whole, a truly theological pursuit, the focus of my project and of much of practical theology has remained on developing good theories of action within the praxis. And this approach according to Farley is typical of a sub-discipline “a combination of a functionalist temper that regards tasks and activities of ministry as the subject matter with one or more extratheological disciplines that provide the scholarly aspect” (Farley 1983:33).

2.4 AT THE GAP

We now stand at the gap. From what has been considered it appears that in many quarters practical theology could be accused of falling short of constructing the complete bridge desired by Schleiermacher. While practical theology has provided the important dynamic theory and praxis approach, the focus on the clerical paradigm, the sidelining of the essence of the church, and the action focus have left it short of being able to fully address the blind theory or blind praxis problems and of unifying a broader ecclesiology with the ministry of the church.

Prior to this point I have avoided defining some of the important terms that we are concerned with due to the range of uses employed among the various theologians cited. However, to move forward effectively it is important to now articulate clearly the situation before us. For our purposes the diagram following (see Figure 11) helps depict the elements and terms with which we are concerned:
2.4.1 Action and Practice

Action is defined by van der Beld as, “Consciously and knowingly doing something in the world” (van der Beld in Heitink 1993:155). Geulen defines action in this way: “To act is to pursue a goal, to work toward an intentional and active realisation of certain plans, by utilizing specific means in a given situation” (Geulen in Heitink 1993:126). Actions then are:

“activities undertaken with intent.”

An action therefore has an underlying intention, or thoughtful theory attached. As such an action is always knowingly or unknowingly connected to an underlying theory – the theory of action.

Within practical theology many employ the term communicative actions (Firet, Pieterse). Generally these are actions that have an underlying theory pregnant with communicative intent. Such actions are also repeated or repeatable and therefore able to be the subjects of practical theological study. It is here, referring to repeated actions, that we employ the term practice. “Practice ... is patterned activity – not random or haphazard but with inner or outer coherence” (Forrester 2000:3). It is a “regular pattern of repeated behaviour” (Forrester 2000:4). In practical theology, practice then refers to:

“repeated intentional actions.”

In view are practices such as preaching or pastoral care.
2.4.2 Theory of Action

Every action as we have noted is theory laden. Whether implicit or explicit every action contains an underlying theory – the theory of action. In practical theology the theory of action has as its underlying intention, again using Firet, “the service of the gospel” (Heitink 1993:130). For Firet, a theory of action must meet the following conditions:

- It must deal with concrete domains of action.
- It must analyse the context of the actions and the actions themselves in their present situation and with regard to their potentiality.
- It does this – also on the basis of an empiricism-transcending critical theory – with the purpose of developing action models and strategies for the various domains of action. (Heitink 1993:130)

Similarly, Pieterse on framing practical theology as an action science states, “Practical theology studies these acts in order to improve them against the background of theological theory and the realities of the context and society in which we live and work” (Pieterse 2004:9). The theory of action then contains the elements of activity, context, and purpose with a view to the improvement of the action in the praxis.

But are such action theories aligned with something bigger than the anticipated effect or end of the act? Or are they only single action focussed? For our purposes we ask, “Is the action intention and theory itself grounded in faith history and focussed toward some eschatological goal?” In other words, “Is the action and action theory integrated and aligned with something larger like a theory of praxis?”

2.4.3 Praxis

For Aristotle and the Greeks praxis refers to “rational and purposeful conduct” (Lobkowicz 1967:11). Placing praxis in a Christian context Firet defines it as, “communicative actions in the service of the gospel” (Cited in Heyns and Pieterse 1990:26). For Tracy, praxis has action and context, stating that praxis is “action, that is, as what one does or possibly or probably can do in concrete circumstances” (Tracy 1983:72–73). Heyns and Pieterse add the concept of intentional movement claiming that praxis is the “concrete action or actions by individuals or groups in the
church or society aimed at furthering the kingdom of God” (Heyns and Pieterse 1990:26). For Van der Ven the praxis is where transformative actions take place in a specific context (Van der Ven 1996:xii). For Heitink, praxis carries the idea of an action with an underlying theory because of the “values, norms, and interests involved” (Heitink 1993:9).

Clearly the concepts of intent larger than the action itself and the specific context in which the action is carried out have been included in the term praxis. Forrester adds a further dimension, that of reflection. “When the term ‘praxis’ is preferred to ‘practice’, the emphasis is on the reflective or meaning content of behaviour, the integral interaction between theory and practice. Praxis usually refers to transformative practice” (Forrester 2000:7). Again Browning states, “The difference between practice and praxis is that in the latter the theory has been made self-conscious and reflected upon critically” (Browning 1983:13). Swinton helpfully confirms and expands on this stating that praxis is “a form of action that is profoundly saturated with meaning. A form of action which is value-directed and theory-laden.... Praxis is reflective, because it is an action that not only seeks to achieve particular ends, but also reflects upon the means and the ends of such action in order to assess the validity of both in the light of its guiding vision” (Swinton 2000:10–11). Praxis then is reflective communicative action employed under a larger transformative guiding purpose in a specific context.

The concept of transformative guiding purpose is clarified by returning to Aristotle who distinguishes between poiesis and praxis, between doing and making (Lobkowicz 1967:9). For Aristotle “poiesis as an act of making something where the telos lay outside of the act of making and praxis as an act that includes the telos within the action itself” (Anderson 2001:49). Action is connected to the underlying intention or theory of that action. Praxis takes on a much wider teleological perspective. For example preaching is an action, when repeated, a practice. However, the sermon (action) event which seeks to disclose the word of God such that it moves a specific faith community (context) toward its telos of reconciliation, transformation, and faithfulness (telos), is the praxis of preaching. The preaching praxis is concerned with aligning all actions with the telos of the faith community. Therefore, we will define praxis to be:

“reflective teleological communicative action in context.”

Therefore, where an action and a theory of action and an action goal combine in a “reflective teleological communicative action in context” we find an “action praxis,” (see Figure 11) such as the preaching praxis or the pastoral praxis.
2.4.4 Theory of Praxis

Schleiermacher viewed practical theology as a “theory of praxis,” a critical enquiry that has as its goal the shaping of all ecclesial actions within the praxis of the faith community in order to guide responses “toward the building of faith” (Heitink 1993:27). What is in view here is a collective theory; a theory that integrates all action theories which serves the entire mission of the community of faith within its operational context and is directed toward its ecclesiological goal. A “theory of praxis” exists where:

“an operational theory integrates all possible action praxes in a context.”

Such a theory of praxis underpins what we will call the operational ecclesial praxis (see Figure 11). Only within the fullness of a theory of praxis would one find an integrated theory and eschatological goal that can serve to orient, guide and give meaning to all actions for a faith community. In the diagram above (see Figure 11) I use the term ecclesial praxis to describe the broader operational praxis for our reflection. The purpose for the employment of this term is explained in further detail in the next chapter.

2.4.5 Blind theory and Blind Praxis

Following on from the above definitions we can now provide a clearer definition of what we are referring to as blind theory and blind praxis. As has been stated, every action and praxis is theory laden. Therefore, a state of actual complete separation of theory and praxis never exists. However, theory and praxis can appear as if blind.

Blind theory, occurring normally in an applicational theory dominated model, is where ecclesial theory is developed in isolation from praxis engagement and active praxis reflection is either not undertaken or is excluded from impacting ecclesial theory.

Blind praxis, occurring normally in a pragmatic or ideological praxis driven paradigm, is where praxis action is divorced from active theory reflection and teleological focus. Given our definition of praxis, which includes reflection and a teleological focus as essential elements, one could say that a blind praxis cannot actually exist, that without such reflection and teleological focus the praxis would exist at best as a collection of blind practices. But for our purposes we will refer to such a praxis situation as a blind praxis. This is the state were the expression of the church is
disconnected from what it is, its essential nature, its essence, not being intentionally and reflectively grounded in a revelatory ecclesiological foundation. In addition the activities of a blind praxis are not teleologically focussed toward transforming the church into what it will be in the future. Blind praxis exists where its revelatory ecclesiological foundation and its eschatological future are excluded from impacting praxis operations in an intentional, reflective, transformational and teleological way.

2.5 BEYOND PRACTICAL THEOLOGY

Mette captures well the broad landscape of practical theology when he says that it focusses on “employing anything that may help to give direction to present and future actions of Christians and churches” (Mette in Heitink 1993:128). Practical theology has focussed too much on producing excellent action theories rather than pushing further to allow action theories to inform and be informed by a deeper operational ecclesiology, in order to produce a comprehensive operational praxis theory. Also theology, and more specifically ecclesiology, has produced excellent clerical, ecclesiastical, or global faith theories which have often not been connected and integrated to the transformational faith praxis in order to inform and be informed by the wider Christian community. We must ensure that practical theology rises above and beyond simple action guidance theories, toward a more integrated, holistic, theologically grounded and operationally dynamic theory of the faith community. It must serves to guide the full essence and expression of the church toward its goal. We must seek the true “from life to life” approach.

As a result of the work done to date we can now name the problems at the gap that require our attention:

1. Given the loss of theology as *habitus*, through the scientific movement, the focus on personal and communal essence, formation, and *telos* has been lost and demands recovery and integration.

2. Given the action praxis focus of practical theology with its ideological and pragmatic tendencies, a holistic, grounded and integrated transformational ecclesial theory and praxis approach needs to be developed.
3. Given the separation of theory and praxis and the problems of prioritising either theory or praxis, a dynamic praxis theory approach needs to be employed to integrate, align, and improve theory and praxis in order to avoid blind theory and blind praxis problems.

In moving toward a solution we must now consider the following questions:

1. What is the praxis frame of such a holistic and integrated ecclesial praxis?
2. What model should be employed to move from theory of action to theory of praxis, and ensure the “theory of praxis” is grounded, integrated, aligned, and open for improvement, in order to avoid blind theory or blind praxis?
3. What approach should we use to ensure such a “theory of praxis” is critically, dynamically, and teleologically operational?

We now move beyond practical theology. To undertake this move we will employ the term “Practical Theological Ecclesiology”. Whereas practical theology, today, is more concerned with the action praxis of specific fields, based on an underlying theory of action (known or unknown), practical theological ecclesiology, as developed in this thesis, is concerned with the entire praxis, seeking to provide a grounded, integrated, aligned and improved praxis theory that encompasses all ecclesial communicative actions and is directed toward an integrated eschatological goal (see Figure 12):

![Figure 12: Practical Theological Ecclesiology](image)

In this thesis, unless specified otherwise or obvious to the reader, the theory and praxis diagrams similar to the one above (see figure 12) are to be read from the bottom to the top.
3 PRACTICAL THEOLOGICAL ECCLESIOLOGY

To make this move, to practical theological ecclesiology, practical theology must be amended to reflect a theory of praxis rather than a theory of action paradigm and be expanded to incorporate the essence dimension and clarify the goal dimension of the praxis. The question is how do we extend practical theology as a theory of action into practical theological ecclesiology as a theory of praxis? If we are to integrate theory and praxis, beyond action theory, toward a comprehensive theory of praxis that serves the entire faith community we must, according to Van der Ven, decide “which ecclesiology should be used as a foundation” (Van der Ven 1998:38) and what the shape of the associated praxis will be. In other words what is the nature and shape, or frame, of our theory of praxis? To answer this we need to:

1. Define the praxis frame for practical theological ecclesiology.
2. Define practical theological ecclesiology as distinct from other usages.
3. Develop an operational ecclesiology model that provides the nature, scope, and shape of the theory of praxis.
4. Develop a practical theological ecclesiological model based on the operational ecclesiology model that incorporates the praxis frame.
5. Show how this model will ground, integrate, align and improve the theory of praxis (see Chapter 4).

The successful completion of these tasks will provide us with an important dynamic relationship between ecclesiology and practical theology, which is practical theological ecclesiology, a dynamic discipline that provides a comprehensive theory of praxis.

3.1 PRAXIS FRAMES

Practical theology is today dominated by praxis thinking. As a result what is and is not included in practical theological research is largely determined by the praxis boundary and the praxis actions captured within. Therefore, it is imperative that we determine the scope and shape of the praxis frame upon which practical theological ecclesiology will be based.
For varying reasons practical theologians have employed several praxis frame variants as the basis for their research and theory development. Most of these variants are action based and would fall into what Farley calls sections of praxis rather than the comprehensive ecclesial whole that we seek. Farley believes that practical theology must correct its focus from “sections” of praxis, such as clerical or social actions, to a more comprehensive and integrated approach through “relating various regions of praxis to each other and by an overall hermeneutics of praxis” (Farley 1987:7). Here we will consider some of these sections, or frames, in order to determine the ideal characteristics of an integrated holistic praxis frame, appropriate for practical theological ecclesiology.

3.1.1 Clerical Praxis Frame

Andreas Hyperius, in the sixteenth century, was perhaps the first to view “practical theology ... as a sum of disciplines involving ecclesiastical action and instruction preparing a person for the activities involved in church leadership” (Ebeling 1978:115). However, it was not until Schleiermacher that practical theology of this type gained notoriety. Schleiermacher framed his practical theological study in terms of the theory of the church praxis. However, the specific focus of his study remained primarily pastoral, studying actions between pastors and their congregations. For Schleiermacher, practical theology “presupposes ‘inequality’ within the church” (Schleiermacher 1988:32). This inequality is based on the varying levels of maturity found within members of the church. For him, this inequality calls for leadership to arise and guide the church toward maturity and thus full equality. And this leadership guidance “calls forth a reflective theory of practice” (Schleiermacher 1988:32), that is practical theology. Schleiermacher states that, “To the domain of practical theology belong all the rules of art that pertain to leadership activities” (Immink 2005:149). Therefore, for Schleiermacher the focal point of his practical theology is the clerical praxis and its leadership activity. Given the clergy/laity dynamic of his time and context, he considered it was only the leadership who were able to guide and bring about the required change to move the church to what he calls the “Idea of Christianity”. This is the ideal reality of the church to which all leadership activities are directed. For him, leadership arises to meet necessary change. “[F]or if nothing is to be changed, no leadership activity is required” (Schleiermacher 1988:93). This leadership activity is a striving for progress directed at pursuing the ideal. This striving for progress assumes that one can envision a possible new reality.
which is more closely aligned to the ideal than the one which currently exists. Schleiermacher then seeks to improve the praxis through renewed leadership activity that is directed toward the goal of the ideal church. In summary, Schleiermacher’s leadership activity model unfolds as follows:

1. **Perfect Idea** - Develop the theory of the perfect church reality.
2. **Progress Desired** - Describe the progress required to bridge the gap between the situation now and the ideal reality.
3. **Change Idea** - Propose the leadership action required to effect the necessary change.
4. **Change Action** - Implement the required leadership action toward the goal.
5. **Goal** - The goal is the ideal church reality.

The problem with this clerical praxis frame is that it is exclusively leadership based. It presumes that only those with power and influence are participants in shaping the nature and activities of the church. Here the ground for theory development and for change through action is tied to the leadership of the church alone. The flow tends to be linear, where clerical theory is implemented through clerical action. While the idea of the church is grounded in the essence of the ideal church, the goal of the clerical model is the advancement of clerical action to achieve a desired end. Therefore, this approach drifts toward being function or action based, being more concerned with the expression effect of the leaders than with the essence and action of the wider community. According to Luther, Schleiermacher’s approach to practical theology perpetuates “a view of the church that regards the individual as the only important component” (Luther in Heitink 1993:33). Indeed the wider community is all but excluded, being viewed as the object of the action rather than a necessary participant in the work of God.

Any church model which is significantly hierarchical in nature, where the leadership is charged with providing direction and change, tends toward this clerical model. Where the clergy is the predominant determinant of church activity, a top down clerical model arises. When reflection is required, the touchstone is the theory and or action of the leadership. The narrow nature of this praxis frame omits the important elements of: congregational involvement, consideration of life transformation, the activity of the wider community, and also precludes any thought of the external impact the church may or may not have on the world. Therefore, this praxis frame tends toward a theory of clerical action approach to practical theology, with its focus being the
improvement of leadership tasks such as preaching and pastoral care. Employing this frame will serve to shape practical theology as follows:

![Figure 13 Clerical Praxis Frame](image)

3.1.2 Ecclesiastical Praxis Frame

As mentioned previously, Nitzsch, a disciple of Schleiermacher, defined practical theology as the “theory of the church’s practice of Christianity” (Nitzsch in Heitink 1993:46). This move broadened the praxis frame from a singular leadership focus to the practical theological consideration of the church in its entirety. Nitzsch moved from Schleiermacher’s church leadership model to a “functional understanding of the church [which] makes it possible to see the church as an object of inquiry with regard to its self-understanding and its course of action. The subject of the ecclesiastical embodiment of Christianity is the congregation in all its members” (Heitink 1993:46). This ecclesiastical frame widens beyond leadership action, to include all the functions and practices of the church. According to Farley, as a corrective it “returns practical theology to the church ... the natural context in which the activities of church leadership should be understood” (Farley 1987:6).

In line with this expansion, the Catholic theologian, Rahner, was a key figure in leading the Catholic criticism to “expand what had been called ‘pastoral theology’ to practical theology and to a general science of church action” (Farley 1987:23). Rahner sets the new praxis frame ecclesiastically stating, “The church is and lives by what all of its members together are and do”
(Rahner 1968:66). For him practical theology’s object is “to be the total operation of the church as it exists in its present situation” (Farley 1987:23).

In protestant circles a similar widening eventuated. Ebeling also moved practical theology beyond its Schleiermacherian focus on the forms and content of church leadership. He sought to expand the frame to include the ecclesiastical reality (Ebeling 1978:118). For Ebeling, practical theology “deals primarily with the institutional forms of the functions of the church’s life centred on the word, namely, community worship, the occasional services oriented to the principal changes in personal life, as well as the form of pastoral care and mission, education and training ...” (Ebeling 1978:123). To these Ebeling adds forms of socialisation pertaining to church leadership and church governance. His practical theological goal, typical of an ecclesiastical focus, centres on the improvement of the church. He states, “we are faced with the urgent task of taking care that the issue is decided neither by clinging to the past nor by seeking novelty, but by sober concern for appropriately carrying out the fundamental event in the contemporary existence of the church” (Ebeling 1978:123). Theodore Leibner agrees with this ecclesiastical view of practical theology, himself focusing on the activities of the church community and “what the church itself does to itself” (Immink 2005:5). Stadelmann describes this approach as the “science of the practice of the church” (Stadelmann 1998:222), setting the praxis frame to encompass the “different practices of the presently existing church” (Stadelmann 1998:222).

The ecclesiastical frame moves beyond leadership to include the activities and practices of the entire church community. Usually this puts the spotlight on the traditional functions of the church, similar to Ebeling, being: preaching, teaching, worship, pastoral care, and governance. This move shifted practical theology from its focus on the improvement of clerical tasks and assisted the rise of the church growth movement, bringing concentrated attention to the area of church improvement and church development. However, at times this frame comes under attack for being too focussed on the interior working of the church without consideration of its role and impact in the world, its gospel mission and its call to social transformation. This occurs when the ecclesiastical frame operates only with a focus on the improvement of the church without regard for the impact of the presence of the church in the world. While this praxis frame is inclusive of the church as a whole, it suggests a theory of action or theory of function approach, albeit collective action within the ecclesiastical realm. Employing this frame will serve to shape practical theology as follows:
3.1.3 Global Praxis Frame

The absence of a wider social dimension to the ecclesiastical frame has received widespread criticism by those who seek to advance the relevance of the church in social and political circles, believing, “Religion is judged on the basis of its relevance to society and not on the basis of its meaning within the confines of the church” (Immink 2005:6). Alfred Müller proposes that the “church does not exist for its own sake, but for the sake of the Kingdom of God, in support of the claim that God has on the world” (Immink 2005:6). Firet also has a broader goal in mind for practical theology, seeking to move the praxis frame beyond the clerical or ecclesiastical, he says “I now tend to view the praxis that forms the object of pastoral theology less exclusively as the way in which the church and the pastor function. This does not imply a lesser degree of appreciation for the church, but it is based on a clearer perception of the possibility and the reality of God coming through other ways than only ecclesiastical institutions” (Firet in Heitink 1993:120). His description of practical theology as the study of all “communicative action in the service of the gospel” (Firet in Heitink 1993:120), allowed for such a widening of the praxis frame. This change sought an extension of the praxis frame beyond the ecclesiastical to, in Firet’s words, “the event between God and humanity” (Firet in Heitink 1993:129). Otto was the first German proponent of this societal shift believing that practical theology is “a critical theory of a religiously mediated praxis in society” (Otto in Heitink 1993:174). Pannenberg likewise contends, “the field of practical theology is the practice of the church in the wider context of society and the life world of Christianity” (Farley 1987:23). A number of Catholic theologians have also followed this move.
Greimacher refers to practical theology as the “critical theory of the praxis of the church in society” (Greimacher in Heitink 1993:174). Van der Ven also pursues this orientation where “practical theology is no longer located within the boundaries of the church, but rather within the system of coordinates that made up of [sic] society, Christianity and the church” (Van der Ven 1998:38). The praxis frame now has a global reach, resulting in practical theological models that give priority to the interaction between the church and the world (Immink 2005:7). This approach suggests that practical theology must “take on the sense of unmasking the distortions in human situations. It must contain a projection of future transformation of society in which it operates” (Mudge and Poling 1987:xxxiii).

This global movement has unlocked the ecclesiastical grip and has opened practical theology up to new realms. The global frame has brought necessary and renewed focus on issues of mission and social concern. However, its explosion of the ecclesiastical frame has often become the exclusion of the ecclesial. Consideration of the church is sacrificed in the pursuit of social justice and global change. This frame focuses on developing theories for situational renewal and social action. Employing this frame will serve to shape practical theology as follows:

![Global Praxis Frame](image)

**Figure 15   Global Praxis Frame**

### 3.1.4 Faith Praxis Frame

Taking another direction, some see practical theology as critical reflection oriented toward the “formation of the community of faith” (Mudge and Poling 1987:xiv). Mudge and Poling find that
the “metaphor of faith community provides a field for integration of faith and praxis” (Mudge and Poling 1987:xv). Immink takes a similar faith formation line pointing out that the church exists “to support the life of faith” (Immink 2005:5). For Immink faith formation is the goal. The faith praxis “finds its expression in many and varied activities and these activities have a “double aspect”: they develop and maintain the faith and serve the life of faith and they are also expressions and products of faith” (Immink 2005:120).

Such practical theologians have reacted against the functional approach of the ecclesiastical frame and against the outward situational focus of the global approach, because they both place little emphasis on 

\textit{habitus}. For them the formation of the individual has suffered under the favour of the development of the church and the pursuit of change in the world. The faith formation praxis movement came into being to restore the \textit{habitus} dimension. By formation we refer to “the \textit{act} of giving shape to something, or the manner in which it \textit{is} formed: by its past, its circumstances, its inherent structure” (Mudge and Poling 1987:xvii). The movement is primarily concerned with the formation of the faith expression of the Christian. This faith praxis frame is “open to the full range of life experience but with a view toward Christian formation and the appropriation of the faith tradition” (Kinast 2000:5).

Fowler, a leading exponent of the faith formation approach, bases his practical theology of formation on 2 Corinthians 5:17-21. Having received a reconciled newness and the vocation of ambassador of reconciliation, Fowler’s vision is “to form men and women through whom God can afford to make his appeal in the world” (Fowler 1983:148). His goal is the formation of the faith community so that God’s mission is extended into the world. Fowler, in his model seeks to move from the applied status of practical theology stating that when the term “practical theology” is used in the “manner that bifurcates theory and practice so as to see the former as creative and authoritative, and the latter as merely derivative and pragmatic, can be grievously misleading” (Fowler 1983:150). As an answer he suggests that “practical theology stands in a trialectical relation. It relates directly to the sources of faith and theology, on the one hand, and it relates to the results of the specialised subdisciplines of theological inquiry into these sources on the other” (Fowler 1983:150). This trialectic is concerned primarily with the engagement with the historical situation of theology and tradition (see Figure 16 at (A)). Fowler adds another set of trialectical relations which focus on the current praxis and the “practical theological concern for understanding and shaping initiatives in the church’s present experiences of social, cultural political, economic, and personal realities” (Fowler 1983:151) (see Figure 16 at (B)). Fowler then
connects the above trialectics with “the ecclesial praxis, in its various dimensions” (Fowler 1983:153). Fowler employs the concept of dimension rather than function to refer to the “aspects of ecclesial existence that focus the concerns of practical theology” (Fowler 1983:153) (see Figure 16 at (C)). He suggests that “Dimensions comes closer ... to suggesting the organic interrelatedness of the various aspects of ecclesial ministry, lay and ordained, in and beyond the community, than does the notion of functions. Functions might suggest distinct, separate bounded areas of ministry” (Fowler 1983:153). Fowler then identifies five dimensions, namely: administration, proclamation, care, formation, and engagement. See the following diagram (Figure 16) of Fowler’s model (Fowler 1983:153):

![Figure 16  Fowler’s Practical Theological Model](image)

Fowler’s model attempts to bring a balanced consideration to theory and praxis through merging an understanding of the historical and current worlds to give guidance to the dimensions of the ecclesial praxis. His ecclesial praxis is focussed toward community formation and its mission of transformation. The model, however, being satisfied with a functional or dimensional base, stops short of grounding itself in an underlying ecclesiology of essence. He stops at this point precisely because, as he states, these functions or dimensions are the “aspects which focus the concerns of
practical theology” (Fowler 1983:153). In other words, traditional practical theology has determined his operational frame of reference, and has limited him to this dimensional approach. This is why he has chosen to “narrow our focus to the church’s concern for formation and transformation of person [sic] toward Christian faith, and to think through the goals, methods, and theological foundations of that praxis” (Fowler 1983:155). Fowler’s uses the term ecclesial praxis, initially suggesting a wider ecclesial focus, however, his primary focus on the transformation of the person towards faith has resulted in what would be better termed a faith praxis rather than an ecclesial one.

The growth of the faith formational model, popular in pastoral, counselling, and spiritual renewal circles has championed individual faith formation over holistic communal formation. This praxis frame focuses on developing theories for faith formation and transformational engagement. Employing this frame will serve to shape practical theology as follows:

![Faith Praxis Frame](image)

Fowler, however, hints at a desire to push further. For Fowler, practical theology “is theological reflection and construction arising out of and giving guidance to a community of faith in the praxis of its mission” (Fowler 1983:149). He seeks a model that is larger than the result above, incorporating personal faith formation in the context of the faith community in the context of the mission of the church in the world. If practical theology is to be fully ecclesial, grounded in and focussed toward a knowing that guides the “being and doing” (Fowler 1983:154) of the ecclesia, then the narrower formational and transformational approach, does not encapsulate the full essence, expression, and goal dimensions of the church. The aspects of faith community and
global presence must play a larger role in directing formation and shaping the ecclesiology employed. Likewise, the goal of faith formation must be incorporated into and bound to the entire essence and expression of the church in the world.

3.1.5 Competing Praxis Frames

Practical theology, often under the label of pastoral theology, has seen two narrowings from its early beginnings: a narrowing of content, the exclusion of moral and formational fields, and a narrowing of the context from church activities to specific clerical tasks. This shift, to the clerical, has subsequently seen three major correctives discussed above, one ecclesiastical, adding the dimension of community, one global, adding the dimension of social engagement and presence in the world, and one faith focussed, adding the spiritual dimension of faith formation.

The first corrective, the ecclesiastical, accuses “the narrowed form of practical theology of being isolated both from theology itself and from ecclesiology, the natural context in which the activities of the church leadership should be understood” (Farley 1987:6). This corrective relocates the focus on clerical leadership tasks within the wider frame of the church and ecclesiology. The second more radical global corrective, seeking to break free from an ecclesiastical context, suggests that the “proposed parameter of practical theology ... is not reducible to a theology of ecclesiastical operations. In this view practical theology is not a theology of the church’s self-realisation in the world but a theology of human and world transformation.... In this approach the realities of contemporary political and social life are the focal point of practical theology” (Farley 1987:6). The third, a return to habitus, and a focus on the faith of the person, endeavours to ensure the faith praxis, the formation of the person, is not lost in the rush toward either church development or global transformation.

Practical theology has carried out its work predominantly within these four competing spheres of operation: the clerical praxis, the ecclesiastical praxis, the global praxis, and the faith praxis (see Figure 18).
So what should determine the practical theological ecclesiology praxis: the pastor, the functions of the church, the engagement of church with society, or personal faith?

As mentioned previously, Van der Ven put the problem this way, “The question that must be asked then is which concept of the church, which ecclesiology should be used as a foundation for practical theology: a church that is centred on itself, its own existence and survival, or one that focuses on the reality outside itself” (Van der Ven 1998:38). While only speaking specifically of the tension between the ecclesiastical and global frames, it is the question itself that is troubling. Within this question lies the suggestion that a number of ecclesiologies can exist. But can we have a number of ecclesiologies that we employ at our leisure into varying spheres of practical theological research? In other words do we allow this either/or situation or is there a way through the impasse?

Positively, Van der Ven’s question rightly suggests that there should be a correlation between the praxis frame chosen and the operational ecclesiology employed for practical enquiry. But similar to how Farley has identified the various praxis frames as “sections” of a unified praxis, Van der Ven’s “which ecclesiology” would best be reinterpreted as referring to “sections” of ecclesiology rather than a determination that different ecclesiologies can or should exist. So the current task, in the development of a practical theological ecclesiology, is to seek a holistic praxis frame and a holistic operational ecclesiology which correlate.
3.1.6 Toward a Holistic Praxis Frame

In seeking such a holistic praxis frame, we first consider those practical theologians who have sought a solution to the praxis frame tensions.

We have previously mentioned that Schleiermacher’s clerical model was overtaken and included within the ecclesiastical functional model commencing with Nitzsch. In 1837, Marheineke, a rival of Schleiermacher, “attempted to demonstrate the connection between practical theology and the essence of the Christian church” (Pannenberg 1976:429). He argued “that practical theology should not be unilaterally tied to the institutional church” seeking a reflection on “the reality of religion in society as the specific task of practical theology” (Lämmermann on Marheineke in Heitink 1993:63). Importantly, Marheineke saw that a consideration of the essence of the church connected practical theology to more than the functions of the church.

While clearly having the institutional church in mind as the primary focus of his practical theology, Nitzsch also sought to extend the frame to include “the church’s embodiment of Christianity to all sectors of life” (Heitink 1993:47). He states “The Christian faith acts in the world as a community and relates to it through the actions of the institutional church” (Nitzsch in Heitink 1993:47). In Drehsen’s mind, “Nitzsch’s view of the church can be understood within the horizon of the kingdom of God, as the eschatological finalisation of the Christian faith” (Heitink 1993:47). In other words, much like Marheineke, the ecclesiastical must move out to affect the global.

Similarly, Pannenberg places the church within a wider kingdom context taking a missional approach.

The mission directed to all mankind is not simply the practice which originally created the church, but also the ultimate horizon on which the whole life of the church must be understood. By its origin in mission the individual community is drawn into a history of divine election which looks toward a future in the kingdom of God; it is inserted into a Christian life-world which transcends its own particularity.... The idea of the kingdom of God as something distinct from the church operates at every level of the church to prevent it from regarding itself as an ultimate goal. (Pannenberg 1976:439)

Pannenberg, in his day, believed that practical theology for the Roman Catholic Church, based on central authority, limits its approach to either a clerical or an ecclesiastical model, whereas the Protestant approach, based on the faith community, allows for a wider praxis consideration, that of the kingdom of God (Pannenberg 1976:439). However, more recently from a Catholic
perspective Van der Ven states, “According to Vatican II, the church is after all the sacrament of salvation, the sign and the instrument of the most intimate union with God and the oneness of all mankind (LG 1), the implication being that the church by its very nature is decentrated in the sense of being focused on the world outside itself and on the relationship of this world to God” (Van der Ven 1998:37–38). By employing the aspect of the church as sacrament or sign the ecclesiastical permeates and affects the global by the very nature of its presence.

Farley, also seeks to break the clerical and ecclesiastical mould by moving to incorporate presence in the world as part of the charter of the church. Accordingly he states, “Ecclesiology in the narrower sense and themes of the church, its ministries, and tasks of ministry should have their thematization within this larger theme of world-transforming character of ecclesiality” (Farley 1983:39). Mudge adopts a similar position where the actual existence of the church makes real the possibilities open for the world. He states, the fact that “the faith community is a sign is this present world’s future possibility” (Mudge 1987:116). And from this vantage point he suggests, “We should thus be able to transcend the distinction between those versions of practical theology that focus on the ekklesia as such, and those for which the field of action is the whole human community.... The people are not the institution. They are, rather a network of signifying action and interaction, both scattered and gathered, which must be understood in much more dynamic terms” (Mudge 1987:116–17). By dynamic he is suggesting that “the church should thinkingly constitute its presence in the world so as to add something to humankind’s capacity to envision itself whole” (Mudge 1987:117). The faith community is to offer “real presence” (Mudge 1987:117) as a sign of its communal ecclesial essence and thereby bring transformational engagement and wholeness.

Heitink is also helpful in articulating this “both/and” rather than an “either/or” praxis approach. Heitink concurs with the above movement of the church into society but takes a different path, stating that “practical theology as a theory of action is the empirically oriented theological theory of the mediation of the Christian faith in the praxis of modern society” (Heitink 1993:6). Within his definition Heitink distinguishes two different concepts of praxis: “the mediation of the Christian faith (praxis 1) in the praxis of modern society (praxis 2)” (Heitink 1993:8). While differentiating between the actions of mediation carried out in the faith community and the societal context affected by such activities, Heitink was careful to ensure their interconnectedness. Heitink’s definition also brings into the conversation the aspect of faith formation via the acts of mediation undertaken by the church. For Heitink, faith, church, and the world influence each other. “Praxis 1
can therefore never be detached from the context of praxis 2. Thus the exercise of practical theology does not have the church but rather society, as its horizon.... For that reason, the influence of the church may be viewed from the perspective of praxis 1 as well as from that of praxis 2” (Heitink 1993:9). While Heitink treats these two praxis frames separately, he leads us in the right direction, a joining of faith, church, and the world.

Swinton also follows an approach similar to Heitink. Swinton views “ecclesial praxis as a dynamic human process of critical reflection carried out by the church community” (Swinton 2000:12). He views practical theology as “the process of ongoing critical reflection on the acts of the church in light of the gospel and in critical dialogue with secular sources of knowledge with a view to the faithful transformation of the praxis of the church-in-the-world”(Swinton 2000:12). For Swinton the “focus of practical theology is not therefore simply the internal workings of the church community (although it includes them), but on the praxis of the church as it interacts with the praxis of the world” (Swinton 2000:8). This idea of the interaction of the church in the world leads Swinton to conclude that, “the praxis of the church is in fact the embodiment of its theology” (Swinton 2000:11). The church in the praxis incarnates its theology. Here Swinton helps us with regard to the faith formation frame and its connection to the ecclesiastical and global frames. If rather than viewing the church only functionally (the servant of Christ), as the ecclesiastical model does, we view the church incarnationally, as the embodied life of Christ (the body of Christ), then the church not only functions on behalf of God but is also formed by the Spirit to be the incarnational sign of God’s presence in and for world. The possibility therefore exists to view the church from an embodiment, or an incarnational formational perspective, where the ecclesiastical frame overflows as an embodied mediating ecclesial presence into the global dimension.

For Farley, practical theology “embraces the whole field of human and world transformation in and through the gospel.... This broad definition gives us a vision of practical theology as concerned both with ecclesial practice and with active presence in every dimension of human existence” (Mudge and Poling 1987:xxvi). Farley’s definition is helpful in uniting the frame of reference for us. It brings together the clerical, ecclesial, and global praxis’. The clerical concern is included within the ecclesial practice, the wider ecclesial concern is connected to both the ecclesial presence and the ecclesial practice, and the global concern is met through the movement of the former toward every dimension of human existence.
We need also to attend to the individualisation of society which influences us primarily through the faith formation praxis. According to Nel, “Ministry is both corporate (relational) and individual. Renewal of the personal life of the believer and the renewal of the congregation can and should not be separated” (Nel 2009:8). This is an important corrective ensuring the individual is not excluded by an enthusiastic ecclesiastical or global focus and neither is the faith community sidelined in favour of individual faith formation. The Spirit is at work within the community to unify and perfect the church toward its eschatological goal and thereby within each individual to unify and transform them now into that which they already are in Christ. “The Holy Spirit is at work within the whole, the corpus Christi, the body of which ‘I’ am a living member” (Nel 2009:9).

The faith community praxis is therefore, formational, ecclesiastical, clerical, and global. It is formational and incarnational in that the community does not just function through ecclesiastical action but it is transformed to embody the essence of its calling as a faith community. It is ecclesiastical in that through its leadership (including clerical) and its congregational ministries the church is present and faith is nurtured and mediated in its various dimensions and forms. It is global as the faith presence of the ecclesial community overflows and impacts the world for God. This praxis, which combines the clerical, ecclesiastical, global and faith dimensions we will call the ecclesial frame of the ecclesial praxis (see Figure 19).

![Ecclesial Praxis Frame Connections](image)

Figure 19   Ecclesial Praxis Frame Connections

The ecclesial frame encompasses the focal points of each of the praxis frames considered above. It includes the clerical frame with its desire to improve leadership. It includes the ecclesiastical
frame with its desire to improve the church. It includes the faith frame with its desire to form the spiritual life of the Christian and the faith community. It includes the global frame with its desire to impact the world. The ecclesial praxis frame has as its purview the faith community oriented toward the kingdom of God.

3.1.7 Ecclesial Praxis Frame

The ecclesial praxis, oriented toward the kingdom of God, is God revealed and at work in this world through his people, the ekklesia. For clarity we need to distinguish between ecclesiastical and ecclesial in this work. Ecclesiastical, as discussed previously, pertains to the institutional church having a focus on its governance and functions. Ecclesial, is more a relational term, pertaining rather to the faith community of God in its entirety, its faith formation, its practices and its presence as the work of God by his Spirit in the church and for the world. The ecclesial frame provides a foundation for viewing the ekklesia as the kingdom work of God within the church and for the world.

Recently, Anderson has pursued an ecclesial praxis model which also places the church, its faith formation and mediation, within a wider global context. Whereas Heitink combined the ecclesiastical and the global through viewing the activity of church as the mediation of God’s work to the world, Anderson placed the church within the wider mission action of God toward the world. For Anderson, “practical theology has a mission and ecclesial focus, set forth in that order. Mission precedes and creates the church. Mission is the praxis of God through the power and presence of the Spirit of Christ. As a result of this mission, the church comes into being as the sign of the kingdom of God in the world” (Anderson 2001:31). Anderson goes on to state, “The mission and nature of the church have their source in the mission of God through the incarnate Messiah continuing in the world through Pentecost. This requires a theology that views the nature and mission of the church as a unity of thought and experience” (Anderson 2001:31). Anderson continues his integrated and missional approach by stating,

The ongoing ministry of Christ through the power and presence of the Spirit of Christ constitutes the praxis of God’s mission to the world through the church and its ministry.... The mission of the church is to embody in it [sic] corporate life and ministry, the continuing messianic and incarnational nature of the Son of God through the indwelling of
the Holy Spirit. The nature of the church is determined in its existence as the mission of God to the world. (Anderson 2001:31)

For Anderson, “The church, in its reflection on its existence as a missionary community, becomes the ‘base community’ for practical theology. This provides the ecclesial focus for critical reflection on the church’s nature with a view to its understanding of the nature of God and the triune life of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit” (Anderson 2001:32). The church is therefore created by a missional God as a missional community, in a missional praxis, and its missional work is to reveal and reflect God in his self-revelatory and reconciling work.

Anderson is suggesting that mission is the praxis of God and that the church is caught up in the nature and action of God by its participation in the mission of God to the world as a sign or witness to the very nature and mission of God. Importantly, Anderson here unifies and directs thought and experience under the nature and mission of the church. Anderson wants us to consider the ecclesial praxis to be the missional praxis of God by his Spirit in the church and for his kingdom in the world, thus combining the church, faith, and global societal dimensions.

While Anderson’s missional trajectory points us in the right direction, I believe such a mission focus poses two problems. Firstly, by employing a mission context, the implied starting point resides within some originating situation or event. If we are to refer to the mission praxis of God we should ask the question “What is the mission of God?” and “What is his goal?” If the answer includes reference to anything outside of God himself then our point of departure does not rest within God himself, but rests in some movement occurring because of some external factor, such as humankind and sin. According to Livermore,

mission isn’t something that started after Adam and Eve sinned, and it’s not just about getting souls saved. It’s about living in light of our position as image bearers of God.... Mission is rooted in creation. It’s not simply a corrective to sin. It’s what God created us to do as human beings. God called Adam and eve to reflect his glory by acting on his behalf with all of creation. (Livermore 2006:163–64)

We would be better to view the praxis of God as a movement of God emanating from his essence alone; a movement of God toward, for, and in his creation. Here the question we ask is “Who is God?” And, taking a trinitarian relational starting point, we find the clearest answer is that God within himself is a God of love. Therefore, the praxis of God is his triune love, and the goal or overflow of this love is creation, humanity and perfect community. According to Harper and
Metzger, this relational focus replaces a mission focus with a being focus. They continue, “A church that begins with a missional purpose before it begins with its identity as communal reality in relation to God is problematic.... Biblically speaking, the missional purpose flows forth from the church’s communal identity and is the inevitable outcome” (Harper and Metzger 2009:20). The church then finds itself created through love and indwelt by the one who moves and transforms his body by the Spirit toward the perfection of the faith community as an incarnational sign of Christ. Therefore, we must commence with the praxis of the triune love of God revealed and reflected through the incarnational ecclesial praxis, which in its essence and its expression is a sign of the essence and expression of the trinitarian God.

Secondly, a full on missional focus can tend to lead us not only toward a global situational focus, but to reside there, and neglect the true nature of the church in and of itself, its essence. If, however, we replace missional with revelational, then the focus shifts from the missional actions of God, or should we say the missional reaction of God to sin, to the unfolding self-revelation of God. The movement of God then initially takes place revelationally, rather than missionally. Mission flows from the revelation of the eternal love of the Triune God. Revelation takes place fully in Christ, and is then further revealed through his body, the church, by the Spirit of Christ.

By overcoming the two problems created by a pure missional focus and replacing them with a revelational incarnational focus we are able to:

1. Locate praxis origins within the essence and expression of God himself.
2. Unite the ecclesiastical, faith formational, and global tendencies under the ecclesial praxis being: “the faith community as the continuing incarnational and eschatological sign of the essence and expression of God”.

This frame focusses us on developing praxis theories for ecclesial or faith community renewal in order to become a clearer revelational and incarnational sign of Christ within and toward the world as it moves toward its eschatological kingdom goal. Employing this praxis frame (see Figure 20) will serve to not only shape practical theology but will move us into practical theological ecclesiology, having a focus beyond action.
The previous model (see Figure 20) proposes that the ecclesial praxis has integrated essence theory and expression theory dimensions which are grounded in the triune God and direct the incarnational praxis events toward its eschatological kingdom goal.

From a protestant evangelical perspective the idea of church as *ekklesia* encompasses the individual, their faith and formation, and the concept of witness; of being a reconciling light to the world. Rather than church being a section of practical theology, it determines its very nature, purpose, and praxis. When the praxis frame considers the incarnational faith formation of the people of God, *the habitus*, in accordance with the nature and essence of God’s body, the church, and calls the people together as his body to be a faithful sign of Christ in the world, there exists also a global impact beyond the walls of the church.

The incarnational ecclesial praxis is the holistic praxis for practical theological ecclesiology.

### 3.2 APPROACHES TO PRACTICAL THEOLOGICAL ECCLESIOLOGY

Having determined that our frame is holistic and ecclesial we now need a corresponding holistic operational ecclesiology model which provides a comprehensive framework for practical theological ecclesiology. In developing such a model we will first consider previous approaches and models of practical theological ecclesiology.
While our observations have shown that ecclesiology has slipped from view in many quarters of practical theology, connecting practical theology to ecclesiology is not new. Stadelmann states that “biblical ecclesiology makes up the framework and normative basis of practical theology, because the church and its practice comprise the field in which practical theology operates” (Stadelmann 1998:225). The term “Practical Theological Ecclesiology” is also not new and has usually been employed to refer to different aspects of practical theology. We are using practical theological ecclesiology to expand our research beyond practical theology and the action praxis toward a theory of the ecclesial praxis that incorporates an integrated essence and expression operational ecclesiology and provides a teleological goal orientation which is not praxis sector based but is holistic. But before we come to a conclusion on practical theological ecclesiology based on the ecclesial praxis defined above, we need to consider the other usages of the term in order to provide a more comprehensive understanding going forward. Further we reflect on whether these other approaches and models can assist us, and whether they utilise an integrated theory of praxis approach, which includes the essence, expression, and goal dimensions, essential to avoid the blind theory and blind praxis prevalent in practical theology.

3.2.1 Heyns and Pieterse

Heyns and Pieterse use the term practical theological ecclesiology as the theory that is concerned with the “functioning of the actual congregation” (Heyns and Pieterse 1990:57). Their model incorporates the essential features of action and/or function theory, serving as expression theory, combined with an ecclesiological theory centred on the body of Christ, serving as the essence theory, to form the unifying theory of praxis. Even though this model incorporates the nature of the church within its work, under the image of the church as the body of Christ, the use of the term has an ecclesiastical flavour serving predominantly as the unifying theory for the traditional functions of the church employed toward recreating the world into God’s salvific kingdom (Heyns and Pieterse 1990:59). Therefore, the model tends toward the employment of the ecclesiastical rather than the ecclesial praxis. Heyns and Pieterse’s model could be depicted as follows:
3.2.2 Heitink

In the work of Heitink, practical theological ecclesiology is but one domain of practical theology. He sees practical theology as the unifying theological pursuit which is then divided into three action domains centred around the “concepts of individual, institutional, and public Christianity” (Heitink 1993:248–49). Heitink then, for each of these communicative domains proceeds to “distinguish three theories: a practical-theological anthropology, a practical theological ecclesiology, and a practical theological diaconology” (Heitink 1993:250). Employing a communicative action approach to the domain divisions, his practical theological anthropology is concerned with the spiritual life of the individual, the faith praxis, his practical theological diaconology is concerned with the “Christian presence in society” (Heitink 1993:292), the global praxis. And Heitink’s practical theological ecclesiology is “directed toward communicative action within, and on the basis of, the social structure of the Christian community” (Heitink 1993:251), the ecclesiastical praxis. His distinguishing of separate domains leads to a differentiated practical theology and is, in part, drawn from the work of Hendrikus Berkof and his concept of mediation. “The church ... is the mediating movement between Christ and his people. As the institute mediates Christ to the congregation, so the congregation in turn mediates him to the world.... The fact of being church is thus not something static; it is a perpetual movement, a bridge event” (Berkhof 1979:410–11). Berkhof sees a mediating movement from Christ, to the clergy, to the congregation, to the world - a clerical to ecclesiastical to global mediation.
For Heitink practical theological ecclesiology covers ecclesiastical action through the church focussed functions of homiletics, liturgics, catechetics and church development (Heitink 1993:251). Importantly Heitink chooses a bottom up approach, seeking to bring the “essence and destiny” (Heitink 1993:276) of the church to bear on the life of the church. However, practical theological ecclesiology employing this approach can go no further than the development of an integrated theory for the ecclesiastical praxis. For Heitink practical theological ecclesiology is only a sub-discipline of practical theology focussed only on the ecclesiastical praxis. The functions and the nature of the church is connected and directed under the concept of koinonia. Heitink’s model could be depicted as follows:

**Figure 22  Heitink’s Model**

3.2.3  Van der Ven

The work of Catholic theologian Van der Ven in Ecclesiology in Context, while not specifically employing the term practical theological ecclesiology, provides us with a more comprehensive rather than domain driven approach. In his work, Van der Ven seeks to provide an integrational framework for practical theological ecclesiology that is an “Ecclesiology that is aimed at the praxis,”(Van der Ven 1996:xii) within a practical theological approach. Influenced by Kickert, Van der Ven expressed the interconnection between his constitutive ecclesiology and the praxis this way:
The core functions ... form the primary positive, complex, intended functions that are necessary for the realisation of the general function of the church, that is, religious communication. It is constitutive to the church.... These are pursued and realised by carrying out tasks. These tasks form a structure of activities in certain sectors. These sectors are the areas or fields in which the activities are executed. (Van der Ven 1996:81)

Using a sociological model, Van der Ven addresses the theory praxis or essence and expression integration issue using the concepts of “core functions” and “sectors” of activities. According to Van der Ven, the core functions of identity, integration, policy, and management, are the essential functions necessary for the church to exist. These functions then operate underneath and toward what Van der Ven calls the supercode of “Church as Sacrament,” or as a religious sign of God’s salvation, in his view the primary goal of the church. Each of the functions are also guided by codes which “form the mechanism on the ground of which social phenomena can be interpreted as religious signs” (Van der Ven 1996:145). For the function of “identity” these religious codes are the church as the people of God ... and the Jesus movement ...; for integration it is the body of Christ ...; for policy it is the building of the Spirit ...; for management it is the church of the poor” (Van der Ven 1996:147). For Van der Ven, these functions provide the substance or essence of the church and the context in which the communicative actions take place. Van der Ven then distinguishes five practical outworkings which he refers to as sectors of activities which the church engages in, in order to achieve its mission. The sectors are “pastoral care, catechetics, liturgy, proclamation, and diacony” (Van der Ven 1996:81). For Van der Ven, the core functions form the ecclesiology or essence theory, the indicative nature of the church. The sectors are the sign categories, the imperative expressions of the church. Each sector employs many tasks. And the tasks of Van der Ven are the specific actions of the church directed toward the church becoming a sign of God’s salvation. Van der Ven’s model could be depicted as follows:
This model provides much of what we are searching for. It provides an integrated essence and expression ecclesiology that is teleologically directed and is not restricted ecclesiastically but flows into global influence. However, Van der Ven’s sociological approach influences the determination of his foundational core functions which shape the entire model. While we agree that the underpinning concept of church as sacrament is comprehensive, the model’s sociological foundation moves us more in the direction of practical theological sociology rather than ecclesiology. His praxis could be considered a social ecclesiastical praxis.

### 3.2.4 A Practical Theological Ecclesiology Framework

Reflecting on these practical theological ecclesiological models we are confirmed in adding essence and expression and goal dimensions to the narrow action theory and praxis categories of modern practical theology. And reflecting on our work on praxis frames we are led to place practical theological ecclesiology, not within an ecclesiastical frame such as with Heyns and Pieterse or Heitink, and not within a social ecclesiastical construct such as with Van der Ven, but within a holistic ecclesial frame.

Therefore, practical theological ecclesiology adds further interconnected layers of thought to modern practical theology’s action praxis and action theory only model. First the action praxis is replaced by the event praxis. This is done to highlight the embedded nature of presence within
any communicative action. One’s being is never divorced from one’s action, for one’s being carries and performs the action. Therefore presence and action are connected. An event includes the combined communicative impact of incarnational action and presence by the Spirit. The event praxis then is the reflective teleological incarnational communicative event in context. Next the goal dimension is broadened beyond action effect to that of eschatological kingdom sign, the ecclesial praxis goal. Two further essential dimensions are added to construct the full theory of ecclesial praxis, they are: the theory of ecclesial expression and the theory of ecclesial essence. The expression theory serves to align integrate and direct all event praxis events into a holistic theory of praxis expression. This expression theory in turn is grounded and integrated into an essence theory which underpins the nature, purpose and goal of the ecclesial praxis. Event, expression and essence theory together form the integrated theory of the ecclesial praxis, the concern of practical theological ecclesiology. The diagram following (see Figure 21) depicts the elements and terms that relate to the framework of practical theological ecclesiology:

![Diagram of Practical Theological Ecclesiology Framework](image)

**Figure 24** Practical Theological Ecclesiology Framework

From a practical theological perspective the previous diagram (see Figure 24) provides us with a workable praxis framework for practical theological ecclesiology. However, this does not provide us with any operational ecclesiologica content. The task now is to discover whether a theologically grounded operational ecclesiology can complete and correlate with this framework or whether a further shaping of the practical theological ecclesiology framework is necessary. Therefore, our attention is now turned to the search for an operational ecclesiology that will fill
out the essence theory, the expression theory, and provide an eschatological goal for the ecclesial praxis.

### 3.3 OPERATIONAL ECCLESIOLOGY

Ecclesiology is the doctrine of the church, and as such is “understood to be a theological theory of the church” (Van der Ven 1996:x), and can therefore, if operational, be considered as the theory of the ecclesial praxis. The challenge before us is to develop an approach to ecclesiology that “speaks both of the church as described in Christian tradition and of the real lived experience of Christian communal life and work” (Watkins 2012:168). Theological statements about the church are not to be abstract but realised in the empirical church. Therefore, ecclesiology, “must not limit itself to statements of the church in general, but should interpret the concrete existence of the church in a given context” (Hegstad 2012:41). This interaction of theory and praxis is affirmed by Nieman and Height, they state, “Part of the liveliness of the discipline of ecclesiology today stems from an interaction between the desire to preserve the essential character of the church and the need that it adapt to new historical situations, between a normative concept of the church and the need that it become inculturated in the life of its members” (Neiman and Haight 2012:9–10).

Kärkkäinen divides ecclesiology into two parts. The first part “focuses on the question of the ecclesiality of the church, that is, what makes the church church, or what are the conditions for being a church. The second part of ecclesiology deals with questions such as the ministry, the structure and the sacraments of the church” (Kärkkäinen 2002:14). Kärkkäinen’s division of ecclesiology helps set a broad operational frame for ecclesiology in terms of ecclesiality or essence and ministry or expression (see Figure 25). Ecclesiology, as a theory of the ecclesial praxis, is then the study of the church’s indicative nature, its essence, and its imperative historical ministry, its expression.
However, ecclesiology as a discipline has focussed predominantly on issues of essence, being traditionally divorced from issues of context and largely disconnected from expression and action theory, which has been assigned to practical theology. Such ecclesologies have therefore largely provided abstracted, or blueprint ecclesiologies (Healy 2000:25–51), which are not reflective of or connected to reality and are therefore not operational in all or any contexts.

We cannot work with an ecclesiology where essence and expression are separated, lest we fall back into theory and praxis only approaches, leading again to blind theory and blind praxis situations. We also cannot work with an ecclesiology divorced from reality, for the guiding of the reality of the ecclesial praxis is the task of practical theological ecclesiology. We cannot work with an abstracted or blueprint ecclesiology. Neither can we work with ecclesiology which is not teleological. This dimension is missing in Kärkkäinen’s broad ecclesiological frame (see Figure 25). However, in order for ecclesiology to be operational and work within a practical theological sphere it needs to provide the praxis, not with a static theory, but with a dynamic theory that has forward guidance, lest the praxis alone determine its own contextual direction. In order to serve practical theological ecclesiology we must pursue what we will call operational ecclesiology:

Operational ecclesiology provides an ecclesiological framework that is connected to the ecclesial praxis being reflective of reality, integrates the essence and expression dimensions of the ecclesial praxis in light of its teleological goal, and is open to critical reflection (see Figure 26).
We will now further define what we mean by operational ecclesiology in terms of how it connects theory to the praxis, integrates the various dimensions, and is operational.

3.3.1 Connected to Praxis

An operational ecclesiology is firstly not an abstracted theory, for “there is not such a thing as pure theory. Theory is always influenced by context and experience” (Pieterse 2011:50). Rather we are seeking a “theory of theology grounded in praxis” (Anderson 2001:14). This is not to be confused with a theology that finds its authority in the praxis or arises from revelation alone, but rather we are speaking of a theology that raises and addresses questions “that seek the mind of Christ through Scripture as applied in a concrete situation” (Anderson 2001:37).

Ecclesiology as a theory of the church always arises from within the faith community, which itself rests within a specific context. Works of ecclesiology, such as denominational ecclesiologies, are always developed by people within a specific context which shapes the formulation of the thought. Or alternatively the work is developed with a specific context in mind, such as ideological ecclesiologies. So we cannot conceive of an ecclesiology that exists without reference to context, and that context is the reality of the faith community which formed or inspired the ecclesiology. Mudge and Poling concur suggesting that “If theology is to recover its reality reference, it must be meaningfully resituated in the *ekklesia* as that discipline which grasps the constants of the faith community’s thought and action” (Mudge and Poling 1987:xxiii). Ecclesial theory and praxis belong together. Ecclesiology must be operationally connected; it must come to life in the praxis.

Ecclesiology, as the theory of the church, is also always intended to find expression in the context of the faith community, the praxis of the church. “The real essence of the real Church is expressed
in historical form” (Küng 1976:23). Healy concurs stating that, “Ecclesiology’s main function is to help the church respond as best it can to its context by reflecting theologically and critically upon its concrete identity” (Healy 2000:22). Healy proposes ecclesiology as a “practical-prophetic discipline” (Healy 2000:22). Therefore, ecclesiology not only comes from the church, it also forms and transforms the church. Ecclesiology of this type is integrally connected to the praxis.

3.3.2 Essence, Expression, and Goal Integration

The abstraction of ecclesiology and the assignment of it to the spiritual realm, divorced from the historical praxis, separates the essence and the expression dimensions of the church. However, the ecclesial form or expression, its signs and actions, cannot be divorced from the essence of the church, its source. “An essence without form is formless and hence unreal; a form without essence is insubstantial and hence equally unreal” (Küng 1976:23–24). Expression theory, therefore, is not isolated but is informed and connected to an operating ecclesial essence theory. Otherwise an “abstract and idealistic ecclesiology divorced from the realities of life will tend to either overlook the ‘un-nature’ of the church or end up just expressing pious wishes” (Kärkkäinen 2002:105).

Schleiermacher attempted such integration. His philosophical and historical theology categories produce the concept of the “essence of the church” or the “idea of Christianity” to provide a referential guide for practical theology. For Schleiermacher, this idea of Christianity is not just an abstract theory, but rather it “is an active force that is in the process of organic development. It unfolds itself throughout history and presses toward a more perfect realisation in the world.” (Schleiermacher 1988:30). This idea or essence of Christianity becomes for Schleiermacher the place of grounding his practical theology and the goal toward which it orients itself, and therefore the reference point for current ecclesial praxis expression and reflection. “[T]he idea of Christianity is to provide the standard by which actual conditions in the church are judged” (Schleiermacher 1988:30). In this way Schleiermacher tries to bridge the theory and praxis divide bringing together the essence and the expression aspects of the church directed toward the teleological goal of the perfection of the church to come, the ideal. The unity of theology for Schleiermacher was according to Pannenberg “firmly based on a necessary connection with the essence of Christianity” (Pannenberg 1976:428–29).
Schleiermacher never realised the possibility of this connection. His focus on the “craft of church management” (Pannenberg 1976:429) together with the dominance of the ecclesiastical structures of his day eclipsed the influence of the essence of the church as a guiding principle in his practical theology. The importance of this concept was brought to the fore through the work of Nitzsch who sought to evaluate “the existing situation in relation to the idea of the Christian church and Christian life in order to discover the guiding principle of all ministerial activity in the church” (Pannenberg 1976:430). Nitzsch regarded it as obvious “that any consistent theory of church activity must be based on a particular concept of the church” (Pannenberg 1976:430). Pannenberg concurs, believing “present-day Christianity itself can be understood only in the context of a general theory of Christianity” (Pannenberg 1976:434). By this, Pannenberg has in mind the importance of the activities of the church being informed by an ecclesiology which is not abstract but which encompasses the concrete “life-world of Christianity” (Pannenberg 1976:434). Essence is the informing ground of expression.

However, the reverse is also true, expression signifies essence. Or more strongly, as Healy states, the church’s “identity is constituted by action” (Healy 2000:5). He amplifies this by saying that the church’s “identity is thoroughly theological, for it is constituted by the activity of the Holy Spirit, without which it cannot exist. But it is also constituted by the activity of its members as they live out their lives of discipleship.... The identity of the concrete church is not simply given; it is constructed and ever reconstructed by the grace-enabled activities of its members as they embody the church’s practices, beliefs and valuations” (Healy 2000:5).

Ecclesiology as the theory of the church must then have as its goal the provision of a foundational operational theory, or essence and expression theory, for the concrete historical ecclesial praxis of the faith community. Essence theory and expression theory must be integrated and dynamically inform the other, thereby avoiding the eventuality of blind theory and blind praxis. Essence and expression, theory and praxis, belong together. As Küng importantly states:

It is all too easy for us to retreat into harmless theologumena, remote from real life, about the ‘essence’ of the Church, and so try to avoid having to make historical judgements and distinctions. At the same time it is equally easy for us to disregard the essence of the Church which is dictated by its origins, to be mentally lazy and uncritical and concern ourselves simply with the present form of the Church, becoming absorbed with ecclesiastical activity or even resigning ourselves to a totally passive role.... The essence of the real Church is therefore always to be found in its historical form, and the
historical form must always be understood in the light of and with reference to the essence. (Küng 1976:24)

In this thesis we refer to the indicative nature of ecclesiology as the “essence theory” of the ecclesial praxis, and to the imperative elements as the “expression theory” of the ecclesial praxis. Distinct from a pure ecclesiology which sets up an abstracted theory of the church, we wish to provide a framework for an operational ecclesiology. An operational ecclesiology comprises the essence and expression theory of the concrete ecclesial praxis, which, like Schleiermacher, is teleologically directed toward the goal of the ideal. An operational ecclesiology that serves practical theological ecclesiology must provide an integrated communal theological theory of a faith community’s essence, expression, and goal dimensions, for its ecclesial praxis. Operational ecclesiology integrates and attends simultaneously to the theological and the concrete historical praxis (Neiman and Haight 2012:13).

3.3.3 Operational

Practical theologians have focussed on the praxis and action theories above ecclesiology. Their work, however praxis focussed, always implies an operational model of ecclesiology at play. Systematic ecclesiologists on the other hand develop their ecclesiology often abstracted from a context. Their work, however theory focussed, always implies an operational praxis. The operational ecclesial theory sought must serve as the foundational and operating theory for the church of the ecclesial praxis. Such an operational ecclesiology must be differentiated from systematic ecclesiology. The operational ecclesiology required by practical theological ecclesiology is neither an abstracted theory nor a mere handbook of practical techniques. We are seeking a grounded indicative and imperative ecclesiology that is operating, visible, and available for verification, critical review, and transformation.

The definition of the church by Pope Paul VI is a helpful starting point for our journey toward an outline of an operational ecclesiology. Setting forth the Roman Catholic position on the church Pope Paul VI states, “The Church is a mystery. It is a reality imbued with the hidden presence of God. It lies therefore, within the very nature of the Church to be always open to new and even greater exploration” (Dulles 2002:10). At the centre of this definition stands the mystery of God. Given the mystery involved in the study of the church, Cousins suggests that all our “religious
language and symbols should be looked upon as models because they only approximate the object they are reflecting” (Cousins in Dulles 2002:16). Taking this path, in order to illuminate this mystery, Dulles employs images in order to develop models to facilitate the necessary openness required for critical and reflective exploration. According to Dulles, models are “realities having sufficient functional correspondence with the object under study so that they provide conceptual tools and vocabulary; they hold together facts that would otherwise seem unrelated, and they suggest consequences that may subsequently be verified by experiment” (Dulles 2002:15). What we seek in dealing with the mystery that is the church is an appropriate operational ecclesiology model which can be used to conduct critical and reflective practical theological ecclesiological research.

Having developed a preliminary ecclesial praxis frame, we now seek an ecclesiological model that is operational. Here we are concerned with finding not the content but the shape of ecclesiology that can facilitate the development of an ideal theory that is connected to praxis. In other words what we seek are the major ecclesiological dimensions and categories that honour Scripture, and are historically evident within the praxis life of the *ekklesia*. Our goal here is not to uncover a new ecclesiology that can be connected to a standardised ecclesial praxis. This may be possible using a theory only, church from above approach. However, our concern is with the visible church today. And though the church is one in Christ its manifestation in history is so varied that searching for an ecclesiological standard and a standardised praxis would be futile. What we are seeking is to ascertain the ecclesiological categories on which an operational ecclesiology can be constructed, recognised or reviewed by any church or group of churches, one which is dynamically connected and integrated to an ecclesial praxis. To do this we will review a number of approaches to ecclesiology, consider their ecclesiological dimensions and categories, and propose a model for an operational ecclesiology that can be connected to any context. Instead of providing a static ecclesiology this operational model will then allow churches and faith movements to construct and review their own operational ecclesiology which is reflective of their ecclesial praxis. What we now seek is a model of such an ecclesiology that is operational, connected to the ecclesial praxis, and incorporates each of the three essential dimensions, essence, expression, and goal.
3.4 OPERATIONAL MODELS

We have until now employed the terms “essence of the church” and “expression of the church” without much clarification. Before proceeding to use these terms more specifically, clarification of what we mean by “essence” and “expression,” and what we have in mind when we say “church,” is necessary.

The essence of the church refers to the essential defining nature of what the church is. Berkouwer refers to esse ecclesiae, the church essence, as its “being in reality” (Berkouwer 1976:9). It is that which is necessary for church to be church. It is that which is “fundamental to the church” (Moynagh 2012:104). For Volf, it “involves that which is indispensable” (Volf 1998:127) to the life of the church. Therefore, if any essential component of what comprises the essence is missing from what we consider church, then what we are considering is no longer church. It is that which is constitutive of the church.

Haight suggests that the essence of the church is essentially spiritual stating, the “essence of the church’s identity lies in its relationship to God and God’s relationship to it” (Haight 2008:79). In addition, according to the World Council of Churches, “The church is not merely the sum of individual believers in communion with God, nor primarily the mutual communion of individual believers among themselves. It is their common partaking in the life of God (2 Pet 1:4), who as Trinity, is the source and focus of all communion. Thus the church is both a divine and a human reality” (World Council of Churches 2008:13)². Williams also notes this dual aspect in relation to the essence of the church observing that the church is “both a spiritual and a social reality” (Williams 1996:20). The church is rooted spiritually in the work of God and exists as a social reality in the world. Therefore, while the essence of the church will manifest as a social reality this reality is also integrally connected to the divine. Therefore, when we ask what the essence of the church is, we are referring specifically to that which constitutes and is indispensable to the life and nature of the Christian church, whether divine or human.

The term expression is a replacement for the practical theological term function. Function refers to a collection of actions fulfilling similar goals. I have chosen the term expression to fulfil this collective role because, unlike the terms function or practice which tend to provide the idea that

² see also (Healy 2000:5)
they possess their own life when given form, the term expression suggests it not only refers to the outward activity or event but that it is also integrally connected to that which it is seeking to express, which for us is the essence. Thus the expression dimension of the church is employed to refer to the collection of ecclesial events which are connected to and express the essence of the church. As previously mentioned, the practical theological terms, action and action theory, have been replaced with the term event and event theory, to highlight the existence of divine and human presence in any action.

Because we are viewing the church through the lens of an operational ecclesiology we also need to clarify what we mean when we use the word “church” in such an operational context.

The Old Testament referred to the people of God as *eda* or *qahal*. “Both words are used in the Old Testament for the assembly or congregation of Israel without any distinction in meaning” (Bavinck 2008:277). Likewise the Greek words *synagoge* and *ekklesia* were initially used interchangeably to refer to the religious gatherings of the Jews. However, a distinction in meaning emerged. *Synagoge* came to designate the concrete gathered congregation, and *ekklesia* “became the word for the ideal community defined as those whom God had called to his salvation ...” (Bavinck 2008:278), that is the spiritual community of faith. From Pauline times the term *ekklesia* increasingly became the technical term used by Christians and pagans alike to refer to the Christian church (Berardino 2010:xxiii). Our word “church,” used to translate “ekklesia”, “originally meant, not the congregation itself, but its place of assembly, the church building” (Bavinck 2008:296–98). Today “church” bears a number of meanings, including reference to the physical building and also to express the full meaning of “the called out people of God”. In English versions of the bible the only word translated into our word “church” is the Greek word *ekklesia* (Dever 2012:6). Therefore the meaning of church in New Testament usage refers to the “called out people of God.”

There is much debate around who exactly are the called out people of God. Fortunately, because we are dealing with an operational ecclesiology, we can avoid much of the lengthy debate on issues concerning the visible and invisible church, the spiritual and historical church, or who is included in the church and who is not. We can do this, firstly, because an operational ecclesiology only has in mind the concrete historical church, and secondly, as we are not providing static ecclesiological content, who is or is not included becomes an issue for the ecclesial praxis under consideration.
So what do we mean by the church? In the words of Bavinck, “The community of those who share in Christ and his benefits is called ‘the church’” (Bavinck 2008:274). According to Dulles it is “a place where men would find one another and find God in Christ” (Dulles 2002:115). Dever puts it like this, “The church is the body of people called by God’s grace through faith in Christ to glorify him together by serving him in his world” (Dever 2012:3). And because we are viewing the church operationally we would say that when we use the term church we have in mind the existing Christian church, being all the communities of faith, local and together as a universal whole, who have a relationship with God.

Having settled on the initial operational dimensions of an ecclesiology which connects theory and praxis, and clarified some important terms, we now turn our attention toward discerning the broad elements of the ecclesiological content that comprise the essence, expression, and goal dimensions. Therefore, we now ask regarding essence, “What is the essential nature of the church?” and regarding expression, “How should it be in the world?” and later regarding the goal we ask, “What is the church’s eschatological destiny?” We will consider a number of ecclesiological models, from the traditional to those being proposed in recent times, to assist us in discerning the appropriate operational ecclesiology model for practical theological ecclesiology.

3.4.1 Traditional Attribute Model

Cyprian of Carthage (AD 250) formulated one of the earliest confessions which made reference to the church. He said, “I believe in God the Father, in his Son Christ, in the Holy Ghost. I believe the forgiveness of sins, and eternal life through the holy Church” (Schaff 2007:20). To the words in this confession the Apostles’ Creed added the word catholic, confessing the holy catholic church (Schaff 2007:45). Following the Council of Constantinople in 381, the four words taken from the Nicene Creed, “one holy catholic and apostolic” (Schaff 2007:59) have been used for much of church history to express the nature or essence of the church. These words, the *notae ekklesia* are called the “notes”, “attributes”, or “marks” of the church. These attributes were originally viewed as qualities or characteristics of the church under the dominance of the Roman Catholic Church. Following the emergence of other churches throughout the times of the Reformation these attributes transitioned into marks used as a polemical tool in determining that which is the “one united true church of faith” (Küng 1976:345).
Dulles, speaking of the words in their original context writes, “The term ‘holy’ was not ordinarily used, in the early centuries, as a criterion for distinguishing the true Church from its counterfeits” (Dulles 2002:115). Rather it was used to refer to the faith of the church arising from the residing presence of the Holy Spirit. The term “apostolic” was originally used polemically against movements such as the gnostics to distinguish between false and true doctrine “that was taught by those churches that stood in the apostolic succession” (Dulles 2002:116). The term “catholic” was originally used to encompass the “whole church as opposed to the particular churches composing it” (Dulles 2002:116). It also served to exclude early independent movements such as those arising from the Donatist schism in North Africa.

A post Vatican II interpretation of the creedal attributes states that:

The church is one because of the indwelling of the one Holy Spirit in all the baptised; it is holy because it is set apart by God’s graciousness for the reception of a mysterious love of predilection; it is catholic in the original sense of the word, meaning that it is whole and entire, possessing all the parts needed to make it integral; and it is apostolic because it remains in continuity in essentials with the original witnessing of the first-century apostles…. (Fiorenza and Galvin 1991:43)

These four attributes, although variously interpreted, have been largely unquestioned (Berkouwer 1976:14) and widely received and used by systematic theologians as points of departure for ecclesiological discussions on the essence of the church (see Küng 1976, Oden 1992, Clowney 1995, Williams 1996, Horton 2011). By Catholics, these terms are mostly used in a realised sense, and by Protestants, largely in an eschatological sense.

The traditional attributes constitute the traditional understanding of the essence of the church and suggest and ecclesiological model depicted as follows:

![Figure 27: Traditional Attribute Model](image-url)
This traditional attribute model addresses the essence dimension of the church but not the expression dimension which is added in the traditional functional model.

### 3.4.2 Traditional Functional Model

“The reformers did not deny the four attributes of the Church; in fact they specifically emphasised their adherence to the creeds of the early Church” (Küng 1976:345). Luther states, “at all times there must be and remain one holy Christian church” (Augsburg Confession 7.1 in Kolb 2000:42). However, they reacted to the possibility of the existence of the church being viewed separate to its relationship with and in Christ. The reformers asked not the question “What is the church?” but rather, “Where is the true church?” The reformers, therefore, largely focussed on the practical marks of the church as identifiers of that which is false rather than on the attributes of what the church is in its essence.

There are a number of Reformation statements which help us construct a Reformation essence model. Luther, maintained that “the church as the ‘communion of saints,’ in accordance with the apostles’ creed, is ‘called together by the Holy Spirit’” (Kärkkäinen 2002:39–40). The Augsburg confession refers to the church as “the assembly of all believers among whom the gospel is purely preached and the holy sacraments are administered according to the gospel” (Augsburg Confession 7.1 in Kolb 2000:42). For the reformers the church exists where the communion of saints is gathered by faith into a holy word and holy presence context.

For the reformers the oneness or unity of the church is found in the “gospel event itself rather than in ecclesiastical uniformity” (Kärkkäinen 2002:41). For the Lutheran church the pure proclamation of the word and the right administering of the sacraments ensure the unity of the church grounded in Christ. Therefore, for the reformers the word “believer” has replaced the prior apostolic focus. The faith and faithfulness of the believer based in the word replaced the focus on apostolic succession and witness, which for the Catholics was largely attached to the institution and hierarchy of the church. Likewise it also appears that the idea of the catholicity of the church, while not neglecting its worldwide nature, is replaced by an emphasis on the gathering of the believing, or for Luther, the communion of the saints, or in Calvin’s terms, the elect. Rather than the institution of the church and its appointed representatives providing ecclesial presence, now the gathering of the believing to participate in the free offer of the word.
and the sacraments constitutes the ecclesial presence. Seeking to more closely define those comprising the church, Calvin placed more emphasis than Luther on the faith and holiness of the church members. He states, “members of the church [are] those who by confession of faith, by example of life, and by partaking of the sacraments profess the same God and Christ” (Calvin 2008:4.1.8). For Calvin, holiness and purity of the church and the life of the member was also essential. In light of the above the nature and essence of the Reformation church could be stated as being, “one holy believing community.”

Those inclined toward the traditional static attribute approach, view the essence of the church as its spiritual invisible dimension. Such ecclesiologists then propose practical marks “that render the catholic and apostolic church visible to the world. These are marks that have to do with the activity of the church, the way it demonstrates its faith and witness in the wider society” (Bloesch 2006:103). Initially the reformers saw preaching as the preeminent sign or practical mark. For Luther, “Where there are the Word of God and the Holy Spirit, there is the church” (Bloesch 2006:104). To this Calvin added the sacraments stating, “Wherever we find the word of God sincerely preached and heard, wherever we see the sacraments administered according to the institution of Christ, there we cannot have any doubt that the church of God has some existence ...” (Calvin 2008:4.1.9). To these primary marks the characteristic of church order and discipline was added. Calvin however, “included discipline in the proper observance of the sacraments” (Clowney 1995:101). Since then theologians have categorised the essential functions of the church under three Greek words “kerugma (proclamation), koinonia (fellowship, including liturgy) and diakonia or diaconal service” (Heyns and Pieterse 1990:57).

The reformational attribute and traditional functional approach can be depicted as follows:
Bloesch in his systematic treatment of the church expands on the traditional functions noted above (see Figure 28), providing a more detailed collection of practical marks of the church. In addition to preaching, and the sacraments, he adds in line with several reformers the mark of church discipline. From the pietistic and spiritual movements following the Reformation he adds fellowship, mission, and service as true marks of the church. From the Orthodox Church he adds educational teaching or catechesis. From the Anabaptist tradition he adds suffering concurring with Arnold that, “Part of the experience of true conversion is the willingness to suffer with Christ, the suffering One. I do not believe that true conversion is possible without this” (Bloesch 2006:106). From liberation theology he adds signs of social justice and personally adds prayer as a practical mark of the church (Bloesch 2006:103–7). We can depict Bloesch’s expanded functional or practical marks model as follows:
The attributes and functions of the church have facilitated for many centuries discussion of the essence and expression of the church; however, this has largely occurred along the traditional theory and practice divide where essence and expression have little integration.

### 3.4.3 Dulles - Models through History

Throughout church history there has been a progressive shift in how these traditional terms have been interpreted and applied to focus the essence and expression dimensions of the church. Dulles captures these shifts in his book, *Models of the Church*, originally written in 1974. In presenting the different models Dulles seeks to provide an operational lens with which to view the church of the day.

#### 3.4.3.1 Church as Institution

The Roman Catholic Church originally viewed the church as a perfect society which emphasised the church hierarchy and its apostolic succession as the place where the true nature of the church resided. It was the Pope, the bishops, and the priests that possessed the attributes of the church. From 1600 – 1940 this societal model dominated (Dulles 2002:22). This view is stated most clearly in the “first schema of the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church prepared for Vatican Council I [held in 1869-1870].... We teach and declare: The church has all the marks of a true Society. Christ did not leave this society undefined and without a set form. Rather he himself gave its existence, and his will determined the form of its existence and gave its constitution” (Dulles 2002:29).

This model upheld a hierarchical mediation view of the essence of the church, where structure and authority dominated the scene. The goal of this model is, as the perfect society, to be the provider of eternal life to its members, for outside the institutional church there is no salvation. The attributes of the church under this model are viewed as the objective visible marks of the perfect organised church.

#### 3.4.3.2 Church as Mystical Communion

In 1943 Pius XII gave ascendancy to the mystical model stating, “If we would define and describe this true Church of Jesus Christ – which is the One, Holy, Catholic, Apostolic, Roman Church - we shall find no expression more noble, more sublime, or more divine than the phrase which calls it ‘the Mystical Body of Jesus Christ’” (Dulles 2002:21–22). Many (Sohm, Brunner, Bonhoeffer, Congar, Hamer) believe that the church in its essence is a relational community. This move sought
to replace structure with church as interlocking relationships in community with the biblical images of the “People of God” and the “Body of Christ” dominating. Rademacher sees this shift as moving from a societal external focus to a more essential internal focus on community. He “maintains that the Church is in its inner core community (Gemeinschaft); in its outer core, however, it is society (Gesellschaft)” (Dulles 2002:41). In his commentary on this statement Dulles remarks, “The society is the outward manifestation of the community. The community is the ‘real,’ as contrasted with the phenomenal, Church; it coincides with the Kingdom of God and with the Communion of Saints” (Dulles 2002:41).

The goal of this model is to “lead men into communion with the divine” (Dulles 2002:50). The church fathers connected the church to the work of the Spirit. In the church creeds the church follows the Spirit, being viewed as that which the Spirit brings and dwells within. Through the Spirit the gathered church is united to, and becomes the locus of, the presence of God. In the words of Irenaeus, “Where the Spirit of God is, there is the Church and every grace” (Irenaeus in Against Heresies 3.24.1 in Roberts 1996:458) In some sense when the church is gathered and the Spirit is present it has achieved its own goal – union with God. The attributes of the church under this model are viewed as qualities that each living community must aspire to.

3.4.3.3 Church as Sacrament

The institutional model places salvation in the hands of a divine organisation, and the communion model could be seen to place salvation in human hands and take away the necessity of the institution itself. The concept of sacrament is seen to bring both the divine and the human together. The Lumen Gentium of Vatican II affirmed this sacramental view stating, “The Church in Christ, is in the nature of sacrament – a sign and instrument, that is, of communion with God and of unity among all human beings” (Kärkkäinen 2002:29). This sacramental view replaces “hierarchy is church,” with “the people of God are church.” And therefore, the people and not the hierarchy are the possessors of the attributes. Sacrament in relation to the church has four elements. It means “a reality founded by God in Christ, a visible sign of an invisible grace, a true embodiment of the grace that it signifies, and an efficacious transmitter of the grace signified and embodied. The Church may be called a sacrament insofar as, having been founded by Christ, it signifies, embodies, and carries on the saving work of Christ, who is himself the original sacrament of God” (Dulles 2002:214).
The goal of this model is to “intensify men’s response to the grace of Christ” (Dulles 2002:65). And in so doing the participants live as signs and symbols of God’s grace in the world. The attributes under this model are viewed as visible signs of grace, of which there is to be growing evidence within the church.

### 3.4.3.4 Church as Herald

Rather than the church as mediator or sacramental instrument the Reformation introduced the herald model. This model places the emphasis on the word and proclamation as the means of grace to all. The church is the agent of proclamation but it is the word and not the church that is the “primary witness” (Dulles 2002:69) to Jesus Christ. Barth a proponent of this mostly reformational and protestant position states:

> We believe in the existence of the Church – which means that we believe each particular congregation of Christ.... *Credo ecclesiam* means that I believe that here, at this place, in this assembly, the work of the Holy Spirit takes place. By that is not intended a deification of the creature; the Church is not the object of faith, we do not believe *in* the Church; but we do believe that in this congregation the work of the Holy Spirit becomes an event. (Barth 2001:133–34)

The church in this model is constituted by, and is witness to, the Holy Spirit gathering event of the word. As Barth stated in his address to the first Assembly of the World Council of Churches, “[T]he congregation is the event which consists in gathering together (*congregatio*) of those men and women (*fidelum*) whom the living Lord Jesus Christ chooses and calls to be witnesses of the victory he has already won, and the heralds of its future manifestation” (Dulles 2002:70).

Similarly, Küng moves the understanding of church as a concrete being to an event of calling. He finds in the term *ekklesia* a reference to those who are summoned by a herald, those who have been called out (*ek-klei*). An *ekklesia* is not something that is formed and founded once and for all and remains unchanged; it becomes an *ekklesia* by the fact of a repeated concrete event, people coming together and congregating for the purpose of worshipping God. The concrete congregation is the actual manifestation, the representation, indeed the realisation of the New Testament community. (Küng 1976:120)

Under this model the church does not hold within itself sacramental status but rather the church “is fully present in each assembly that responds to God’s word” (Dulles 2002:71). It is this faith response that forms the primary gathering bond and it is the word which is sacramental,
gathering those who respond in faith. The word then is central to the constitutive essence of the church and the resultant call to herald. Apostolicity under this model resides not in the church or its leaders, but in the word. It is the “continuity in the message of faith that was first articulated by the apostles” (Bloesch 2006:40), that carries the apostolic witness. Moltmann put it this way, “The apostolic succession is, in fact and in truth, the evangelical succession, the continuing and unadulterated proclamation of the gospel of the risen Christ” (Moltmann 1985:359). Another characteristic of this model is the distinction made between the kingdom and the church. The church is seen as a participant and a herald in the kingdom not the bringer or the bearer of the kingdom. The goal of this model of church is to proclaim the good news of Christ. The attributes under this model shift from a church to a word focus. The proclamation of the word is to be uniting and holy, preached to all, as the apostolic message.

### 3.4.3.5 Church as Servant

Dulles notes that in the previous four models “the church is seen as the active subject, and the world as the object that the church acts upon or influences. The Church is produced by God’s direct action, and stands as a kind of mediator between God and the world. God comes to the world through the Church, and the world likewise comes to God through the church ...” (Dulles 2002:81–82). These more authoritarian models had impact when and where the church and the world were closely aligned. With the decline of such a relationship the previous directive approaches toward the world has more recently given way to a more dialogical involvement with the world through the servant model. Richard Cushing, a Catholic cardinal stated it this way: “And the Lord was the ‘man for others,’ so must the Church be ‘the community for others’” (Dulles 2002:85). Similarly, Bonhoeffer, seeking to move beyond Barth’s *kerygmatic* theology calls for a servant church. “The Church is the Church only when it exists for others.... The Church must share in the secular problems of ordinary human social life, not dominating, but helping and serving” (Bonhoeffer 1953:140). It is under this model the new missional and global concern movements have taken place.

The goal of this model is to bring situational transformation through the church coming alongside to help all in whatever situation or context they happen to be. This is the new mission of love - that through pursuing peace, justice and prosperity they may also find their way into the Kingdom of God. The attributes under this model “would be interpreted as characteristics of the new creation or the Kingdom of God, rather than directly and immediately of the church” (Dulles
Within this model the church would be viewed as an agent of change within the kingdom.

3.4.3.6 Church as Community of Disciples

Dulles’ previous five models each place a different emphasis on what is essential for the church to be church. Each model also provides a different perspective on the original understanding of the four creedal attributes (see Figure 30).

**Figure 30 Dulles’ Interpretation of Attributes**

Dulles believes that each model came to the fore to address the shifting contexts that the church had to come to terms with. When the church was the world and the world was church the institutional model worked alongside the state. When the congregation became more educated and involved, and the church and the world drifted apart, the concepts of community among believers and being a presence or sacrament in the world became more important. With the protestant influence and the greater access of all to the word of God, and the need to reach the world which had left the church in larger numbers, focus on the word and active proclamation came to the fore. With increased alienation of the church by the world, and the failure of the authoritarian model, the dialogical missional servant model came into being.
Dulles, while resisting a supermodel, seeks to incorporate the strengths of the five models into a model based on “the community of disciples,” as representative of the essential nature of the church (Dulles 2002:198). For him the community of disciples walks in the way of Jesus as a renewed contrasting society in the world (Dulles 2002:200–201). For Dulles each model has validity in that each model contains unique strengths. The institutional model highlighted that the church needs structure, order, and leadership. The community model demonstrates the need to be united to God and to one another by grace. The sacramental model illuminates the need for the church to be a vital sign of God’s grace in and toward the world. The herald model accentuates the need for faith in Christ and continuing witness. The servant model creates a transformational urgency that seeks to bring the values of the kingdom to reality in human society (Dulles 2002:185–86). And for Dulles the models together contain the essential elements that constitute the church. He states, “By its very constitution, the Church is a community of grace (Model 2) structured as a human society (Model 1). While sanctifying its own members, it offers praise and worship to God (Model 3). It is permanently charged with the responsibility of spreading the good news of the gospel (Model 4) and of healing and consolidating the human community (Model 5)” (Dulles 2002:196).

The changing contexts, captured within the models, not only changes the interpretations of each of the four traditional essence attributes it also serves to direct their expression. The strength of each of the five models has highlighted aspects of expression which flow out of the attributes according to the emphasis placed within each model. So while each model is based on the four attributes, the focus of the model moves us from a traditional static ecclesiology into a more dynamic place where the elements of the expression of the church are connected to the essence rather than merely seen as functional and separated from the essence. We can depict this move toward the dynamic in Dulles as follows:
3.4.4 Dynamic Attribute Models

The traditional attribute model has been viewed as producing a “static ecclesiology” (Berkouwer 1976:19) and a static church. The Roman Catholics largely institutionalised the attributes, and Protestant church where “adhering rigidly to Reformation concepts of the church stands in danger of having a stationary or static view of the church” (Piet in Van Engen 1991:64). And while the traditional attribute and functional models deal with the essence and expression dimensions and categories of the church, it has resulted in feeding a mostly divided ecclesiology. However, more recently a number of theologians have sought a more dynamic approach to ecclesiology. As a result there have been varying attempts at providing a dynamic attribute model where the traditional attributes are viewed not as static characteristics but as representing both the nature and work of the church.

In light of Christ’s active and dynamic rule among his people, Schilder sees the church is “in a state of becoming. Schilder does not want to see the church standing still, but rather in motion” (Berkouwer 1976:20). The church must not merely believe that its existence constitutes the church but rather it must reflect on whether it is actually being the church. The nature and essence of the church must be dynamically realised. Oden expresses a movement in this direction by seeking a realisation of the attributes as follows:
First, the church must be *one* because it is unified by one faith in one God revealed in the one crucified and risen Lord. Second, the church is being made *holy* by participating by faith in the perfect holiness of the Son through the power of the Spirit. Third, the church is universal or general or *catholic* because it offers the whole counsel of God to the whole world. Fourth, the church is *apostolic* because it is sent into the world even as the Son was sent. Where these marks are present, the church is alive. (Oden 1992:720)

We consider now a number of theologians who have pursued such a dynamic path where the essence based on the traditional attributes is also connected to the expression of the church.

### 3.4.4.1 Jürgen Moltmann

“Jürgen Moltmann suggests that a ‘hermeneutics of origin,’ which grounds theology in Scripture alone (sola Scriptura) must understand that Scripture is grounded in Christ, not only historically but eschatologically” (Anderson 2001:37). This eschatological work of the Spirit in the praxis of the church seeks to transform the faith community into that which reflects Christ and his revelation not only historically but moves toward the promise of all that is to come. The church is involved in a dynamic movement toward what will be, based on what already is in Christ. “The hermeneutics of christology’s origin must therefore be complimented by the hermeneutics of its effects” (Moltmann 1990:43–44). For Moltmann, origin and effects, essence and expressive movement, belong in a dynamic relationship.

Therefore, for Moltmann, it is important how the traditional attributes are viewed. If they are viewed as characteristics of the church then we will seek visible signs. If they are viewed as criteria then the attributes are viewed as distinguishing marks, as with the Reformation. Moltmann’s starting point is to view these four attributes as “integrated components of the confession of the triune God, and cannot be detached from this context” (Moltmann 1985:337). Therefore these characteristics do not belong to the church but are received. “The church receives the attributes ... from the activity of Christ in the workings of the Spirit for the coming kingdom” (Moltmann 1985:338). Therefore for Moltmann:

If the church acquires its existence through the activity of Christ, then her characteristics, too, are characteristics of Christ’s activity first of all. The acknowledgement of the ‘one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church’ is acknowledgement of the uniting, sanctifying, comprehensive and commissioning lordship of Christ.... If the church acquires her existence from Christ’s messianic mission and the eschatological gift of the Spirit, then her characteristics are messianic predicates at the same time. (Moltmann 1985:338–39)
As the church of Christ, the attributes are firstly “statements of faith,” and as the church of the kingdom of God the attributes are eschatological “statements of hope” (Moltmann 1985:338–39). The church is not only in Christ, one, holy, catholic, and apostolic, it is also future bound to be the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic bride of Christ. For Moltmann, the church now, existing in faith, oriented toward eschatological hope, is lead into dynamic action. “If the characteristics of the church are statements of faith and hope, they also lead to statements of action” (Moltmann 1985:339). Because in Christ the church is one, holy, catholic, and apostolic, the church ought to actively manifest these attributes. The attributes then not only point to the essential nature of the church they dynamically point to the expressive action of the church in the world. Moltmann puts it this way:

Because in Christ the church is one, it ought to be one. Those who receive its unity in Christ ought to seek its unity. The one people of the one kingdom ought to lay the foundations of unity among men. Because in Christ the church is holy, its members ought to fight sin and sanctify its life through righteousness, Because they are sanctified through the Spirit, they ought in obedience to sanctify all things for the new creation. Because in Christ it is open to the world, it ought to be catholic, testifying everywhere to the all-embracing kingdom. As the church of the Spirit, the one church is the unifying church. The holy church is the church that sanctifies or makes holy. The catholic church is the peace-giving, and so the all-embracing, church. The apostolic church is – through the gospel – the liberating church in the world. (Moltmann 1985:339–40)

The church therefore finds its essence and expression, its life, as it “lives in the one, holy, catholic and apostolic rule of Christ through faith, hope and action” (Moltmann 1985:340) empowered by the Spirit toward its eschatological goal. Moltmann’s model could be depicted as follows:
Moltmann points out that at times other marks have been considered, but regarding the four creedal attributes he states, “These are undoubtedly the essential ones” (Moltmann 1985:340). However, he concedes that the understanding of the attributes is shaped by the existing context. Moltmann notes that the traditional four were laid down during a “context of the church’s development into the church of the empire” (Moltmann 1985:340), when the oneness and universality of the church were of critical importance for the Roman empire. Moltmann therefore believes that the attributes may require refocussing to enable them to serve the church within the presenting context. In an attempt to connect the traditional attributes with the need and context under his consideration, Moltmann recasts the creedal four as: “The church’s unity is its unity in freedom. The church’s holiness is its holiness in poverty. The church’s apostolicity bears the sign of the cross, and its catholicity is linked with its partisan support for the oppressed” (Moltmann 1985:341). This recasting, he believes, ensures the marks do not operate internally, within the church, but that they also operate externally, having a bearing toward the world, acting as “confessional signs”, confronting the context and issues of the day (Moltmann 1985:342).

3.4.4.2 Charles Van Engen

Rather than a static approach to the four traditional attributes, Van Engen views the attributes as being both gift and task. The attributes take on a dynamic nature by not only describing the essence of the church, the gift, but by embodying also the very tasks the church is called to take on as it emerges “toward the full manifestation of its true nature” (Van Engen 1991:65). According to Van Engen:
The *gift* that the Church’s nature is *one* embodies the *task* to strive toward unity, to live as one, to unite itself around its Lord. The *gift* that the Church’s nature is *holy* accompanies the *task* to strive toward holiness in its members, in its organisations, in its life in the world, in its reception and expression of the Word of God. The *gift* that the Church is *catholic* means that the Church’s *task* is to grow in its geographical, cultural, racial, spiritual, numerical, and temporal universality around the Lord of lords who speaks his Word to all creatures. The *gift* that the church is *apostolic* would itself be a *task* for applying the apostolic gospel, living in the apostolic way, and being sent as apostles to the world. (Van Engen 1991:65)

In this way, Van Engen believes the attributes relate closer to church reality rather than defining an abstract body which may or may not exist in such a designated way. Such a concept of church “reaches beyond what *is* to what *could be* as we maintain more intimate contact with the essence of the Church’s nature” (Van Engen 1991:66). Van Engen goes further, not wanting to see these dynamic attributes just as tasks that the church does to itself to become essentially true to its gifted nature, he also wants them to be viewed as “four planetary orbits of the church’s missionary life in the world” (Van Engen 1991:68). As such “First, the one Church of Jesus Christ would be seen as a unifying force.... Second, the holy Church of Jesus Christ would be seen as a sanctifying force.... Third, the catholic Church of Jesus Christ would be seen as a reconciling force.... Fourth, the apostolic Church of Jesus Christ would be seen as a proclaiming force.... Viewed in this way the four ancient concepts are not only activities the Church does, but the totality of existence” (Van Engen 1991:68). If the attributes are viewed in this dynamic way then they not only speak to the nature of the church, nor merely influence the actions to be carried out, but according to van Engen they are the church’s “totality of existence” (Van Engen 1991:70).

For Van Engen, the purposes of the church are realised according to its fourfold nature “when its members participate in the Church’s being-in-the-world through *koinonia, kerygma, diaconia, and martyrria*” (Van Engen 1991:89). These four expressions are closely connected to the active attributes. For Van Engen, the church as gift is one, holy, catholic, and apostolic, and thereby it dynamically acts to unify, sanctify, reconcile and proclaim, through connected expressions of *koinonia, kerygma, diaconia*, and *martyria*, so that the church realises its “unique identity and purpose in the world as a *covenant community of the King*” (Van Engen 1991:104). Van Engen’s dynamic model can be depicted as follows:
Figure 33  Van Engen’s Missional Attribute Model

3.4.4.3  Stephen Pickard

Pickard believes, “The creedal marks provide the basic frame of reference for the life and mission of the church” (Pickard 2012:149). However, he calls for them to be reinterpreted from a static “given” status and placed within a now and not yet context. Following Pannenberg’s distinction between the *imago Dei* as original gift and the unfinished nature of the *imago Dei* (Pannenberg 1999:44–79), the church is viewed as existing now between gift and destiny. As gift, the church is constituted now by the trinitarian God as an image bearer. As destiny, the church is to be precisely that image. The church now is called to become that which it has been constituted to be. Thus the “marks are signs of the destiny of the church of Christ as much as they are signs of originative gifts” (Pickard 2012:131). Viewing the attributes from an eschatological becoming stance, Pickard proposes the traditional attributes be dynamically interpreted as, one in expanding connectivity, holy in transformed community, catholic in embrace, and apostolic in shared discipleship.

Coming from a missional emergent perspective, Pickard sees these reinterpreted attributes as moving “beyond fixed measures of truth and good order and becoming emergent properties of the renewal of the *ecclesia*” (Pickard 2012:150). However, Pickard, unlike Moltmann and Van Engen, does not correlate the expression elements with the essence attributes but rather conceives of a gifted dynamic essence that is fulfilled by the Spirit through “those ecclesial...
practices that have been central to Christian pilgrimage throughout history. Worship, word, sacrament, service and witness have been developed in terms of the energy empowering life on the ‘Way’” (Pickard 2012:207). The life of the church, made visible through these practices, originates from the “attractive energy of the triune God [as] the original and transformative energy at work in the generating and shaping of a renewed sociality in God” (Pickard 2012:184). From this perspective the church is “that body of people formed by and drawn towards God through the ordered energetics of God’s own life” (Pickard 2012:184). Thus the essence and expressions of the church are part of a trinitarian double movement. This is a movement where God both “founds and fulfils the form of the church” (Pickard 2012:114). This is first a movement of constitutive gift, by God toward the church, the essence dimension. And secondly, there is an empowered expressive Spirit movement within the church, reaching toward the fulfilment of the church’s future destiny in Christ. Pickard’s dynamic gift and destiny model can be depicted as follows:

![Figure 34](image)

**Figure 34** Pickard’s Gift and Destiny Model

### 3.4.5 Trinitarian Models

The dynamic models have importantly served to activate the otherwise static attributes of the church into essence expressive elements focussed on moving the church toward its destiny of becoming that which it has been gifted in Christ. Following the concept of gift, some ecclesiologists sought a starting point for the nature of the church in the nature or work of the
triune God. For Harper and Metzger, the essence of the church is to be viewed through two lenses, the trinitarian lens and the eschatological lens. They state,

"we must give foundational consideration to the church as the community of the Triune God because the church derives its core identity from its relationship with the Triune God to whom the church is united as God’s people, Christ’s body and bride, and the Holy Spirit’s temple; and we must give foundational consideration to the church as the eschatological community of the Triune God because it serves as the primary agent and embodied witness of this God’s kingdom" (Harper and Metzger 2009:14).

The following models in their various forms have a trinitarian source and many also have an eschatological orientation.

### 3.4.5.1 Hendrikus Berkhof

Berkhof has a dynamic covenantal view of the Trinity. The eternal covenantal relationship between Father and Son, which “takes place in the Spirit who proceeds from Father to the Son and then in turn proceeds from the Son to human beings,” (Berkhof 1979:331) is to be viewed as a covenantal including act. For Berkhof, the ultimate purpose of God in salvation is to bring about “partnership in the Trinity (consortium trinitas)” (Berkhof 1979:332). “The trinitarian event arises from the very nature (essence of God) and leads to it. In that sense the Trinity is natural (essential) for God. It describes how God, according to his eternal purpose, extends and carries on in time his own life so as to share it with man. The Trinity is thus not a description of an abstract God-in himself, but of the revealed God-with-us” (Berkhof 1979:332).

Berkhof views the church as a mediating agent. If God is this triune God of covenant community, and by nature God is one and unifying, is lovingly universally including, graciously open in holiness, then the church is this also. Just as Christ mediated God to humankind, the church is “the mediating movement between Christ and the people” (Berkhof 1979:410). “The fact of being church is thus not something static; it is a perpetual movement, a bridge-event” (Berkhof 1979:411). Berkhof views the church as having three mediating dimensions. “First it is an institution, a totality of activities and agreements. Next it is a community, a totality of personal relationships. Finally it is a totality of influences to the outside.” (Berkhof 1979:411). As institution the church mediates Christ to his people. As body of Christ, the faith community mediates Christ to the individual. And as the apostolic people of God, as firstfruits, the church stands between Christ and the world (Berkhof 1979:345). For each mediating dimension Berkhof considers the
relevant events and actions that mediate Christ to the church, to the individual, and to the world. Berkhof’s trinitarian essence and expression mediation model can be depicted as follows:

![Figure 35  Berkhof’s Mediation Model](image)

### 3.4.5.2 Millard Erickson

Erickson’s trinitarian approach to the essence of the church, utilises certain Father, Son, and Spirit images of the New Testament, “the people of God, the body of Christ, and the temple of the Holy Spirit” (Erickson 1998:1045). His approach, although trinitarian, is not based in the nature of the Trinity but rather connected to the work of the triune God in relation to the church. For Erickson, as the people of God, the church finds identity and a calling to holiness. As the body of Christ the church represents Christ and is connected to Christ and thereby to all local churches. As the temple of the Holy Spirit the church is united and purified, built to be the presence of the living God in the world. Erickson then, largely unconnected to the essence images, employs a functional approach to the expression dimension, with the functions of the church being evangelism, edification, worship and social concern (Erickson 1998:1060–61). Erickson’s trinitarian functional model can be depicted as follows:
Erickson’s model is typical of many within the evangelical sphere. The model although grounded in trinitarian images is largely an ecclesiology abstracted from reality. Therefore, the proposed expression categories exist largely isolated rather than connected and integrated into the essence dimension. The trinitarian essence foundation also finds little overflow into the functional expression.

### 3.4.5.3 Stanley Grenz

Grenz also believes the traditional attribute approach to church has “emphasised its static, theoretical essence” (Grenz 2000:464–65). Grenz proposes a more dynamic trinitarian understanding by appealing to “three concepts which describe its fundamental nature: covenant, kingdom sign, and community. The church ... is a people standing in covenant, who are a sign of the divine reign and constitute a special community. In short, the church is the eschatological covenant community” (Grenz 2000:464). For Grenz what the church is now “is determined by what the church is destined to become” (Grenz 2000:479).

Grenz believes that Christians fundamentally “saw themselves as a people called together by the proclamation of the gospel for the purpose of belonging to God through Christ” (Grenz 2000:465). Further, through employing the images, “the nation of God,” “the body of Christ,” and “the temple of the Spirit,” where each image is connected to a member of the triune God, Grenz views the church relationally, and primarily because of Christ as a covenant people belonging to God. Grenz sees the concept, “the church as the covenant people,” as constitutive, providing the church with an understanding of being “those whom the Spirit has called out of the world through
the gospel proclamation to walk together as God’s people” (Grenz 2000:472). From a trinitarian perspective the church is God’s covenant people of faith who are in Christ by the Spirit.

The second concept, “the church as the sign of the kingdom,” refers eschatologically to God’s ultimate purpose for the church as being now, “a foretaste of the eschatological reality that God will one day give to his creation” (Grenz 2000:479). According to Grenz, the church is not the kingdom; it has been created through the breaking in of the kingdom in Christ and through the Spirit. The “kingdom remains broader than the church. The kingdom concept encompasses God’s domain in all of its aspects which when viewed eschatologically includes the entire created universe as well as the heavenly court. The church, in contrast, arises from God’s program in calling out a people to belong to him in Christ” (Grenz 2000:478). The church as a sign of the kingdom is a Spirit witness now to the eschatological hope to come in Christ.

The third concept, “the church as community,” arises out of the presence of the covenant “which stands at the foundation of the church as a community.... The church consists of those persons who declare individually their loyalty to God through Christ” (Grenz 2000:480). For Grenz, it is this individual confession of Christ that is the basis of the covenant relationship, and it is this joint faith confession that forms the covenant community. “Indeed, the presence of the covenant is what transforms a loosely related group of people into a community” (Grenz 2000:480). For the covenant people to be a sign of the kingdom, Grenz suggests, “means to reflect the very character of God. The church reflects God’s character in that it lives as a genuine community – lives in love – for as the community of love the church shows the nature of the triune God” (Grenz 2000:483). The church is such a community of love, “a people bound together by the love [of God] present among us through the power of God’s Spirit” (Grenz 2000:484). The church is a people called to be a sign of Christ’s covenantal love to the world.

Grenz using a trinitarian, Father, Son, Spirit, and salvation historical eschatological, faith, hope, love approach, captures the elements of faith identity, eschatological calling, and mission, in the concepts of God’s covenant people (Father, faith, past), the Spirit’s kingdom sign (Spirit, hope, future), and Christ’s community (Son, love, present).

Grenz’ expression framework comes not from focussing on the actions themselves but on the focal points of the expression activities. For him the practical expressions of the church are worship, being those events which focus on God, edification, being those events which focus on the faith community, and outreach, being those events which focus on the world (Grenz
The purpose of each expression for Grenz is for the church to bring glory to God, en route to the consummation of God’s purposes, [through] mirroring the divine image” (Grenz 2000:489). Grenz’ trinitarian, eschatological, relational community model can be depicted as follows:

![Grenz' Trinitarian Community Model](image)

**Figure 37   Grenz’ Trinitarian Community Model**

### 3.4.5.4 Miroslav Volf

Volf also follows a trinitarian perspective, seeking a communal corrective to the individualism of the Free Church. Many such churches, according to Volf, have an “exclusive soteriological-ecclesiological concentration on Christ, [which] can ... ground only the salvation of the individual, but not the ecclesial salvific community itself” (Volf 1998:196–97). Volf gives us a definition of what for him constitutes a church in Christ:

> Every congregation that assembles around the one Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord in order to profess faith in him publicly in pluriform fashion, including through baptism and the Lord’s Supper, and which is open to all churches of God and to all human beings, is a church in the full sense of the word, since Christ promised to be present in it through his Spirit as the first fruits of the gathering of the whole people of God in the eschatological reign of God. Such a congregation is a holy, catholic, and apostolic church ... since it possesses these on the basis of the constitutive presence of Christ. (Volf 1998:158)

His definition of church, while connected to the traditional attributes, presents in a different way. He considers first what constitutes and connects the church community of Christ and then looks
at how this connection is evidenced within the church and externally to the world. For Volf, firstly, the church is an assembled confessing community of Christ, and each local assembly is connected by the Spirit “with all other churches of God, indeed with the entire communion of those who through the same Spirit are ‘in Christ’” (Volf 1998:145). Secondly, for an assembled community to be a church they must gather in the name of Christ. “Gathering in the name of Christ is the precondition for the presence of Christ in the Holy Spirit, which is itself constitutive for the church” (Volf 1998:145). The church is a gathering that confesses faith in Christ, identifies with Christ, and allows their lives to be directed by Christ. Thirdly, when this confession of Christ is made internally there occurs an “intraecclesial event” (Volf 1998:154), but also when each church confesses the same Christ, this confession “simultaneously connects every church with all other churches” (Volf 1998:154), and an interecclesial event occurs. These intraecclesial and interecclesial events at once create unique independence locally and unified openness universally, connecting each local church to the other, and all to impact the world.

Volf then seeks to push the trinitarian nature of the church further. He believes that one’s understanding of the Trinity “decisively shapes not only ecclesiology, but the entirety of Christian thought” (Volf 1998:193). For Volf, this is not just a theology from analogy, where the church is like the Trinity. But rather he sees that since believers are initiated by the concretely trinitarian act of baptism into the church, “the church must speak of the Trinity as its determining reality” (Volf 1998:195). Volf sees ontological trinitarian correspondences “between the relationship and mutual interpenetration of the trinitarian persons and that of Christians and congregations” (Hill 2012:139). He sees the church as the image of the Trinity. Such a trinitarian correspondence leads to the following reflections on the essential nature, or essence of the church:

1. Confessing: The connection between the Trinity and the church is grounded in true confession, confession of the one true God. “Through baptism ‘in the name of the Father, of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,’ the Spirit of God leads believers simultaneously into both trinitarian and ecclesial communion” (Volf 1998:195). The church exists through confession of the triune God.

covenant communities and while independent are “mutually related entities affirming one another in giving and receiving” (Volf 1998:207).

3. Open: The persons of the Trinity “all mutually permeate one another” (Volf 1998:209). Operating as one body Christians are open to impact and to be impacted by the mutual giving and receiving of all. The Christian community is catholic, it is open, inclusive, interdependent and transformational.

4. Ordered: The Trinity consists of a specific dynamic of ordered relationships. The Christian community is therefore called to exist as such a dynamic ordered community.

The above forms that which is constitutive of the church for Volf. He, like the dynamic attribute models, expects that the church will “grow in unity, sanctity, catholicity, and apostolicity ... on the basis of the constitutive presence of Christ” (Volf 1998:158). Volf stops short of providing a dynamic expression model in the image of the Trinity. Therefore we depict his trinitarian essence model as follows:

![Volf's Image of the Trinity Model](image)

**Figure 38  Volf’s Image of the Trinity Model**

### 3.4.5.5 Roger Haight

Haight also commences his work on the nature of the church by connecting its essence to the Trinity. “The church’s essential characteristics flow from its relation to God and the way in which that relationship takes place” (Haight 2008:80). He then places the church theologically by employing the trinitarian images of the “people of God”, the “body of Christ” and the “temple of the Holy Spirit”. He states, this “deep grounding and the mystical language of participation in God as Creator, Word, and Spirit are used by all Christians to describe their church. All else beyond this bond of unity among all Christians and with God, which bears so much ontological depth and density, pales in importance when compared with it” (Haight 2008:88).

Haight goes on to view the church from the perspective of its tensive relationship between its eschatological ideal and its historical reality. It is from this perspective that Haight considers the
attributes (Haight employs the term marks) of the church. He sees the attributes as dialectically determined through faith, having transcendent and historical dimensions. He sees them as referring primarily to the work of the Spirit within the church. And he sees the attributes as a call upon all churches to realise them historically across the boundaries of the churches (Haight 2008:90–91). Thus he suggests, “all churches should be able to recognise themselves as the people of God, the body of Christ, and the house of God’s Spirit. They should also be able to appropriate to themselves the marks of the church and be able to see them in other churches” (Haight 2008:97–98).

Haight divides the expression activities of the church socially, into those which affect the “internal life of the church (ad intra) and the world outside it (ad extra)” (Haight 2008:197). The internal activities of the church for Haight are pastoral, worship (including word and sacrament), and nurturing the whole life of the members. The external activities of the church are mission and dialogue. These are facilitated by the additional important activity of administration or governing.

Haight therefore has a three tired approach to ecclesiology. Firstly, there are the trinitarian foundations that bring to life the church. Secondly, this life is identified by the traditional attributes which are used dialectically, they point to the essential nature of the church and its eschatological goal of being one holy, catholic, apostolic church in Christ. Thirdly, these attributes or marks are to be realised now through the various expressions of the church. Haight’s model can be depicted as follows:
3.4.6  Relational Models

The trinitarian models of Berkhof, Grenz, and Haight, have not only a trinitarian essence, they have progressed ecclesiology along relational lines emanating from the Trinity. We consider now other approaches and models which may not all have trinitarian roots but which are united in their conviction that the church in essence and/or expression is connected to the various relationships the church has or is called to have.

3.4.6.1  Wayne Grudem

Grudem adopts a primarily Reformation, word and sacrament, apologetic view of the essence of the church. These elements are viewed from the perspective of what must be present for a church to exist rather than considering what constitutes its essence. Grudem then, without integration into essence, presents the expressive nature of the church in relational categories,
similar to Grenz, in “terms of ministry to God, ministry to believers, and ministry to the world” (Grudem 1994:867).

![Grudem’s Model](image)

**Figure 40**  Grudem’s Model

### 3.4.6.2 Norman Geisler

Similar to Grudem, Geisler does not provide a clear essence framework and he also identifies the ministries or purposes of the church according to its various relationships. Geisler expands on the three relationships employed by Grenz and Grudem, naming five. In relation to God the church’s purpose is worship and glorification. In relation to the church universal, the church’s purpose is to be a visible manifestation of unity and oneness. In relation to other believers, the church’s purpose is to edify. In relation to unbelievers, the purpose is evangelism. In relation to the angels, the church’s purpose is to be a sign of God’s wisdom and grace (Geisler 2005:94–95). Geisler’s model can be depicted as follows:

![Geisler’s Model](image)

**Figure 41**  Geisler’s Model
3.4.6.3 Edmund Clowney

Clowney bases his essence of the church on the four creedal attributes and then like Grenz, Grudem, and Geisler, connects the ministries of the church along relational lines. However, unlike these theologians who align particular ministry expressions with each relationship, Clowney considers the church has three predominant ministries (or means), worship, nurture, and mission, that are applicable across all relationships (or goals) (Clowney 1995), through expression variations of word, mercy and order. Clowney’s model is depicted as follows:

![Clowney’s Model](image)

3.4.6.4 Malan Nel

Nel similarly, has a relational, God, church, world model. He places the traditional attributes and the reformers three marks, of word, sacrament and discipline, as applying to the essence of the church in “whatever mode of ministry the congregation is involved in” (Nel 2009:14). Out of that basis he views the church as an “‘intermediary pastor’, serving God’s presence among us and his coming to the world” (Nel 2009:14). He views the congregation as a “relational unit” (Nel 2009:9), being created and recreated by God in a covenental love relationship. The church is therefore a
reconciled and reconciling community. As a result, for Nel, each expression of the church emanates from and toward relationship. Each ministry mode exists to serve the communication of the gospel. Each mode of ministry and all of them together are three-dimensional. This means that each should always be service to the Triune God, service to one another, and service to the world. The communicative involvement of God with the church and the world is the ‘given’ that compels the congregation to orient itself towards this three-dimensional focus on service. The crucial question that every mode of ministry has to answer is: is it a communicative act that serves the gospel with regard to God, the believers as a body and the world? (Nel 2009:8)

Nel here builds onto his attribute and mark essence base via the threefold relational dynamic, a set of relational ministries which are akin to the traditional functional ministry model (Nel 2009:8). These modes of ministry are then to reflect the essential attributes and marks in the development and maturity of each relationship. Nel then suggests the critical question for the church is “Are we serving God’s coming to us and through us to our context, our world, his world within our reach?” (Nel 2009:13). Nel’s model could be depicted as follows:
Nel’s approach is missional, viewing the “congregation as the intermediator in the coming of the Kingdom of God to His world; and the church’s main reason for existence, namely enjoying the King while serving the coming of his Kingdom” (Nel 2009:13). This missional approach places the relationships as the goal of the ministry modes which are expressions of the essential attributes and marks of the church.

**3.4.6.5  Mark Dever**

Dever takes us one step further through integrating the relational, the attributes of the church, and the nature of God. He states, “The church reflects the character of God” (Dever 2012:15). He views the four traditional attributes of the church “as a reflection of God’s unity, holiness, immensity, eternality, and truthfulness” (Dever 2012:15). Stated briefly, he describes the attributes of the church as follows:

“The church is one and is to be one because God is one.... The church is holy and is to be holy because God is holy.... The church is universal and is to be universal because God is
the Lord of the earth.... The church is apostolic and is to be apostolic because it is founded on and is faithful to the Word of God given through the apostles” (Dever 2012:16–20).

Dever also considers the faith generating and distinguishing marks of word and sacrament as well as the ordering aspects of membership, polity and discipline as necessary for the true church.

Dever, similar to Grenz, then sees the church as being purposely directed toward three relationships, namely, with God, with other Christians, and with the world. It is these three relationships that guide the expression of the church to bring glory to God, namely, by “the worship of God, the edification of the church, and the evangelisation of the world” (Dever 2012:69). Dever’s model can be depicted as follows:

Figure 44  Dever’s Model

3.4.6.6  Michael Moynagh
The influence of Grenz and other social Trinitarians has placed relationship and community at the centre of discussions of what forms the essence of the church. Writing for the emerging church Mobsby puts it this way: “The holy Trinity is beckoning the emerging Church to model a way of being a spiritual community that reflects the very nature of the Trinitarian Godhead” (Mobsby in Moynagh 2012:105). Similarly for Moynagh, the essence of the church is connected to the nature of the triune God. Moynagh, writing from a missional and communication perspective, sees the church’s call is to imitate the communicative and relational nature of God and participate with him in his kingdom mission.
Following this relational and missional line of thinking Moynagh and the Fresh Expressions Movement suggest that:

The church is comprised of four sets of relationships centred on Jesus – to the Godhead, between members of the local church, to the world, and between each part and the whole body. In believers’ experience, these relationships are what church is. Take any one set of these relationships away, and the church would be less than fully church. These four sets of relationships are essential to the being of the church. (Moynagh 2012:106)

They see that,

These four ecclesial relations echo and participate in the Trinity. The relationship with God is modelled on the Father’s giving to the Son (Matt 28.18) and the Son’s obedience to the Father (John 28.28-9). The relationship with the world is a participation in God’s mission through the Spirit. Fellowship within the gathering reflects the mutual love of the divine persons. Relations to the whole church are the ecclesial counterpart to the perichoretic relationships within the Trinity – one affects all. (Moynagh 2012:108).

And these four sets of relationships can be described as:

UP relationships through participating in the life of the Trinity
IN relationships through fellowship within the gathering
OUT relationship in love for, and service of the world
OF relationships, as part of the whole body, through connections with the wider church.
(Moynagh 2012:107).

Taking the communication line Moynagh states that:

The kingdom-shaped church is in perpetual conversation about the kingdom and with the world. These conversations are part of an ongoing series of interactions that are not just at the heart of church, but constitute its very existence. Take away these conversations and there would be little left. The conversations that make up the church are with the Trinity, with the world, between different parts of the wider church and within each ecclesial gathering. (Moynagh 2012:118)

Moynagh’s justification for viewing the church as relationally constituted falls into several categories. Citing Minear’s classic Images of Church in the New Testament, he notes that the controlling New Testament images of the church are relational in nature. He also refers to the World Council of Churches 2005 statement, The Nature and Mission of the Church, which states that biblical images of the church “evoke the nature and quality of the relationship of God’s
people to God, to one another and to the created order” (WCC, 2005:22-23 in Moynagh 2012:113).

For Moynagh, “If relationships are the essence of the church, practices are for the good of the church” (Moynagh 2012:109). The practices build on the four relationships and direct them toward maturity, and that maturity “will involve growth in Christ-likeness. This can be understood as movement toward the kingdom within each of the four interlocking sets of relationships that constitute the church – with the Trinity, the world, the living tradition, and with the gathering” (Moynagh 2012:329–30). Moynagh sees maturity from an eschatological missional perspective as imitating the self-giving nature of God in all relationships. It is a “movement into God’s reign, which is the telos, the goal of the church” (Moynagh 2012:330). He then identifies the relationally connected practices of the church as “four pathways to maturity – discipleship, worship, community, and sustainability” (Moynagh 2012:330). Under discipleship Moynagh places the actions of evangelism, initiation, and formation. The practice of worship is seen as essential in ensuring maturity in faith formation and ecclesial identity. Community seeks a mature alternative Spirit social life that includes “the practice of hospitality, solidarity expressed in mutual giving, dispersed leadership, a contextualised faith that can subvert the existing order and make a difference in life, and a willingness to negotiate differences in identity” (Moynagh 2012:404). Sustainability is about “the durability of the container within which discipleship, worship, community, and other ingredients of maturity are grown” (Moynagh 2012:405). It includes aspects of church foundation, leadership, dynamics, and reproduction; actions which provide a solid church framework and ensure its health, fruitfulness and longevity.

Moynagh’s model of a relational missional church based on four relationships and four broad practices for maturity could be viewed as follows:
3.5 THE OPERATIONAL ECCLESIOLOGY MODEL

Each model and each model category adds new and important angles for an integrated operational ecclesiology model. We must now discern what key essence, expression and goal categories will make up our operational ecclesiology model. To develop a comprehensive model we need to ensure it satisfies the major strengths and key themes of each of the four model groups we have considered.
3.5.1 Key Themes

The traditional attributes have stood the test of time. Having been incorporated into the apostle’s creed and utilised to guide models up to the present, the traditional attributes cannot be discounted, but perhaps cannot also be considered as normative. As Berkouwer states, “the church is the congregation of the faithful and, therefore, stands under her Lord, directed to Him and tested by Him concerning her obedience” (Berkouwer 1976:23). The church and the attributes are therefore open to a testing, a reflective and corrective function (Berkouwer 1976:23). An example of such a correction is Barth’s belief that “Holy egoism,” (Barth 1962:767) that is the church existing for itself, led to a “pronounced lack of joy in mission” (Barth 1962:767). He therefore calls the church’s being for the world “a true nota ecclesia, with an external sign by which the true community of Jesus Christ may be infallibly known” (Barth 1962:772). So while the four traditional attributes stand with a towering presence they must also be open to change or addition.

The dynamic models add three important aspects. Firstly, they move us from a static ecclesiology into an activated or more operational model. This is significant because it takes us beyond a theory only, abstracted ecclesiology, toward a more integrated essence and expression model. Secondly, this dynamic movement is placed within a gift and destiny or indicative and eschatological imperative context. This provides a foundation and goal approach to ecclesiology which sits comfortably within practical theological circles that see its task as facilitating such movement between what is and what should be. And thirdly, this dynamic movement also highlights the important correlation that exists between that which is given to the church and that which is future. Therefore the goal of any expression is to realise that which the church is by nature.

The trinitarian models move us closer to understanding the essential nature of the church from God mediating, God imaging, and trinitarian relational perspectives. These models cause us to reflect on the fact that the church in essence and expression is an incarnational revelational representation of the triune God in nature and character, and therefore relationally.

This moves us to the relational grouping of models. These models impress upon us the need to consider that the church has been created in and for relationship and therefore its ministry and its ultimate goal is relationally bound. Harper and Metzger affirm the relational nature of the church, stating, “The church’s identity is itself communal and relational. It derives this communal being
from the Triune God whose being is the three divine persons in communion, and who created it for communion” (Harper and Metzger 2009:19). “The church has its existence in constitutive relation with God, its own, humanity at large, and the world. Moreover, the church exists to love God, its own, the world, and the whole creation because it is loved in covenantal communion with God.” Here, as mentioned previously, Harper and Metzger, against the missional movement, suggest that the church is ultimately relational and being-driven rather than purpose-driven or practice-driven. This confirms that the trinitarian relational nature of the church should take initially a revelational incarnational path rather than a missional one.

3.5.2 Connecting the Themes

We have identified four key ecclesiological themes, namely, the attributive theme, the dynamic theme, the trinitarian theme and the relational theme. These now need to be substantially included and connected into our operational model. The connection between the attributes and the dynamic models has already been made evident. We now need to consider if and how the key themes are connected.

Volf and Dever suggest a correspondence between the nature of the Trinity and the nature of the church, and a connection between these correspondences and the attributes of the church. As mentioned previously, Volf believes that a trinitarian imaging church which is a confessing, one, open and ordered community, will “grow in unity, sanctity, catholicity, and apostolicity ... on the basis of the constitutive presence of Christ” (Volf 1998:158). Therefore, the trinitarian imaging church will grow attributively.

In addition, from reflection on and in line with Volf’s work, we can add the trinitarian element of holiness. The triune relationship between the Son and the Father is one of being holy, set apart for unique intimate pure relationship and for being completely given over to obedience to the will of the Father. The church likewise, by the Spirit, is called to conform to the image of Christ in its allegiance to God and in its holy obedience to the will of God. As Dever says, “The church is holy and is to be holy because God is holy” (Dever 2012:16). We can demonstrate the connection between the Trinity and the dynamic attributes as follows:
Note that we have also added “Ordered” as an attribute corresponding with the trinitarian characteristic of relational order (See Figure 46). Along with Volf, this attribute has been given attention previously in the work of Van der Ven and Dever.

Minear in his iconic book, *Images of the Church in the New Testament*, surveys the biblical images of the church. A full treatment of his work is not required here, but importantly for our purposes he helps connect the images that underpin most of the trinitarian models with the relationships highlighted by the relational models. Minear notes that there are four major image groups which help guide our relational understanding of the nature of the church. These are images that relate to the concept of the church as: the people of God, the new creation, the fellowship of saints, and the body of Christ (Minear 2004:67).

According to Minear, the people of God concept connects the faith community, historically, universally, and via the covenant, relationally to God. The new creation concept connects the faith community universally and eschatologically within “the context of the redemption of the world” (Minear 2004:67). The fellowship of saints concept captures the united community life of the church. According to this image the church is an interdependent community “of saints and slaves whose life together is characterised by a unique kind of mutuality in gift and vocation” (Minear 2004:67). The body of Christ concept connects the faith community redemptively through our shared oneness in Christ and communally by the work of the Spirit. Our vertical,
Christ based, “oneness in the body is paralleled by oneness in the Spirit” (Minear 2004:196), horizontally, under the universal headship of Christ. These images encompass the four major relationships considered in the previous models, with God, within the church, between churches, and to the world. There is not a one for one correlation of images to relationships but rather the images flow over to incorporate more than a single relationship under its field of reference. However, taking a simplified approach the following diagram (see Figure 47) will serve to illustrate how the major trinitarian biblical images connect with and affirm this relational focus.

![Figure 47 Trinitarian Images Mapped to Relationships](image)

If the church is created by and for relationships, and relationships are constitutive of the essence of the church, in order to press toward a full understanding of essence one must still ask, “What is the essential nature of the relationships?” Moynagh’s communication perspective helps us combine the relational models with the traditional attribute quality model. For him the four relationship conversations are directed via practices toward maturity. For Moynagh, maturity is viewed in missional terms as a movement toward the kingdom. But like Anderson’s missional approach needed a revelational and incarnational reinterpretation, Moynagh’s maturity needs to be expanded from its missional context, to not only refer to movement toward the kingdom, but to be defined eschatologically by the fullness of the future realisation of the kingdom. Maturity is the eschatological goal God has for the church in all relationships, and through them to reveal the perfection of Christ. And the marks of such relational maturity should be the traditional attributes viewed as essential relational qualities that reflect the image of the Trinity. Therefore, these attribute qualities will ensure that the relationships are dynamically directed by the various expressions of the church toward the eschatological goal. Such a connection can be depicted as follows:
This picture (see Figure 48) perhaps oversimplifies the possible mapping. Oneness is not only an aspect which relates to our shared unity with God in Christ, it characterises our relationship to each other having a common position in Christ. Oneness also describes the intended inclusivity we have with all of the faithful as part of the one body of Christ. We also find our “at oneness” with the world as we stand as the created before the creator, loved equally by the one God. Likewise, holiness is to not only mark the relationships we have with one another. Our being set apart, as pure before God, marks our unique relationships with God, with other churches, and marks our interaction with the world for God. Just as apostolic witness is a continuing proclamational sign to the world, it also speaks of the word based faith that gives life to our relationship with God, it grounds and directs the building up of one another, and sets the basis for church unity. While the universal inclusivity of the catholic mark embraces diversity, it calls for oneness of the churches worldwide, and it also speaks of the God who loves all so much that he gave his Son. It speaks of the call for local churches to embrace all the diverse gifts given to the priesthood of believers. It calls us to an inviting, accepting and including love for all.

We have connected the trinitarian characteristics to the attributes through Volf. We have connected the trinitarian biblical images with Minear to the relational essence of the church. And with the help of Moynagh we have connected the key relationships with the traditional attributes in a holistic way. Therefore broadly, our operational model will need to include reference to the church’s trinitarian relational nature, its God imaging life and attributes, set within a dynamic gift and eschatological goal context. Given the abundance of models on offer it would be impossible to incorporate all the aspects of each proposal. And given that our goal is to develop an operational model that can be used by any church or movement, the aspects employed will need
to be broad and expansive, allowing for breadth of content and interpretation, rather than prescriptive and narrow which would lead to a blueprint model. However, the dimensions and categories still need to be reflective of the key attribute, dynamic, trinitarian and relational themes just considered.

3.5.3 The Model Dimensions

Considering the previous work we find the essence and expression, and indeed the goal dimensions of the church operating within these four interconnected themes:

1. Dynamics: The essence dimension is grounded by faith in Christ as the body of Christ. The expression dimension is built together by the Spirit of love now. The goal dimension moves eschatologically in hope toward its future as the people of God.
2. Trinity: The church by nature finds its source within the triune nature of a relational God.
3. Relationships: The church as the people of God is constituted relationally through interconnected relationships.
4. Attributes: The relational being and movement of the church is guided and matured by the Spirit in accordance with the essential attributes of its trinitarian relational and incarnational nature.

In developing a broad operational ecclesiology framework (see Figure 26) we need to incorporate these key themes, and the dominant aspects of the models considered, across each dimension. I propose that we commence, like Grenz, to view the church dynamically through a past, present, and future lens. This connects each dimension through providing the church with its essence grounding, its expression movement, and its eschatological goal, through a trinitarian salvation historical eschatological faith, love, hope, ecclesial dynamic (see Figure 49).
We now turn to consider each dimension in turn allowing the connecting work already done to guide the construction of the operational ecclesiology model.

3.5.3.1  *The Essence Dimension*  
In addition to the overarching trinitarian dynamic the essence dimension of the church grounded by faith in Christ must include two additional dynamics. Similar to Moynagh, it must be constituted relationally. And similar to Volf and Dever, it must also be constituted along attributive lines, viewing the attributes from a trinitarian perspective, to provide a qualitative essence dynamic that defines the nature of the relationships and guides movement toward eschatological maturity. We therefore find the essence of the church operating on the following three interconnected levels (see figure 50):

![Figure 50  The Essence Dynamics](image)

By putting these three levels together and adding the essence categories we can now construct the dynamics and the categories involved in the essence dimension of our operational ecclesiology model (see Figure 51).
1. The Overall Trinitarian Dynamic: It is grounded by faith in Christ as the body of Christ.

2. Relationships: According to Moynagh, the church as the people of God is constituted relationally through four sets of interconnected relationships: with God, within the local church, with other churches and with the world. To these relationships we add the important relationship of “body life” which is connected to the trinitarian attribute of order affirmed by Volf and Dever. The body life relationship, taken from the image of the church as the body of Christ, refers to that which constitutes the social dynamic of the church as a whole. It comprises the relational life brought about through order and governance, and the actions and contributions of the diverse parts to sustain and grow the whole. Importantly body life serves to connect and guide the church, moving it to be holistic in its essence, expression and goal, rather than fragmented and segmented in its life and practice. The role of the body life relationship is to ensure that the church embraces all dimensions and relational categories, and that it is organised and ordered to channel the life and energy of the faith community toward the vocation and goal that Christ, as the head, has given his church (Grenz 2000:542). The horizontal arrows (right to left, from the body life across all relationships) have been added to reflect this (see Figure 5).

3. Trinitarian Attributes: Similar to Volf and Dever, the relational being and movement of the church is guided and matured in accordance with the attributes of its essential nature: the attributes of one, holy, open, sign, and ordered. The word “catholic” has been replaced with “open,” to overcome any obvious confusion with the Roman Catholic Church, and also to express the more general meaning of the church being universal and for all without exclusion. The word Apostolic has been replaced with “sign,” which retains the idea of faithful connection and witness to Christ, excludes the thought of singular reference to apostolic succession, and also is inclusive of the Reformational concept of faithfulness to the apostolic word. The attribute of “ordered,” which Volf and Dever also include has been added as a qualitative extension of the social body life of the church.

3 Ephesians 1:22-23, 1 Corinthians 12:27
4 1 Corinthians 12:1-31
5 Ephesians 4:15, 5:23
3.5.3.2 The Expression Dimension

For the expression dimension we follow a similar approach. The expression movement of the church is grounded in the incarnational dynamic of the Spirit of love. Like Moltmann, we add an incarnational trinitarian dynamic that is relationally directed and dynamically expresses the trinitarian attributes. And second we add the active expression dynamic (see Figure 52).

In deciding on the active expressive categories, we consider all expressions which have been previously proposed and do two things. Firstly, we state these in broad inclusive terms, and secondly, we incorporate as much of the diverse views considered as possible since we are providing a broad operational model for any movement rather than a prescriptive model for a select group. The range of expressions to consider is presented in the following table:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model</th>
<th>Basis</th>
<th>With God Expressions</th>
<th>Within Church Expressions</th>
<th>With the World Expressions</th>
<th>Body Life Expressions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Traditional</td>
<td>Function</td>
<td>Liturgy</td>
<td>Proclamation</td>
<td>Fellowship</td>
<td>Service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heyns &amp; Pieterse</td>
<td>Function</td>
<td>Worship</td>
<td>Preaching</td>
<td>Instruction</td>
<td>Care</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The previous table (see Figure 53) includes a wide range of models and also captures the fact that whatever the basis for choosing the expression categories most expressions fall into four broad categories. These categories are based on key relational movements, with God, within the church, with the world, and as part of body life. Following this observation we adopt a broad relational approach, similar to our essence categories, including the dividing of church relationships into two, namely, within the local church and between churches. Therefore, the broad relationally connected expression categories we will include in the model are as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Heitink</th>
<th>Function</th>
<th>Liturgics</th>
<th>Homiletics</th>
<th>Catechetics</th>
<th>Church Development</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Van der Ven</td>
<td>Function</td>
<td>Liturgy</td>
<td>Proclamation</td>
<td>Catechetics</td>
<td>Pastoral Care</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bloesch</td>
<td>Marks</td>
<td>Sacrament</td>
<td>Preaching</td>
<td>Teaching</td>
<td>Fellowship</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dulles</td>
<td>Dynamic</td>
<td>Sacrament</td>
<td>Preaching</td>
<td>Teaching</td>
<td>Community</td>
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<tr>
<td>Moltmann</td>
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<td>Sacrament</td>
<td>Preaching</td>
<td>Teaching</td>
<td>Community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Van Engen</td>
<td>Dynamic</td>
<td>Sacrament</td>
<td>Preaching</td>
<td>Teaching</td>
<td>Community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pickard</td>
<td>Dynamic</td>
<td>Sacrament</td>
<td>Preaching</td>
<td>Teaching</td>
<td>Community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Berkhof</td>
<td>Mediating</td>
<td>Sacrament</td>
<td>Preaching</td>
<td>Teaching</td>
<td>Community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Erickson</td>
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<td>Sacrament</td>
<td>Preaching</td>
<td>Teaching</td>
<td>Community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grenz</td>
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<td>Preaching</td>
<td>Teaching</td>
<td>Community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Haight</td>
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<td>Preaching</td>
<td>Teaching</td>
<td>Community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grudem</td>
<td>Dynamic</td>
<td>Sacrament</td>
<td>Preaching</td>
<td>Teaching</td>
<td>Community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geisler</td>
<td>Dynamic</td>
<td>Sacrament</td>
<td>Preaching</td>
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<td>Clowney</td>
<td>Dynamic</td>
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<td>Dynamic</td>
<td>Sacrament</td>
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<tr>
<td>Moynagh</td>
<td>Dynamic</td>
<td>Sacrament</td>
<td>Preaching</td>
<td>Teaching</td>
<td>Community</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 53  Table of Expression Categories**
By employing the expression category “worship” we include all designations connected to the “with God” relationship, including worship, liturgy, sacrament, and sign.

By employing the expression category “nurture” we include all designations connected to the “within the local church” relationship, including nurture, edification, upbuilding, preaching, teaching, catechetics, homiletics, kerygma, word, proclamation, instruction, discipleship. In the previous diagram (see Figure 54), the words edification and nurture are the most commonly used words to express that aspect of moving the local church toward maturity. I have decided to employ the term “nurture” for the local church relationship because it more naturally contains the aspects of personal and interpersonal formation, necessary to ensure the faith praxis sector is included in our thinking. By employing the expression category “community” we include all designations connected to the “with other churches” relationship, including community, fellowship, koinonia, unity, pastoral care, service, and diaconia. The designation “community” expresses both the relational depth and breadth of the church in its entirety, beyond the local walls, and captures the intended corporate nature of the church at large. By employing the expression category “witness” we include all designations connected to the “with the world” relationship, including social service, social justice, social concern, mercy, embracing, dialogue, prophetic, witnessing, mission, evangelism, outreach, martyrria, suffering, and sign. I have chosen the term “witness” to express the incarnational embodiment of the call toward the world, rather than mission, or evangelism, which can tend toward consideration of more word driven expressions rather than incorporating the incarnational presence of the witness. Finally, I have employed the expression category “leading” to incorporate the expressive aspects of church development, discipline, governance, polity, order, leadership and sustainability. This is also the expression category that connects horizontally all other expressions of the church, ensuring the
church is fully balanced in its expression, and not narrowly focussed, allowing expression gaps to develop.

While the expression categories have been relationally connected they need to be considered both in a specific and in a holistic fashion. For example, while worship is integrally connected to the church’s relationship with God, it is not isolated to that connection, but rather overflows to impact all relationships and aspects of the church. All expression elements should be viewed in both this specific and holistic way.

We now must add the incarnational dynamic expresses the trinitarian attributes. Like Moltmann, we bring the attributes to life, dynamically and relationally. Therefore, the church that is one in Christ is unifying by the Spirit. The church that is holy in Christ is sanctifying by the Spirit. The church that is open under Christ is embracing by the Spirit. The church that is a sign of Christ is signifying by the Spirit. The church that is ordered by Christ is sustaining by the Spirit. That which is by nature in Christ is activated and brought to life by the Spirit. This completed expression dimension can now be depicted as follows:

![Trinitarian Expression Dynamic: Built by the Spirit of Love](image)

**Figure 55  The Expression Dimension**

### 3.5.3.3  The Goal Dimension

In order to complete the model we need to add one further dimension, the eschatological hope directed goal. This is done by considering the previous models that contained either explicitly or implicitly an ecclesiological goal. The range of proposed goals is presented in the following table:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model</th>
<th>Goal Basis</th>
<th>Goal Categories</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dulles</td>
<td>Church as Institution</td>
<td>To provide eternal life to members.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dulles</td>
<td>Church as Mystical Communion</td>
<td>To lead members into communion with God.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
With the exception of the historical models presented by Dulles, the rest are united in having their ecclesiological goal determined either by a becoming movement or by an eschatological destination. Like Schleiermacher’s “ideal church,” the goal is always the eschatological ideal, “the final point in the future” (Schleiermacher 1988:93). This eschatological goal is “a state which is said to be reached by activity arising out of the present but is never reached at any given time” (Schleiermacher 1988:93), it remains future. For Schleiermacher, practical theology is taken up with moving the actual historical expression of the church in line with the essence of the Christian church, the ideal. What then is our ideal?

According to the goal category table (see Figure 56), this future movement toward the ideal is either guided attributively, or as a missional or relational reflection of the triune God. In line with our comments on the missional approach previously, a missional goal needs to be embedded within the revelational and incarnational nature of the church, as both the creation and the destination of the church finds its reference from within the relational loving nature of God, rather than the missional action of God. A missional goal will have a finite end, the end of the mission, whereas a nature goal has an eschatological fulfilment that is embedded in eternal relational life. As a result we will focus our goal on the eschatological nature of the church rather than align it with the missional action of the church. Therefore, for the goal dimension, we will employ the overall trinitarian dynamic of the dimensions and add an eschatological component that is relational in nature, attributive in character, and operates as a sign of God’s kingdom (see Figure 57).
We now must add the relational attributive kingdom goal categories. Like Schleiermacher, we seek to bring the dynamic attributes to their culmination, to their eschatological ideal with God. And like Moynagh we seek to bring the relationships to their fullness, to maturity. Therefore, the church that is one in Christ, and is being unified by the Spirit, moves to become united with God. The church that is holy in Christ and is sanctifying by the Spirit moves to become perfect for God. The church that is open under Christ and is embracing by the Spirit moves to become loving with God. The church that is a sign of Christ and is signifying by the Spirit moves to become reconciled to God. The church that is ordered by Christ and is sustaining by the Spirit moves to become complete with God. That which is by nature in Christ, is activated and brought to life by the Spirit, moves toward becoming fully what it is destined to be with God. This completed goal dimension can now be depicted as follows:
3.5.4 The Operational Model

By combining the essence, expression and goal dimensions, pending a comparison of our operational ecclesiology with the ecclesial praxis, the following is the completed model for our operational ecclesiology:

---

**Figure 59  Operational Ecclesiology Model**

We now must consider whether this model satisfies our key requirements:

1. Is it trinitarian? The model is trinitarian in three ways. Firstly, it is at its foundation relational, reflecting the relational nature of the triune God. Secondly, it is trinitarian in that it recognises the trinitarian involvement within the dynamic life and movement of the church. It is created through the covenant of faith in Christ, transformed by the Spirit toward incarnational loving action, and called forward in hope as the eschatological people of God. And thirdly, each of its attributive qualities are shaped by a trinitarian relational reflection.
2. Is it relational? The model is relational at its core. It recognises that being created by a relational God the church has been created in, with, and for relationships. The model is based in the relationships, with God, within the local church, with other churches, with the world. In addition the interrelational life of the social organisational body is added. This relational flavour permeates the model and flows toward its eschatological climax.

3. Is it attributive? The traditional attributes have been included with minimal change, shaped by the trinitarian reflection and therefore connected to the relational nature of the church. The attributes not only serve to form the qualities of the essence but are activated dynamically to guide the expression and goal dimensions also.

4. Is it dynamic? The model is dynamic throughout. The trinitarian essence, the relationships, and the interconnected attribute qualities are clearly connected dynamically to categories of relational and incarnational expression, which are in turn directed toward the eschatological goal, which reflects the created foundational nature of the church.

Thus the model is integrated by a trinitarian dynamic and is constituted relationally, incarnationally and attributively. In summary, the indicative trinitarian relational essence of the church is given by faith in Christ. The imperative incarnational expression of the Spirit, builds, transforms, and matures the church’s relationships in love. And these relationships, bound together horizontally through body life, are directed vertically in hope toward the eschatological goal of the kingdom as the people of God.

### 3.6 THE PRACTICAL THEOLOGICAL ECCLESIOLOGY MODEL

Having developed an operational ecclesiology model that integrates the essence and expression dimensions and directs them toward an eschatological goal, we now need to confirm whether the model connects and correlates with the practical theological ecclesiology framework for the ecclesial praxis. Does our operational ecclesiology model include all the aspects of the leadership, church, formational, and global sectors of the ecclesial praxis, and therefore operate as the continuing incarnational and eschatological sign of the essence and expression of God?
3.6.1 Connecting the Model and the Framework

The operational ecclesiology model and the ecclesial praxis frame can be shown to be significantly connected on a number of levels. Firstly, it can be noted that the shift in the historical ecclesiological models presented by Dulles also has a correlation with the historical shifts in praxis frame emphasis in practical theology. The early institutional model which emphasises authority, structure and leadership would encourage practical theology of a clerical praxis nature. The community, sacramental, and herald models, which move away from structure and leadership toward being more congregationally inclusive, point toward a practical theological focus that would be ecclesiastical. And the servant model with its helping, healing, and kingdom focus mirrors the energy of the global praxis frame with its desire to break free from the church and flow into the world. Dulles then in proposing his community of disciples model, which seeks to incorporate the strengths of the others, has a transforming discipleship (formational) and a kingdom focus, which moves toward our ecclesial praxis. The models can be mapped to the various praxis frames as follows:

![Figure 60 Dulles Models Mapped to Praxis Frames](image)

Secondly, Moynagh’s set of four relationships also correlate significantly with the major praxis sectors. If the relationships, within the local church and between churches, are viewed as one church based relational dynamic, then we find that the remaining three relationships, with God, within the church, and with the world, directly correlate to the praxis sectors developed under practical theology, namely, the faith, ecclesiastical and global praxis sectors. If we add to Moynagh the relational category of body life, with its leadership focus, and therefore its orientation toward the clerical praxis, we find the following relationship to praxis connections:
And thirdly, by employing a practical theological communication perspective we can also connect the operational ecclesiology model with the ecclesial praxis. From a practical theological communication perspective the relational parties of: God, the Christians in the local church, other churches, the world, and body life, form the subjects of the human-divine praxis conversations and the various relationships form the essential lines of praxis communication. For Moynagh, kingdom mission directs the purpose of the conversations and the ecclesial practices to progress the conversations toward maturity of all relationships. Reframing we would say that the conversations are directed toward the realisation of the ecclesial eschatological relational goal, and the ecclesial expressions and events progress the conversations toward being a clearer incarnational revelational kingdom sign, in its relationships, by the transforming work of the Spirit. Being in essence trinitarian and relational, this communicative approach ties together essence, expression, and goal, ecclesiology and praxis, and “recognises that relationships cannot be separated from the practices that embody them, but encourages practices to be tested against the bar of relationships” (Moynagh 2012:113).

### 3.6.2 The Completed Model

The previous discussion demonstrates that there exists a significant connection and correlation between the essence and expression dimensions (which includes event) of the practical theological ecclesiological framework, and the essence and expression dimensions of the operational ecclesiology model. In addition the operational ecclesiology model with its eschatological theme has also clearly added an eschatological goal dimension. We included this
teleological dimension in our definition of praxis (see 2.4.3) and in our revision of practical theology leading to practical theological ecclesiology (see 2.5 and Figure 12). However, while this dimension has in the past not been completely absent from practical theology, it has been silent, and all but replaced by a dependence on the chosen praxis frame to set praxis goals. Contextual improvement has eclipsed a clear teleological goal which for the ecclesial praxis is eschatological. This goal dimension is confirmed and included to guide the ecclesial praxis forward eschatologically.

By overlaying the operational ecclesiology dimensions and categories within the practical theological ecclesiology framework we can now construct a completed practical theological ecclesiology model as follows:
In the next chapter we consider each of the model dimensions and categories and their relationships in more detail as we discuss the tasks of practical theological ecclesiology and how to employ the model and the tasks in a practical theological ecclesiology case study.

To date we have chosen a comprehensive ecclesial praxis which encompasses all praxis sectors under the trinitarian incarnational eschatological kingdom sign focus. This recovers the lost *habitus* aspect of theology. We have grounded and integrated the ecclesial praxis with an
operational ecclesiology. This has replaced practical theology's action focus with practical theological ecclesiology's holistic theory of the ecclesial praxis focus. The model has effectively integrated the essence, expression, and goal dimensions of practical theology and of ecclesiology. This serves to integrate theory and praxis, theology and practice. Therefore we have successfully moved from practical theology as:

The study concerning the improvement of human-divine interactive communicative actions involved in the service of the gospel. (Smith 2007:5)

to practical theological ecclesiology as:

The dynamic critical purposeful engagement with the human-divine interactive life of the ecclesial praxis to: ground, integrate, align and improve its essence and expression dimensions as the revelational incarnational sign of God and his purposes in and for the world and directed toward his eschatological kingdom goal.
4 THE TASK DYNAMIC OF PRACTICAL THEOLOGICAL ECCLESIOLOGY

Having developed an operational model that brings the essence, expression, and goal dimensions together our attention now turns to determining the research framework that should surround the model. What kind of approach should be at the core of practical theological ecclesiology?

Practical theology demonstrates the need for a praxis and theory dynamic. And as we have learned earlier a praxis or theory only perspective ends in disappointment. A praxis action approach, at its worst, is limited to addressing issues conceived from the natural reality, binding the set and cast to the limited possibilities within the shadows of human flourishing. The theory approach, in its finest moments, sets up an indicative alternate reality, the perfect bride, yet it cannot produce a set and cast to play it out. What we need is a Spirit event or conversation that concretely embraces and embodies what is revealed in Christ in a performance of love that brings light to the shadows as it moves hopefully toward the fullness to come.

Aristotle understood this. He called knowledge that is about “what kind of world we should be making together: phronesis” (Veling 2005:xii), wisdom. And “the actual use of that knowledge is praxis ...” (Veling 2005:xii). The thought is that this knowing, which provides a picture of a possible new world we should be creating, implicates us to bring it into existence. The call on the faith community is to live the truth. This is not a work of mere contemplation nor simply a pragmatic task but rather a conversation of the two. Truth is not solely to be grasped but also “to be encountered, lived out, related to and above all, loved if it is to be known” (Forrester 2000:23). Practical theological ecclesiology must follow practical theology where theory and praxis must be intertwined.

Placing this in an ecclesial frame, Newbigin views the church “as the hermeneutic of the gospel” (Newbigin 1989:25). Similarly, Swinton and Mowat see the church hermeneutically believing the church is “that place where the nature and purpose of the gospel is interpreted, lived out ...” (Swinton and Mowat 2006:25). Ebeling refers to this as a word event. He states that “The word event belongs to the reality of life itself, and indeed as that which, in a certain respect, initially constitutes reality” (Ebeling 1978:118). Ebeling holds that the word event is constitutive of life as well as the content of that which is to be expressed. Hardy refers to embodiment. The “Church is

\[6 \text{ John 3:21} \]
not measured by any fixed standard, the Church is embodied in its practices, and its practices embody a living relationship among its members and the triune persons of God. The measure of the Church lies within this relationship and is embodied within Church practices” (Hardy 2010:65). Torrance calls this “living theology, a way of thinking which is at the same time a way of living ...” (Torrance 2003:138). Hauerwas calls it a faith performance. For Hauerwas, beliefs are not abstract propositions which make a faith community, rather beliefs are “embedded in a community of practices that make those beliefs themselves work and give us a community by which we are shaped” (cited in Swinton and Mowat 2006:4). He suggests that it is only where faith is found to be performing, that faith can indeed be located at all. Swinton and Mowat also follow this performance line stating that such a pursuit “finds itself located within the uneasy but critical tension between the script of revelation given to us in Christ and formulated historically within scripture, doctrine, and tradition, and the continuing innovative performance of the gospel as it is embodied and enacted in the life and practices of the church as they interact with the life and practices of the world” (Swinton and Mowat 2006:5). Further they state, “the task of the practical theologian, inter alia, is to work towards the unification of the Church’s theological understandings and her practices in the world, and in so doing, ensure that her public performances of the faith are true to the nature and actions of the Triune God” (Swinton and Mowat 2006:25). The ecclesial response to this divine initiative is then the arena for practical theological ecclesiology as the critical theological reflection concerned with the guidance of the faithful response of the faith community to the initiative of God, in both life and action.

Practical theological ecclesiology must employ the approach of practical theology which takes place between theory and praxis but in addition moves beyond a focus on actions to combine essence, expression and goal dimensions in a dynamic faith life performance. This dynamic needs to also encompass the relational conversation that Moynagh speaks of, that is those relationships that take place “with the Trinity, with the world, between different parts of the wider church and within each ecclesial gathering” (Moynagh 2012:118).

Therefore, what we seek is a dynamic conversation that both holds theory and praxis together while seeking the maturity of each ecclesial relationship as a faithful response to the divine initiative of God.
4.1 THE CYCLE

The dynamic we speak of is an embodied and enacted faith performance that takes seriously the revealed script of the past, its texts and traditions, its reconciled life in Christ made present by the Spirit and the hope of the anticipated future in the kingdom. This faith life performance is a human and Spirit duet, played out between faith grounded in the past and hope anchored in the future. And through the people of faith the Spirit performs the ongoing love act of revealing Christ to the world and of reconciling the world to himself.

Schleiermacher sets forth such a process, intended to be continuous and dynamic, which remains influential within practical theology today and serves as a relevant model for us to base our dynamic research conversation on. Schleiermacher sees that all truly Christian theology arises within the context of Christian community and seeks its perfection. This perfect idea of Christianity, for Schleiermacher, serves as the essence and the goal of the church. For him, practical theology is taken up with bringing the actual historical expression of the church in line with the essence of the Christian church, and with the ideal, the goal. And this movement is only possible with a “clear and complete knowledge of the relationship between the essence of the Christian Church and its historical elements” (Schleiermacher 1988:95).

Thus overlaying our terminology with Schleiermacher we see the following:

1. There exists a direct relationship between the essence (idea), expression, and goal (ideal) dimensions.
2. The essence (idea) of Christianity is theologically grounded.
3. The essence (idea) of the church is also the eschatological goal (ideal).
4. The expression of the church is to align with the essence (idea) and the eschatological goal (ideal).
5. The role of critical reflection and action is to realise the essence and goal (idea and ideal) through improvement.

So for Schleiermacher “The action and its purpose are held together at each moment” (Schleiermacher 1988:100). “The aim of practical theology ... [is] that of giving coherence to our activity and making it clear and deliberative” (Schleiermacher 1988:100). And the goal of practical theology is to identify “correctly what can be done to maintain and perfect the church” (Schleiermacher 1988:101). Such a pursuit brings clarity, through grounding the essence
theologically, integrating the essence and expression of the church, and bringing direction through aligning and improving its expression toward the goal of the ideal future church.

Contemporary practical theology, under the influence of Zerfass, takes Schleiermacher’s somewhat static “theory of praxis” and places it in a dynamic dialectical interaction of theory and praxis, the “continual interaction between ideal (what we believe things ought to be) and reality (as it actually happens)” (Pieterse 2011:49). The process “moves from practice, to reflection on practice, and back to practice, a dynamic movement that is carried out in the light of the Christian tradition and other sources of knowledge and is aimed at feeding back into the tradition and the practice of the church” (Swinton and Mowat 2006:26). This produces an informed praxis where theory shapes the praxis and the praxis questions and reshapes the theory. Theory and praxis therefore exist in a bipolar tension (Heitink 1993:195). Thus the once linear process becomes the continual dynamic or conversational cycle.

By applying the dynamic theory praxis movement to the process of Schleiermacher using our own terms and dimensions from our practical theological ecclesiology model we arrive at a dynamic ecclesial conversational cycle where:

1. Within the ecclesial praxis the essence, expression and goal dimensions are in direct and dynamic relationship.
2. The operational ecclesial theory, comprising the essence theory, the expression theory, and the goal theory, is theologically grounded and integrated.
3. The ecclesial theory and the ecclesial praxis are aligned.
4. The ecclesial praxis is improved through a continual theory/praxis conversation.

This ecclesial conversation cycle exists where:

1. The essence is performed by the expression and the expression is the performance of the essence.
2. The expression is oriented toward the goal and the goal is oriented by the expression.
3. The goal fulfils the essence and the essence is the fulfilment of the goal.

And this cycle continues through the carrying out of the practical theological ecclesiological tasks of grounding, integrating, aligning and improving (see Figure 63).
Practical theological ecclesiology is an ongoing dynamic conversation that involves the entire life of the church, its ecclesial theory, and the praxis of the faith community, for the purposes of God. In the previous chapter we stated that practical theological ecclesiology should be viewed as:

The dynamic critical purposeful engagement with the human-divine interactive life of the ecclesial praxis to: ground, integrate, align and improve its essence and expression dimensions as the revelational incarnational sign of God and his purposes in and for the world and directed toward his eschatological kingdom goal.
The faith community is created and grounded in Christ. The faith community is called to live connected and aligned, conformed to Christ. It is called to incarnate the life of God, Christ, by the Spirit, being transformed into what it already is in Christ as it moves to becoming what it ultimately will be in eschatological reality. Therefore, we are concerned here with the ecclesial praxis of the Spirit of Christ; the place where the presence and practice of God meets his people in the embodied essence and the enacted expression of the church. Practical theological ecclesiology must dynamically guide the life essence and the expression of the faith community of the Spirit through the duet of truth and life. The faith community as the locus of Spirit, the living word of truth, is called to a faith performance (grounded and integrated) and a faith-full performance (aligned) of love and of reconciliation, an integrated and aligned ecclesial conversation set between and directed by the scenes of faith and hope.

As a dynamic critical discipline of the life of the faith community, practical theological ecclesiology therefore seeks:

- the theological grounding of the faith community with its origin in Christ, its Spirit mission in the world, and its destination with God.
- the integration of the faith community’s essence, expression, and goal dimensions.
- the alignment of the faith community’s ecclesial theory and ecclesial praxis.
- as its goal the improvement and integrity of the praxis as a sign of the kingdom of God.

Such purposeful engagements form what we call the ecclesial conversation tasks. The term “ecclesial conversation” in practical theological ecclesiology:

- denotes that the ecclesial praxis frame is in view,
- captures the essential nature of “communicative action” handed on through practical theology,
- references the relational nature of the church, and
- suggests that a wisdom and practice or theory and praxis dynamic is in view.

This practical theological ecclesiological conversation takes place in the midst of the ecclesial praxis by carrying out the four major tasks of, grounding a faith community’s operational ecclesiology, integrating its ecclesial theory, aligning its theory and praxis, and from there to guide and improve the faith community’s contextual witness toward its eschatological goal (see Figure 64).
While there are four distinct tasks which will be detailed in turn, each task is rarely isolated, and the cycle is never completed only once with the view of the process coming to an end. The dynamic conversation of which we speak ensures the cycle is continuously repeated. While progressing a single task we must also bear in mind that each task will shed new light on the existing ecclesial theory and/or praxis, which will in turn require additional considerations and adjustments to be made by all tasks. In undertaking these four tasks the ecclesial conversation is centred on the following questions in relation to the ecclesial praxis of the faith community being studied:

**Grounding:**
- What is the ecclesial theory (the essence, expression, and goal theory) of the faith community?
- Is the faith community’s ecclesial theory (the essence, expression, and goal theory) theologically grounded: having its faith origin in Christ, its mission of love in the Spirit, and its hope destination with God?

**Integrating:**
- Is the faith community’s ecclesial theory (the essence, expression, and goal theory) connected and integrated?
Aligning:

- What are the faith community’s ecclesial praxis expressions?
- Are the faith community’s ecclesial theory and ecclesial praxis aligned and goal directed?

Improving:

- How can the ecclesial praxis of the faith community be an improved expression of the ecclesial theory in its context?

We now turn to consider each of the practical theological ecclesiology tasks in turn.

### 4.3 GROUNDING THE ESSENCE, EXPRESSION, AND GOAL THEORY

This first task is the grounding of the ecclesial theory, the essence, expression and goal theories of the ecclesial praxis. Hanson says that the life of a faith community is driven by a double exegesis. A call to interpret the world accurately and interpret the word accurately, and living implicated by the ongoing dialectic between them (Hanson 1986:529). The faith community is here called to be a grounded living historical interpretation of its nature and purpose. This grounding involves two distinct steps as indicated by the two grounding questions noted above. The first step is the uncovering of the existing ecclesial theory. The second is ensuring the theory is grounded biblically and theologically in accordance with broad categories within the operational ecclesiology model.

#### 4.3.1 Uncovering the Ecclesial Theory

The first step of the grounding activity seeks to answer the question “What is the existing operational ecclesial theory of the faith community?” At any given time and in any given context the ecclesial theory of a faith community exists, according to Tracy, as a “mutually critical dialogue – between the experiences of the past and the experience of the present” (Bevans 2009:166). For Tracy, Scripture and tradition are experiences of the past which meet in conversation with the individual, communal, cultural, and social experiences of the present. This ever present dialogue necessarily expands our field of research beyond the normative sphere only. In light of this we ask, “Where do we look to find the grounded ecclesial theory of an
ecclesial praxis?” Some faith communities may have a history of objective documented ecclesiology, others may have fragments, and yet others would exist only in the present without any such formal body of thought. In the book, *Talking about God in practice: theological action research and practical theology*, the authors note that there are “four voices of theology” (Cameron et al. 2010:51–56) present and in dialogue in any given praxis, at any given time. The inference is that the researcher must give clear attention to each in order to recognise and uncover the explicit and implicit bodies of theology present within a praxis. The four voices of theology together serve to form the theological make-up of the ecclesial conversation in any ecclesial praxis. The four voices are: normative theology and formal theology, of which both are explicit, and espoused theology and operant theology, of which both are more implicit. A diagram of these voices adapted from the book follows:

![Four Voices of Theology Diagram](reproduced from Cameron et al. 2010:54)

The normative voice of theology “is concerned with what the practicing group names as its theological authority – an authority which may even stand to correct, as well as inform, operant and espoused theologies” (Cameron et al. 2010:54). That which is normative can vary from group to group. For most it will include Scripture, for many it includes the creeds, for the Roman Catholic Church it will include papal teaching, for others it may include a particular hermeneutical approach, and yet for others aspects of liturgy or orthopraxy may play a normative role. That
which is normative gives foundational authority, legitimacy, and definition to the particular ecclesial life of the faith community.

The formal voice is that of the theologian. The role of the theologian within a faith community is to offer “a specifically ‘intellectual’ articulation of faith seeking understanding, through practicing a form of thought which engages in critical and historically and philosophically informed enquiry, regarding the way in which faith is, and has been expressed” (Cameron et al. 2010:55). Formal theology provides a positive developmental function through serving to clarify and articulate normative theology, and fashion espoused and operant theology. It also provides a reflective and critical function which calls all into question for constructive change.

Any praxis or practice is, as we have considered, laden with theological meaning. “Practices of faithful Christian people are themselves already the bearers of theology; they express the contemporary living tradition of the Christian faith” (Cameron et al. 2010:51). Practices are concrete representations of the operant theology of the participants. While this operant theology will be shaped by the normative and the formal voices, it is generally more “consciously aligned to an articulated theology. This is the ‘espoused’ theology of a group” (Cameron et al. 2010:53). The espoused theology of a group is the faith communities’ articulation of their beliefs. This may be more or less developed than that which is operant, and this may be strongly or weakly informed by either normative or formal theology. Because espoused theology is often closely aligned to operant theology it is often influential in the development of practices and in the filtering of the influence of normative and formal currents of theology into community life.

Returning for a moment to the blind theory and blind praxis concepts, we would normally find communities that tend toward operating from blind theory would give greater authority and emphasis to the normative and formal sources of theology, while those communities which tend toward a blind praxis operation would tend toward greater emphasis on the operant and the espoused, or the informal sources of theology. However, these voices while distinct are “not discrete, separate from one another; each voice is never simple. We can never hear one voice without there being echoes of the other three” (Cameron et al. 2010:54).

The ecclesial praxis theory will therefore consist of influences from each of these four voices of theology. It is clear from the descriptions above that there is a nexus between the normative and the formal, and also between the espoused and the operant voices. The normative is predominantly accessed, interpreted and articulated by the formal to the broader faith
community. These two voices combined form a faith community’s’ historical, recorded and objectively referenced body of theology. The espoused and the operant voices form the more subjective or experiential body of theology that is attached to and expressed by the life and belief of the local contextual faith community. We will group and refer to these voices of theology as referential and experiential (see Figure 66).

Figure 66 Referential and Experiential Voices of Theology

This referential and experiential voice approach to praxis theology assists in developing the process for uncovering the ecclesial theory of any ecclesial praxis. The referential form of theology is collected via a review of available historical records and other objective sources, which is predominantly the literature produced by and for the faith community under consideration. The experiential form of theology is collected via qualitative or quantitative research directed toward the participants within the specific faith community under consideration. It is conceivable that the strength of connection between the referential and the experiential voices may vary, and therefore there may be considerable variation between the referential and experiential theologies. Such variations are the focus of the integration activity. For the purposes of grounding, the substance of the referential and the experiential sources will form the ecclesial theory of the faith community.

4.3.2 Grounding the Ecclesial Theory

Once uncovered the ecclesial theory then enters a dynamic critical grounding process. Here the faith community’s operational ecclesiological theory is subjected to a biblical and theological review. In Schleiermacher’s words this process continually seeks conformity to the idea or
essence of the church. Using the practical theological ecclesiology model, such review seeks to ensure that the essence, expression, and goal theories for the various categories have their source within a biblical and theologically operational ecclesiology. This grounding process provides the opportunity to ensure that the contemporary ecclesial theory of the faith community is grounded having: its faith origin in Christ, its mission of love in the Spirit, and its hope destination with God.  

It may appear that this process reverts to a theory to praxis movement. However, this task must be placed within the overall conversational cycle which includes praxis reflection and also be seen as part of the ongoing cycle of reflection which will allow the praxis to shed new light on the grounding task.

To assist this grounding task a broad description of the practical theological ecclesiology model categories is necessary to broadly point toward the nature of the referential and experiential theory information being sought. These category descriptors will then be used in the analysis of the research data.

4.3.2.1 Essence Categories

According to our model the essence categories are held together by the guiding concept of being the body of Christ both as a reflection of the relationality of the triune God and as an attributive reflection of Christ sent into the world. Thus the essence attribute categories of one, holy, open, sign and ordered, are relationally grounded within the relational dynamics of the faith community being with God, with those in the local church, with other churches, with the world, and within itself as an organised social body. Across the entire model it is important to keep in mind that while there are vertical relational movements there is also a horizontal holistic attributive cohesion which is to be present across all relationships. Therefore, for example, while our relationship within the church may be marked specifically by holiness it is equally to be marked by oneness, openness, being a sign, and having order. The dynamic of body life also exists

7 Colossians 1:3-5
8 1 Corinthians 12:27, Ephesians 4:12
9 John 17:20-23
10 2 Corinthians 5:17-20
11 John 17:18, 20:21
in part to specifically draw the church and its relationships together in a holistic, and according to our model, a horizontal way.

We turn now to consider the frame of reference for each category. It is not our desire to prescribe the full content of each category but rather to give a content frame which while biblical and theological, can be fleshed out by each faith community according to their specific communal essence theology.

The essence of the church is comprised of five relationships. The relationship with God has both a communal and an individual reference. It speaks of the fact that a personally shared covenant relationship with God is essential to being and belonging within the faith community of Christians.

The relationship with other Christians in a local church speaks of the fact that individually being a Christian means automatically belonging to a gathered covenantal faith community. Therefore faith and family cannot be separated. The relationship of one local church with other local churches means that we acknowledge the one headship of Christ, are interdependent and inclusive, and called to live within an open perichoretic giving and receiving dynamic. Faith, family, and community cannot be separated. The relationship with the world speaks of the fact that the church is the ongoing presence and sign of Christ as his reconciling representative in and toward the world. Faith, family, community and presence in and for the world cannot be separated. The social construct that is the body life of the church is the relational social dynamic that exists as the “container and sustainer” of life. Faith, family, community, presence, and life exist together in the church.

These relationships are then qualitatively grounded. The categories of oneness, holiness, openness, sign, and order are qualities that should mark each relationship. The definitions of these terms could vary widely, from an institutional view, to a word based view, to a congregational view, to an existential view. However, following the categories chosen in the practical theological ecclesiology model (see Figure 62), and picking up on Volf and Dever we will broadly interpret these categories from a God based trinitarian perspective as follows:
• One – The church is one because God is one.\textsuperscript{12} The trinitarian nature is woven into the constitution of the church. Under God’s will the church is the creation of the Son and the Spirit. Also as God is one united relational community, so in Christ all share in the one covenantal united relational Spirit as a community of faith.\textsuperscript{13} Therefore, by faith oneness exists in vertical and horizontal dimensions. Oneness in Christ draws us relationally and vertically toward God and horizontally toward his family. The church is united with all who confess the apostolic word of God and thereby constituted by the Spirit as the people of God. For the church to evidence a trinitarian oneness, the Christ and Spirit dimensions of oneness must be held together. The absence of a call to communal faith opposes oneness in Christ. And the individualisation of this covenant call opposes the Spirit unity of the community of faith. Pickard notes that, “While it is through the Spirit that faith recognises Jesus the individualistic focus inevitably omits the constituting work of the Spirit for the ecclesia” (Pickard 2012:19). He continues, believing with Schwöbel, “The Reformation focus on the Church as the creature of the divine Word (\textit{creatura verbi divini}) appears incomplete, if it fails to recognise the Spirit’s action in constituting the fellowship of believers as Church” (Pickard 2012:19). Pannenberg confirms this dual Christ and Spirit role, “The Christological constitution and the pneumatological constitution of the Church do not exclude one another but belong together because the Spirit and the Son mutually indwell one another as Trinitarian persons” (Pannenberg 1998:16–17).

• Holy – The church is holy because God is holy.\textsuperscript{14} The church is formed and set apart for conformity to the will of God, expressed fully in Christ, which is to be the image of Christ. Holiness then is to be reflected not only in the individual life of the Christian, but in the relationships of Christians together. Therefore, the absence of a call to image Christ, being different from and set apart from the world, both individually and communally opposes the individual and communal holiness of the faith community.

• Open – The church embraces all because God is a God of mutual love, one for the other.\textsuperscript{15} God is a triune community. Just as within God there is a mutual permeation of the other (perichoresis), there is to be openness, a dynamic of relational love, a mutual giving and

\textsuperscript{12} 1 Corinthians 10:17, 1 Corinthians 12:12-13, Ephesians 2:13-16
\textsuperscript{13} Ephesians 4:4-6
\textsuperscript{14} 1 Peter 1:15-16, Leviticus 11:44-45
\textsuperscript{15} John 3:16, John 17:20-26, 2 Corinthians 5:17-20, 1 John 4:16
receiving, of being impacted and of impacting others. An open church is therefore truly catholic, it is kingdom focussed and invitational in outlook and posture, not sectarian or exclusive. Therefore the absence of open diverse ecumenical relationships with others and other churches in favour of a closed, inward, and localised dynamic opposes the call to openness.

- **Sign** – God is a self-revealing God, through Christ, the Spirit and the church. The church, caught up in the revealing action of God, exists to reveal God through the confession of the one true God\(^{16}\) and as a faithful present living sign of that apostolic confession to the world.\(^ {17}\) The Apostle’s Creed and the Nicene Creed both place the church under the article about the Holy Spirit. The church is the dwelling place of the Spirit and the Spirit is the life of the church. The church “can see and understand itself, its own existence in this basic sense, only in the light of the illuminating and therefore constitutive power of the Holy Spirit as the power of the Word of God, and therefore only in relation to the world created and actively loved by this God” (Barth 1962:787). The church’s “task to be light in the world [comes from] the gift of its specific being, and therefore in and with its creation ...” (Barth 1962:787). In this sense it is originally and essentially light, the light which by the power of God and therefore of the Holy Spirit may reflect His eternal light in the world. In this sense, it has fundamentally no option but to exist for the world as it reflects the light of God and is itself light (Barth 1962:787). As this sign the church seeks to be both salt and light; being both that which is present in the world (salt) as the ambassadors of the gospel, and that which shines (light) as confessing witnesses of the gospel of reconciliation.\(^ {18}\) Therefore, not being a relational reconciling presence that is evident or a witness that is manifest opposes the call to be a sign of Christ.

- **Ordered** – The trinity exists as a specific dynamic of ordered relationships. Just as God exists, and we in his image “are embodied, social, and historical beings,... our common life requires embodied, social, and historic structures” (Sherman 2015:142). The church exists as a social body whose life is ordered because God exists as a dynamic ordered community.\(^ {19}\) Under Christ the church is called to be led, be sustaining, and grow as all...

\(^{16}\) Matthew 28:19
\(^{17}\) 2 Corinthians 5:17-20
\(^{18}\) Matthew 5:13-16
\(^{19}\) 1 Corinthians 12:12, Ephesians 2:21-22, 4:16
contribute in unity toward the maturity of the body of faith. Therefore, leadership and gift deployment that is stifled or chaotic opposes the order and life of the faith community.

In summary, in its essence the church is and is to be an ordered body life of one, holy, open, sign to God, each other, other churches, and the world.

4.3.2.2 Expression Categories

According to our model the theory of expression categories is held together by the guiding concept of being built by the Spirit along incarnational lines through active expressions. Thus the essence attribute categories of one, holy, open, sign and order, are dynamically brought to life through unifying, sanctifying, embracing, signifying, and sustaining expression events of worship, nurture, community, witness, and leading, aimed toward the maturing of relationships with God, with those within the local church, with other churches, with the world, and of itself as an organised social body. In the God directed relationship we seek oneness through unified worship. Within the church we seek holiness through sanctifying nurture. With other churches we seek openness as an embracing kingdom community. With the world we seek to be a sign through having a faithful witnessing presence. Within body life we seek to be ordered through sustaining leadership. Again across the entire model it is important to keep in mind that while there are vertical relational movements there are also horizontal holistic incarnational expressions which are to be connected and present across all relationships. Therefore, for example, while our relationship within the church may be marked specifically by holiness and this is fostered through sanctifying nurture it is equally to be marked by unifying worship, embracing community, signifying witness, and sustaining leadership. The same applies across each relational dynamic which is held together by the body life.

We turn now to consider the frame of reference for each expression category. Again it is not our desire to prescribe the content of each category but rather to give a content frame which while biblical and theological, can be filled out by each faith community according to their specific communal expression theology. The following provides a broad guide to the expression categories:

\[20\] Ephesians 4:16
\[21\] Ephesians 2:13-16
• Unifying Worship – “Without worship, there is no Church... Worship is the fundamental act that incorporates and animates this community as a body” (Sherman 2015:75). Worship flows from, and forms, the oneness shared in Christ. We are concerned here with incorporating and communal declarations of worship. These include corporate gatherings, communal remembrances and representations of God’s story with his people. It also includes specific church family events such as baptism, dedication, communion, confirmation, commissioning, weddings and funerals. Therefore, the absence of unifying, corporate, “we are the people of God” focussed worship expression, in favour of an individualised and self-focussed expression, opposes unifying worship.

• Sanctifying Nurture – Flowing from the holiness of God we are concerned here with the call to Christlikeness, the formation and growth toward maturity of individual Christians as a joyful response to God. “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind” guides personal formation. Events that serve to inform the head, shape the heart, and guide the hands are in view. Events of teaching, preaching, discipleship, pastoral care, counselling, equipping for service and faithful service are included here. Therefore, the absence of expressions which lead to a joyful deepening discipleship with Christ, in favour of legalistic compliance or the tolerance of worldliness, opposes the sanctifying nurture of the faith community.

• Embracing Community – Flowing from the open inclusive love of God we are concerned here with community formation marked by open and inclusive relationships of grace and forgiveness under Christ. “For the ancients, Christian community was unique, intriguing, and attractive primarily because it called for inclusion of all people. The Christian movement was the only place where women, children, and people of non-Jewish origin could all be together” (Halter and Smay 2008:70). “Love your neighbour as yourself” guides the relationships and community formation of the church. This involves the embrace of others out of grace despite differences, and the reconciling inclusion of all no matter what the diversity, based on our oneness in Christ. Events of love, fellowship,

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22 1 Peter 1:16
23 Luke 10:27
24 Colossians 2:20-23
25 Luke 10:27
conversation, partnering, supporting and service are included here. Therefore, the absence of, forgiveness, acceptance, a relational focus, and the gracious loving inclusion of others, in favour of a defensive critical separatist posture, opposes embracing community expressions.

- **Signifying Witness** – Flowing from the revelation of God toward the world in Christ, the church is to be a continuing active witnessing presence of God by the Spirit in the world. The kingdom prayer, “on earth as it is in heaven,”\(^{26}\) and the call to a “ministry of reconciliation,”\(^{27}\) guide the presence and action of the church in the world as a signifying witness of the kingdom here on earth. The church as the fellowship of believers is a relational social sign, first as a local congregation, secondly to other congregations, and thirdly to the world. In each social context the church is “ordained to be a sign of God’s will to save humanity, a sign of reconciliation with God and of the resultant renewal in intrahuman relations, a sign of the future fellowship of humanity in the kingdom of God” (Pannenberg 1998:432). Events of presence, justice, proclamation, confession, dialogue and mission are included here. Therefore, not being active, obvious, and Christ concerned as a reconciling presence in the world through word, deed, life and relationships, but rather being inactive, unconcerned and private, opposes the church expressing itself as a signifying witness.

- **Sustaining Leadership** – The church as a unity employs its diversity of gifts under Christ and through organised leadership in order to sustain and strengthen its members to be God’s kingdom life in the world.\(^{28}\) The aspects of governance, polity, leadership, decision making, gift utilisation, reflection, review and goal focus are included here. Therefore, without clear godly movement forward and empowered effective participation, the sustained and guided life of the faith community is compromised.

### 4.3.2.3 Event Categories

Each event theory should be grounded within the broad expression category or categories to which it relates and encompass both event presence and event action dimensions which are also goal directed. As an example the corporate worship event must be grounded in a theory of

\(^{26}\) Matthew 6:10  
\(^{27}\) 2 Corinthians 5:18-19  
\(^{28}\) Ephesians 4:11-16
unifying worship that is grounded in our relationship with God and directed toward the eschatological goal of unity with God. It is also understood that any event may serve more than one expression category and be directed across a number of goals. Again using corporate worship event as an example the preaching event could serve both as an expression of worship and an expression of nurture, serving the goals of unity and perfection.

As with the essence and expression categories all event categories not only serve vertically along relational lines but must through a holistic body life also combine horizontally to provide a holistic expression of the complete nature of the faith community directed toward the eschatological goal in its entirety.

Because the main contention of this thesis is the lack of connection between the essence, expression and goal categories of the ecclesial praxis, and because of the amount of attention that practical theology has given to event or action categories, process consideration only will be given to the grounding, integration, alignment and improvement of events.

4.3.2.4 Goal Categories

According to our model the theory of goal categories is held together by the guiding concept of the ecclesial praxis being hope directed and moving toward the eschatological kingdom goal. Wright believes that such an eschatological hope directed goal is essential to prevent the present being overrun by pragmatism in the now (Wright 2009:233). Being goal directed also highlights the dual nature of the church, that it is at one time historical and eschatological. It is present now in reality, in its essence and expression, in a fragmented form, and yet it is also in Christ perfect, and directed by the Spirit toward its future wholeness. The church cannot remain static. Therefore, any operational ecclesiology must be dynamic, existing in reality but always responding to the future call that resides within. Biblical “theological images of the church reflect the eschatological or ideal dimension of fulfilment to which the church is called. These theological ideals also correspond to the real presence of God as creator, Word, and Spirit at work in the church in history. The eschatological dimension holds out an ideal future and an effective presence in the historical church” (Haight 2008:88). The church now is the basis of the present eschatological activity of God.

Eschatological ecclesiology therefore provides the goal of the church and of practical theological ecclesiology. This in Schleiermacher’s terms is the ideal church. Historical, visible or praxis ecclesiology provides us with the concrete state of an operational ecclesiology in a specific
context and time. Between the current context and that of the eschatological ideal or the “divine dimension of the church [which is] really present and operative but not visible” (Haight 2008:89), the divine is at work. It is in this “between” space that practical theological ecclesiology is located. And within this space practical theological ecclesiology is to articulate, call, and guide the ecclesial praxis into participation in the divine movement which is directed toward the future goal.

We stated previously that the goal of the present ecclesial praxis, which is itself anchored in the eschatological fulfilment, is to be a hope directed relational attributive eschatological kingdom sign. As such the eschatological goal is the fulfilment of the created, relational, and attributive essence of the church. Also, as noted previously, it is not our desire here to prescribe the content of each category but rather to give a content frame which while biblical and theological, can be filled out by each faith community according to their specific communal ecclesial goal theology. The broad goal categories are as follows:

- United with God: Following the “with God” relationship through the attribute of “oneness” the ecclesial praxis moves through expressions of “unifying worship” toward the eschatological goal of being fully “united with God.”

- Perfect before God: Following the “within the church” relationship through the attribute of “holiness” the ecclesial praxis moves through expressions of “sanctifying nurture” toward the eschatological goal of being completely mature and “perfect before God.”

- Loving with God: Following the “with other churches” relationship through the attribute of “openness” the ecclesial praxis moves through expressions of “embracing community” toward the eschatological goal of being perfectly “loving with God.”

- Reconciled to God: Following the “with the world” relationship through the attribute of “sign” the ecclesial praxis moves through expressions of “signifying witness” toward the eschatological goal of being a reconciling community that is wholly “reconciled to God.”

- Complete with God: Following the “body life” interrelationship through the attribute of “ordered” the ecclesial praxis moves through expressions of “sustaining leading” toward the eschatological goal of being mature and “complete with God.”

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29 John 17:20-23
30 Ephesians 4:15, Revelation 19:8, 21:1-2
31 Revelation 21:3
32 Revelation 11:9
Just as the expression is to be reflective and incarnational, so is the goal. The church is to “Be perfect as God is perfect.” This involves the ecclesial life of the faith community being directed by relating and “acting in a style or manner that God acts” (Forrester 2000:8) and relates.

4.3.3 Grounding Analysis

The grounding of the essence, expression, and goal categories is undertaken through a historical analysis of the referential sources of the ecclesial data of a faith community and a qualitative analysis of the experiential life of the faith community (see chapter 5). The grounding of each theory category is a combination of the referential and the experiential grounding findings. Regarding the referential data it will be important to ascertain what sources, if any, are referred to as authoritative within the movement today and whether the referential sources still serve a theory grounding purpose.

Our operational ecclesiological model is relational. However, it would be easy from a Western worldview perspective to view the categories as relating to only individuals; that is relationships between individuals and God, other Christians, and other churches and the world. While these relationships are important and included we need to also keep the corporate nature of church in view and capture the grounded theory in relation to corporate relationships internally within the church, and also externally with other churches and with the world. To protect this relational integrity, essential to the church, we need to ensure an ecclesiological focus that includes the individual and the internal and also the communal and the external. Therefore, in assessing the theory present for each ecclesial category we will identify a key element that is individual or internal and a key element that is communal or external. For a substantive grounded theory to exist for each ecclesial category there must be some indication that both elements exist in a substantive way. The referential and experiential research will use the following elements (see Figure 67) as key indicators of the presence or absence of grounded theory within each essence, expression, and goal category. Factors which may oppose the grounding of the theory are also provided.

33 Ephesians 4:15, Revelation 21:1-3
34 Matthew 5:48
Following the data collection a grounding summary diagram will be constructed using the following grading process to illustrate the degree to which the essence, expression, and goal categories are grounded.

To assist the data presentation an objective grading system will be used. The grounding scores are a product of both the completeness of grounding, and the consistency of data gathered. The completeness of grounding is determined using the grounding elements detailed above (see Figure 67). Each category has two elements that should exist within each ecclesial theory category. The grade percentage attributed to the completeness of the grounded theory will be as follows:

**Figure 67  Grounding Elements and Opposing Factors**
10%  Minimal - Where no apparent grounding elements exist.

50%  Moderate - Where one of the grounding elements exists.

100% Substantive - Where both of the grounding theory elements exist.

The consistency of the theory present will be assessed according to the data support of the ecclesial grounding elements under consideration. The grade factor attributed to the consistency of the data surveyed will be as follows:

10  Minimal - Where there is no apparent theory or no apparent consistency of views on the grounding elements surveyed.

50  Moderate - Where the data for the grounding elements surveyed is divided between a small number of different views.

100 Substantive - Where a majority of the data consistently supports the grounding elements surveyed.

The grounding result for each category will be the product of the grounding completeness grade and the consistency grade of the data surveyed. For example if theory completeness is 50% (only one of the grounding elements is present in a category) and the historical referential or qualitative existential evidence clearly supports a consistent theory then the grounded theory result will be: 50% * 100 = 50.

If the product of completeness and consistency is 1, the conclusion is that no apparent communal theory exists and that the data is anecdotal at best. If the result is 5 or 10 then the conclusion is that there exists only a minimal communal theory within the faith community. If the result is 50 then the conclusion is that there exists a moderate communal theory within the faith community. If the result is 100, being where strong grounding themes appear in the data and there is a clearly demonstrated consistency, then for our purposes there exists a substantive communal theory within the faith community.

Colour will be used to depict the extent of grounding of each theory category using the following coding:
The grading will be undertaken by comparing the research support found for each predetermined grounding element (see figure 67). Research will be carried out separately for the historical referential theory, by literature review, and the contemporary experiential theory, through praxis survey, and then charted together. This charting comparison will serve to demonstrate the influence the referential material has on the current praxis. The referential and experiential grounding summaries will be presented in the following example format (see Figure 68) where the colour depicts the extent of grounding for each ecclesial category.
Figure 68  Example Grounding of Theory Chart

The example chart (see Figure 68) displays the essence, expression, and goal categories of ecclesial theory, both referential and experiential, which need grounding attention to bring maturity to a faith community’s operational ecclesiology. The movement itself can then determine the appropriateness of the grounding of each category from a biblical and theological standpoint, the appropriateness and use of the referential theory, and also work towards the filling in of any grounding gaps that are uncovered.
4.4 INTEGRATING THE ESSENCE, EXPRESSION AND GOAL THEORY

Having a picture of the grounding, or otherwise, of the operational ecclesial theory, the second activity for practical theological ecclesiology is to ensure the essence, expression, and goal theories are integrated with one another. That is that the grounded theory of each dimension has substantive theory connection.

4.4.1 The Necessity of Integration

The functionalist formal approach to theology that existed after Schleiermacher and the employment of the clerical paradigm as the unifying force “passed over ... the Christian community in its essential, defining, ecclesial aspect of being a redemptive community, with a leadership whose tasks centre in the corporate and individual occurrence of redemption” (Farley 2001:128). According to Farley, “the education of a leadership for a redemptive community cannot be defined by reference to the public tasks and acts by which the community endure (a formal approach), but rather by the requirements set by the nature of that community as redemptive” (Farley 2001:127–28). Further he states that, “Defining ministry by its community tasks ignores the community’s own redemptive nature, its received tradition, its truth convictions” (Farley 2001:128). As we have ascertained previously, the very thing which is required to guide the task and action theory of the church, the nature and essence of the church, has been largely ignored as a formative reference in history and in contemporary practical theology. To avoid the theory praxis divide, the action theory of the church must first be informed and connected to the essential nature of the ecclesial community.

The integration problem remains with us today. Macquarie speaks of the current proliferation of writing on the church, much of which is practical in nature, and observes that this work needs “to be guided and correlated by a theological understanding of the church” (Macquarrie 1977:386). Similarly, Badcock notes, “Books in ecclesiology today belong, mostly as a matter of course, to the genre of practical or applied theology” (Badcock 2009:3).

Barth’s starting point for integration is the very person of God, he states it clearly this way, “God is who He is in His works” (Barth 1957:260). God’s being and his works are inseparable, his works express his being. By implication for him this means “the Church’s essential nature is not only
perceived, but in fact comes to be, when the church fulfils the purpose for which it exists. Barth spoke of the church’s purpose in relation to ‘the doctrine of reconciliation’ as this leads toward ‘the being of the community’ of reconciled persons” (Van Engen 1991:88). For Barth, like God, the church’s “act is its being, its status its dynamic, its essence its existence” (Barth 1956a:650). Therefore, “The Church as ecclesia ... is a description of an event.” (Barth 1956a:651). The church is an integrated event, where nature and action, like God and as a reflection of God, are inseparable.

Hans Küng, taking a creedal approach, puts it like this, “Unity, holiness, catholicity and apostolicity are ... not only gifts, granted to the Church by God’s grace, but at the same time tasks which it is vital for the Church to fulfil in a responsible way” (Küng 1976:348). The result for Küng is similar to Barth, the works of the church express its being. For Küng, the being and action, the essence and expression of the church are not only connected, they are essentially and dynamically the same. “What is truly decisive is not the formal presence of certain characteristics, but their use and practice. The word of the Gospel must truly be preached, heard and followed, the sacraments must really be used, oneness, holiness, catholicity and apostolicity must be lived by living men in a living Church and the notae Ecclesiae must become in one way or another notae Christianorum” (Küng 1976:348). Küng here not only effectively integrates essence and expression but also seeks to ward against blind theory by ensuring all essence theory has integrated and associated action.

Hegel’s philosophy held, “The metaphysical version of reality posited essence as prior to and determinative of existence” (Anderson 2001:18). “The existing person, Kierkegaard argued, defines and determines the essence of what is real” (Anderson 2001:18). In other words we find and understand essence and expression in close relationship to one another; we should not find essence separate from its lived through existence. Our word of caution here is that we cannot make fallen humankind, or the faith community of God which is not yet perfect, a model of existence and therefore a representation of complete essence. Rather our reference is taken to Christ in God who is the final revelation of true existence and essence, and whom the church in all its presence and practices is to reveal and reflect.

Heidegger suggests that Western philosophy has “spent so much time inquiring into life and its meaning that it has forgotten to attend to life itself. Heidegger calls this as a “forgetfulness of being” (Veling 2005:5). For Heidegger, “Being” carried with it the sense of a verb rather than a noun, alive not static. “Life means living, and living is predominantly what we do. We do not
simply exist; rather we are alive and we live” (Veling 2005:6). For Heidegger, existence is located in the very act of being. Therefore, we do not have a static essence disconnected from activity in the world. But rather our activity expresses our very essence; we live who we essentially are. Our essence and expression are connected. In support Anderson concludes,

An integrated ministry overcomes the ambivalence that results from two levels of truth, one purely theoretical and the other merely functional.... Within the structure of Christopraxis the ‘presence-in-action’ mode of revelation stands as a barrier to all attempts to view the truth of God in abstraction from the work of God. Thus theory and praxis are united within this form of practical knowledge which works itself out within the praxis of the church. This model of practical theology with its emphasis on ecclesial praxis and the attainment of practical knowledge goes a long way toward healing the rift between theory and practice. (Anderson 2001:33)

From this performative perspective, theory and praxis are always united. Your theory narrates your praxis and your praxis performs your theory.

Not only do we need to ensure that essence and expression are integrated but also that the eschatological goal is the integrated intent of the reality. Swinton and Mowat helpfully connect the three dimensions revelationally believing,

The important thing is that the practice bears faithful witness to the God from whom the practice emerges, and whom it reflects, and that it enables individuals and communities to participate faithfully in Christ’s redemptive mission. Thus the efficacy of the practice (the good to which it is aimed), is not defined pragmatically by its ability to fulfil particular human needs (although it will need that), but by whether or not it participates faithfully in the divine redemptive mission. (Swinton and Mowat 2006:22)

Thus with the ecclesial praxis located between the historical texts and tradition, the ongoing Spirit experience, the context in the world, and the eschatological call to a perfect future, “what the church does is informed by its understanding of what God is doing through its life and mission” (Anderson 2001:33). Therefore “each act of ministry will be interpreted by others as revealing something about the nature and purpose of God” (Anderson 2001:30). Essence expression and goal are therefore revelationally integrated.

Haight confirms this from an ontological perspective stating, “Together, the nature and purpose of an organisation form a mutual relationship that determines the ontology of its being and the character of its existence. There is no nature apart from its purpose: the purpose teleologically determines the nature of the group; the nature provides the resources to accomplish the
purpose. The two dimensions together and interactively constitute the church” (Haight 2008:98). Employing our three dimensions we could restate Haight this way:

Together, the essence, expression and goal of an organisation form a mutual relationship that determines the ontology of its being and the character of its existence and the direction of its life. There is no essence apart from expression and an intentional goal: the goal directed expression teleologically determines the essence of the group; the essence provides the resources to express and accomplish the intended goal. The three dimensions together and interactively constitute the church.

Essence, expression, and goal are therefore ontologically integrated.

However, a move toward such integration must also be done with an understanding of the impossibility of the task. For it will be impossible to gain “an integrated self, society, or church in any complete, final and whole way. It should be obvious that such a claim is based on Christian hope that lies in a future eschato logical promise that is not of our own making” (Cahalan 2012:386). So we proceed with caution knowing our approach here involves dynamic approaches and systems that are “on the way,” which will never here be wholly complete or reach the fullness of integration we see possible through eschatological hope. However, we are called to proceed.

If, as we have agreed, “the praxis of the church is in fact the embodiment of its theology” (Swinton 2000:11), the essence is to be the faithful incarnation by the church of the presence of God by the Spirit which conforms to the revelation and incarnation of Christ. The expression is to be the faithful participation in God’s redemptive loving actions in the world. The goal of the church here is to be a hope directed eschatological sign of all that is in Christ and will be upon his return. The essence, expression, and goal of the church must now be integrated.

4.4.2 Integration Analysis

It is possible that an essence theory, an expression theory, and a goal theory for any ecclesial category or relationship could be non-existent, could exist in isolation or be substantially disconnected from each other. Also it is possible that an essence theory which may be strongly grounded by referential theology is expressed based on an experiential expression theory which makes no reference to and is completely disconnected from the essence theory. Further, it is conceivable that an expression theory whether connected or not with the essence theory could
be focussed on serving pragmatic goals or other goals which are unrelated to the corresponding eschatological goal. Therefore, in order to ensure that there is substantial connection and correlation between essence, expression and goal theories we need to determine the integration relationship that exists between each of the three theory dimensions.

This analysis will be based on the correlation or overlap of themes found within the data gathered for the essence theory, the expression theory, and the goal theory for each ecclesial element within each ecclesial essence relationship (i.e. the ecclesial relationship of God and oneness, unifying worship and being united with God). Given the emphasis in this work of grounding the praxis in an operational ecclesiology, the essence domain will serve as the benchmark for the integration correlation grading. Therefore, if there is no grounded essence, a moderate or substantive integration is viewed as not possible.

To clearly illustrate the research findings with respect to each element we will utilise the following colour coding:

- None = Element not mentioned or mentioned only once = White
- Minimal = Minority support for element = Yellow
- Substantive = Majority support for element = Green

The integration analysis will follow the following process. Firstly, the extent of integration for each ecclesial element relationship will be given the following grading:

- Non-Existent – Where the essence element receives less than majority support and the corresponding element in the expression category or the goal category receives only minority support or is either non-existent or mentioned only once. Where the essence element receives majority support and the corresponding element in the expression and goal category receives no support or is only mentioned once.

- Minimal - Where the essence element receives majority support and the corresponding element in the expression category or the goal category receives only minority support. Where the corresponding expression and goal elements may correlate with majority support but the corresponding essence element is absent or receives less than majority support. Where all corresponding elements receive minority support.
Moderate - Where the essence element receives majority support and the corresponding elements receive majority support in either the expression category or the goal category, but not both.

Substantive - Where the essence element receives majority support and there is also majority support for the corresponding element in the expression and goal categories.

The next step is to combine the integration results for each element within an ecclesial essence relationship. This will be facilitated using the following grading:

Non-Existent – Where only one corresponding essence, expression and goal element is minimally integrated. Where the corresponding essence, expression, and goal elements are considered non-existent and unable to be integrated.

Minimal - Where one corresponding essence, expression, and goal element is shown to be substantively connected and integrated and the other is non-existent. Where one of the corresponding essence, expression and goal elements are moderately integrated and the other is minimal or non-existent. Where both of the corresponding essence, expression, and goal elements are both minimally integrated.

Moderate – Where both of the corresponding essence, expression, and goal elements are moderately integrated. Where one corresponding essence, expression and goal element is shown to be substantively connected and integrated and the other is minimally integrated.

Substantive - Where the corresponding essence, expression, and goal elements are shown to be substantively connected and integrated.

The integration summary findings for each essence relationship will be colour coded as follows:

- No integration possible = White
- Minimal integration = Yellow
- Moderate integration = Orange
- Substantive integration = Green
To summarise, the integration process utilises the research gathered, compares the grounded theory results for each set of connected essence, expression, and goal category elements, combines the findings for each essence relationship, and then charts the integration of the theory categories in the following format (see Figure 69) where the colour depicts the extent of integration for each ecclesial category.

![Figure 69 Example Integration of Ecclesial Theory Chart](image)

This integration chart, once completed by a faith community, will display the extent of integration of ecclesial theory across the essence, expression, and goal categories. This will then highlight the categories which need integration attention to bring maturity to a faith community’s operational ecclesial theory. The movement itself can then determine the path toward integration from a biblical and theological standpoint.

4.5 ALIGNING THEORY AND PRAXIS

4.5.1 The Necessity of Alignment

Other factors which add to the blind praxis and blind theory problem arise not so much due to inattention to either theory or praxis but due to issues of alignment. In many contexts one hears the mantra, “right belief, right action.” Here assumptions are made that congruence necessarily exists between ideas and beliefs and their associated expressions. Chave calls this the “religious congruence fallacy.” He claims, contrary to the popular mantra, that “evidence overwhelmingly shows that people’s religious ideas, values, and practices generally are not congruent.... Rather, people’s religious ideas and practices generally are fragmented, compartmentalized, loosely
connected, unexamined, and context dependent” (Chaves 2010:2). This clearly points to the importance of alignment. Küng put it like this:

The nature given to the Church through God’s eschatological saving act in Christ was given it as a responsibility. This nature must be constantly realised anew and given new form in history by our personal decision of faith. The historical Church cannot do without this constant renewal of its form. Renewal of form implies change of form by means of human decision and responsibility. God does not present us with the nature of the Church as an objective fact, nor does he overwhelm it with mystic inevitability, nor work on it by organic development; he calls us constantly to new decisions of faith, to a free responsibility, to loving service. It is impossible to preserve the Church for all time in the original form it enjoyed as the primitive Church. Changing times demand changing forms. Yet in spite of all changes in form the basic structure of the Church given to it in Christ by God’s saving act must be preserved, if it is to remain the true Church. Through the failure of men in their free responsibility, discrepancies between nature and form can occur: mistakes and misconceptions, errors of judgement and false developments. Thus there can be a form an actual state which is true to its nature or false to its nature – and therefore in this sense a true or a false Church. (Küng 1976:341)

The grounding and integration of the theory dimensions is only of value if alignment follows to avoid what Küng calls a false church. That is, theory and praxis must have a high degree of correlation. For of what value is excellent theory if the praxis does not express it. Or what value is excellent praxis if such praxis cannot be verified as excellent by a corresponding grounded and integrated theory. Moynagh through his relational lens states, “If relationships are the essence of the church, practices are for the good of the church” (Moynagh 2012:109). If for Moynagh relationships encapsulate the operating theory then all practices are to be correspondingly aligned and directed toward the outworking and maturing good of those church relationships. Thus the essence of the church guides the expression for its good and expressions are therefore directed toward the fulfilment of the eschatological goal of the church, which is the perfection of its very nature in Christ.

Essence and expression exist in a dynamic eschatological goal focussed relationship, where “Practices are not unimportant, but they exist for the sake of the four [or in our case five] interlocking sets of relationships that comprise the church. They are servants of these relationships, just as the Old Testament law is the servant of the covenant.... The covenant relationship was the ultimate reality that obedience to Yahweh made concrete” (Moynagh
THE TASK DYNAMIC OF PRACTICAL THEOLOGICAL ECCLESIOLOGY

2012:110. “Practices are to serve relationships through bringing them life” (Moynagh 2012:110), as a sign now of the ultimate reality come, moving forward toward that future relational fullness.

Alignment of theory and praxis can be conceived in a number of forms. A propositional theory to praxis alignment seeks to cultivate a body of truth and bring it to bear on actions, thus guiding the alignment of the praxis to the theory. A clerical alignment will focus attention on the role of leadership in bringing praxis and theory into alignment. A dispositional alignment seeks the character formation of the individual or community towards its ultimate spiritual goal. However, what we seek is a revelational ecclesial alignment which seeks the alignment of the church to its revealed essence, and the alignment of its actions to reveal Christ through the revelatory and reconciling practices of God by the Spirit in the world, as a sign of its eternal destiny.

We are here returned to Barth’s starting point for integration as the starting point for alignment. For if “God is who He is in His works” (Barth 1957:260) not only is there integration of essence and expression, but also a necessary alignment, where action flows from essence and actions also reflect their essential origin. God reveals himself in action and acts according to his being. God is love. He is himself in action. He is love, loving. He is the reconciler, reconciling. Therefore, by viewing the church similarly and incarnationally the same can be said of the ecclesial praxis, theory and praxis must align. “There are forms of ministry that appear to be comforting and even reconciling, but if they do not reveal Christ, these ministries are not of God. That is, these ministries are not actions of God. For God has acted in Jesus Christ and continues to act in him in such a way that Christ is revealed in all of God’s actions” (Anderson 2001:54). If we believe God acts in and through the church to reveal himself and his purposes, then the church as participant in this revelatory event is to be an aligned expression of all that it is and is becoming in Christ.

As is the case for practical theology, so also it is important for practical theological ecclesiology to ensure “the unification of the church’s theological understandings and her practices in the world ...” (Swinton and Mowat 2006:25). It is possible that an ecclesial theory for a faith community exists and is grounded, and it is also possible that the ecclesial theory is substantially integrated, and yet the ecclesial praxis may be operating completely separately from the theory or operating with varying degrees of alignment from the ecclesial theory. Where this occurs we will still have locations of blind theory or blind praxis. Therefore, it is essential that alignment between ecclesial theory and ecclesial praxis is sought. Once the theory is grounded and the theory dimensions integrated the third task of practical theological ecclesiology is to align theory and praxis.
4.5.2 Alignment Analysis

To ensure that there is substantial alignment between theory and praxis, we first need to conduct a qualitative analysis of the ecclesial praxis to ascertain what constitutes the faith community’s ecclesial praxis expression. Following this research an alignment analysis which compares the theory and the praxis findings will be carried out to determine whether the faith community’s ecclesial theory and ecclesial praxis are aligned and goal directed. The focus is to discern the alignment that is present or absent between the praxis expression theory and the praxis events or actions and goals. Alignment could go further and include the essence dimension as well. However, if alignment has been preceded by successful grounding, and an integration review which has resulted in a closer integration of essence, expression, and goal theories, then using expression theory as the basis for praxis alignment should provide similar results.

Following the collection of the praxis data and the alignment analysis we will chart the degree to which the ecclesial theory categories are aligned with the ecclesial praxis. This will be done in three stages. First we will note the praxis support for each element across the associated dimensions of expression, action, and goal. Second we consider the presence or absence of alignment between data on expression, action and goal for each element within an ecclesial expression category relationship (i.e. personal concern expression element, personal concern action element, reconciled people goal element). Thirdly, we bring the element alignment results together to produce an alignment summary for each expression category relationship, which then provides us with an overall alignment chart for the praxis.

In order to clearly illustrate the alignment analysis process we will utilise the following colour coding to depict the expression, action, and goal element support:

- None = Element not mentioned or mentioned only once = White
- Minimal = Minority support for element = Yellow
- Substantive = Majority support for element = Green

While, as mentioned previously, event is the preferred term, action has been used in the research to ensure accuracy of understanding among the research participants.
The first step displays the data support each element receives across the expression, action, and goal dimensions. An expression, action, goal element support example follows:

**Figure 70  Element Support Example**

Secondly, we determine alignment. The alignment grading is based on the correlation or overlap of themes within the data gathered for the expression theory, the praxis action and the associated action goal for each ecclesial expression element. It must be noted that if any expression, action, or goal element receives no support or only one participant mentions the element then there can be no alignment for that entire expression, action and goal element relationship. The extent of correlation for each element will be determined by the following descriptors:

- **Non-Existent** – Where one or more of the corresponding expression, action, and goal elements receives no support or is mentioned only once.

- **Minimal** - Where one of the corresponding expression, action, or goal elements receives majority support and the other two receive minority support, or where all three elements receive minority support.

- **Moderate** - Where two of the corresponding expression, action and goal elements receive majority support and the other receives minority support.

- **Substantive** - Where the corresponding expression, action, and goal elements all receive majority support.

To depict the extent of alignment we will use the following colour coding:
No alignment possible = White
Minimal alignment = Yellow
Moderate alignment = Orange
Substantive alignment = Green

We now, thirdly, need to combine the two expression elements for each expression relationship category. The combined alignment for each expression category relationship will be given the following grading:

Non-Existent – Where the alignment for both expression element relationships are considered non-existent, or, where one is minimally aligned and the other is non-existent.

Minimal - Where the alignment result for one expression element relationship is substantive and the alignment of the other is non-existent. Where the alignment results for both expression element relationships are minimal. Where the alignment results for one expression element relationship is moderate and the other is minimal or non-existent.

Moderate - Where the alignment result for one expression element is substantive and the alignment of the other is minimal. Where the alignment results for both expression elements are moderate.

Substantive - Where the alignment results for both expression element relationships are substantive.

The summary findings for each expression category will use the following colour coding:

No alignment possible = White
Minimal alignment = Yellow
Moderate alignment = Orange
Substantive alignment = Green

To summarise, the alignment process utilises the research gathered, compares the praxis results for each set of connected expression, action and goal category elements, combines the findings
for each expression relationship, and then charts the integration of the categories in the following format (see Figure 71) where the colour depicts the extent of alignment for each expression relationship.

![Alignment Chart](image)

**Figure 71  Example Alignment Summary of Praxis Chart**

This alignment chart (see Figure 71), once completed by a faith community, will display the extent of alignment found between ecclesial expression theory and the associated action and goals of the praxis. This will then highlight the categories which need alignment attention to bring maturity to a faith community’s ecclesial praxis. The movement itself can then determine the theory or praxis change required to place the faith community on a path toward alignment.

### 4.6  IMPROVING THE ECCLESIAL PRAXIS

Ecclesial theory may be grounded and integrated, and ecclesial theory and praxis may even be significantly aligned and goal directed, but the actions and practice of the church may remain ineffective. The goal of practical theological ecclesiology is to see that the faith practices of the faith community are perfectly faithful to the practices of God in Christ. However, “of course in reality, these practices are carried out imperfectly. Indeed practices can easily become distorted and even evil. One of the main critical tasks of Practical Theology historically is to recognize distorted practice and to call the Church back to the theological significance of its practices and to enable it to engage faithfully with the mission of God” (Swinton and Mowat 2006:24–25). In addition to grounding, integration, and alignment we need to add the task of improving. We have put the question this way, “How can the ecclesial praxis of the faith community be an improved expression of the ecclesial theory in its context?” Anderson puts it this way, “Theological reflection is the activity of the Christian and the church by which acts of ministry are critically and
continually assessed in light of both revelation and reconciliation as God’s true Word” (Anderson 2001:55). Continuous teleological improvement, a primary task of practical theology, becomes the fourth task of practical theological ecclesiology.

For Schleiermacher, the rule for improvement is Christ.

Christ presents us with an archetype that we are to approximate, and the words of Christ set out a pattern for human thinking and acting.... [T]he Christian church becomes the totality of those who endeavour to approximate this archetype in their common life. Thus the rule which serves to insure that activities in the Christian church take place correctly is: Whatever promotes an approximation to Christ is correct; whatever hinders this approximation is false. (Schleiermacher 1988:122)

For Veling, improvement is that which brings earth to accord with heaven. According to Swinton and Mowat the improvement task is a “fundamentally missiological discipline which receives its purpose, its motivation, and its dynamic from acknowledging and working out what it means to participate faithfully in God’s mission.... The aim ... is therefore not to simply understand the world but to change it” (Swinton and Mowat 2006:27).

The practical theological ecclesiology task of improving the praxis is done dynamically in connection with the grounding, integrating and aligning tasks completed for or by a faith community or movement. It is from this point and this point only that the methods of practical theology can be effective in achieving expression and praxis change. From a practical theological perspective the event or action improvement task is often undertaken in three stages. According to Dingemans these stages are: analysis of the situation, research into the ideal, and development of a strategy to move from the current situation to the desired future (Dingemans 1996:62). According to Heitink, the stages are understanding, explanation and change (Heitink 1993:165). More recently, Osmer has introduced a four stage approach: the descriptive-empirical task, the interpretive task, the normative task, and the pragmatic task (Osmer 2008:4–12). Developing a comprehensive operational ecclesiology model and a practical theological ecclesiology process that highlights the praxis areas that need attention is the intention of this work. A new model or process for praxis improvement will not be pursued here but left for further engagement with the work already available within the field of practical theology. Thus in the case study to follow (see Chapter 5) we will be restricting the work to that of grounding, integrating, and aligning. Consideration of expression and event or action improvement within the praxis will not be carried out in the case study, but rather left for the faith community to pursue.
4.7 THE COMPLETED CYCLE

Once the grounding, integrating, and aligning tasks have been completed the researcher will have produced three valuable summary pictures for the faith community being studied. These are: the grounding of theory chart, the integration of theory chart, and the alignment of theory and praxis chart. The operational ecclesiology model, the practical theological ecclesiology model and process, together with these three summary tools provide a clear understanding of the operational ecclesial praxis of a faith community.

The grounding chart will show areas which may be susceptible to blind praxis. These areas will be those where little or no ecclesial theory exists. While all categories will require future grounding reflection, those where little or no theory exists will require immediate grounding attention to address the significant blind praxis situations. The integration theory chart will highlight those essence, expression, and goal categories, specifically along relational lines, which are not connected and require attention in order for the faith community to mature faithfully in a revelational, incarnational, and eschatological manner. The alignment of theory and praxis chart will assist in highlighting areas of blind theory and blind praxis where theory and praxis are not reflective of each other. Areas of blind theory highlighted for attention will be areas which may have a grounded theory and even an integrated theory but which have either no expression or little expression. Areas of blind praxis highlighted for attention will be areas where there is little theory and praxis correlation where the praxis does not reflect or operate out of the ecclesial theory.

Practical theological ecclesiology provides the faith community with the continuous dynamic tasks of grounding, integrating, aligning and improving the life of the church, so that ecclesial theory and praxis become united, reflecting the essence and expression of the church, as the revelational incarnational sign of God and his purposes in and for the world, directed toward his eschatological kingdom goal.

In the next chapter we carry out a case study based on the Christian Community Churches of Australia faith community (formerly Christian Brethren) in order to illustrate and support the approach of practical theological ecclesiology developed in this thesis.
5 A CASE STUDY - THE CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY CHURCHES OF AUSTRALIA

Following the approach detailed in the previous chapter and focussing on the faith community known as the Christian Community Churches of Australia (originally known as Plymouth Brethren, later Open Brethren, now also commonly known as Christian Brethren), this case study will illustrate how practical theological ecclesiology employs the operational ecclesiology model in the ecclesial praxis and carries out the dynamic tasks of grounding, integrating, aligning and improving. The emphasis in this study is not to provide a definitive study of the movement but rather to illustrate the practical theological ecclesiology process and illuminate the pathway for more detailed research in the future.

This case study will involve a measure of historical research connected to the grounding task and a qualitative analysis of the Australian praxis connected to the grounding, integrating, aligning and improving tasks. However, prior to commencing the practical theological ecclesiology tasks, a brief introduction to the Brethren faith community and the early thoughts that shaped the movement is in order.

5.1 INTRODUCING THE BRETHREN MOVEMENT

Those who call themselves Brethren trace their roots to a movement in the early 1800s. At that time there was no label, no definition, nor any sign that would suggest the early days would bear the fruit we now see. The Brethren arose out of “an Evangelical movement of spiritual renewal which began in Dublin and South-West of England around 1827-1831 (hence the term ‘Plymouth Brethren’), and which has as one of its main concerns the realisation of a fellowship in which all true believers in Christ might find a welcome” (Grass 2006:3).

Movements never just happen, they are conceived because the circumstances are right and they take shape within an environment that provides the right space and conditions for their growth. So it was from the seedbed of apostasy and sectarianism, revival and a deep desire for unity, that the Brethren movement began; a movement which although at first a mere stream would become a significant river. I have a long heritage within the Christian Brethren faith community through many generations. But today as a member of this movement I stand far downstream. From such a point the source and original energy of the movement becomes easily forgotten and
A CASE STUDY – THE CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY CHURCHES OF AUSTRALIA

distorted by any member - to the point that questions like: “What does it mean to belong to this movement?” “What was the intended essence and expression of the movement?” and “Where does this river go to from here?” arise.

From 1534 and the separation of the Church of England from Rome by Henry VIII there had been only one recognised church in England, the Church of England, which received its position, strength, and power from its establishment by the state. It was a state church. One may initially think that the Brethren movement was essentially born out of a reaction to the perceived apostasy of the Church of England over the intervening period. While this is true it is only part of the story.

Prior to the Brethren movement England had been host to at least three former renewal movements. The first, the Puritans, aimed to purge the Church of England of anything Roman Catholic. The Puritans of the 1560s contended that, “too many rags of popery were still in the Anglican Church.... Their main objections were directed against the continued use in the liturgy of the church of ritual vestments that seemed popish to them. They opposed the use of saints’ days, clerical absolution, the sign of the cross, the custom of having godparents in baptism, kneeling for communion, and the use of the surplice by the minister” (Cairns 1996:328). In the 1570s under Thomas Cartwright the Puritan movement shifted its focus from the reform of liturgical elements within the church to the reform of its theology, insisting on the final authority of Scripture. While achieving much, they failed to establish an accepted Puritan Church. Many Puritans left England for America in search of religious freedom. Many of those who remained, formed dissenting congregations, later known as Congregationalists (of these a large number migrated to Plymouth) and Independent Baptists.

The second, the Quaker movement, took shape under George Fox for whom Christianity was a “mystical experience in which one could come directly to God” (Cairns 1996:381). Under Fox’s leadership, the Society of Friends (also called Quakers), was formed in 1652. Robert Barclay the theologian for the movement believed, “the Spirit was the sole Revelator of God and the source of ‘Inner Light’ within man that gave him spiritual illumination. The Bible was but a secondary rule of faith, and the inspiration of the writers was placed on the same level as the inspiration of Fox or any other Quaker” (Cairns 1996:381). Quakers were given to zealous missionary and social endeavours and their persecution by the authorities forced the spread of their work throughout England and abroad.
The third renewal movement prior to the genesis of the Brethren was that which became known as the Methodist revival. This revival initially took place within the Church of England. John Wesley together with his brother Charles met with other Anglican students at Oxford to further their devotion to God through a disciplined method of spiritual improvement, which included regular times of prayer and Bible study, resulting in the “Holy Club.” Following John Wesley’s conversion in 1738, which was influenced greatly by the reading of Luther, he began to preach in Bristol, and from there on horseback around the country, creating what became known as the Methodist revival. Aspects which contributed to this revival were the development of a more enthusiastic preaching event, the use of hymns, the development of Bible study groups, and extempore teaching. Wesley resisted breaking from the Church of England. It wasn’t until 1795, after Wesley’s death, that the Methodist Church was formed outside the Church of England. There remained within the Methodist Church an Anglican influence on Episcopal polity and reception of communion. While retaining a marked separation of clergy and laity, they embraced an Arminian theology stressing “justification by faith through an instantaneous experience of regeneration … and the possibility of absolute Christian perfection in motive in this life because the love of God so filled the heart of the believer that God’s love would expel sin and promote absolute holiness of life” (Cairns 1996:386). While controversy surrounds Wesley’s theology of holiness, the pursuit of it was undeniable.

We turn now to the more obvious contributor to the environment leading to the Brethren movement, the state of the Church of England. At the turn of the 19th century the Church of England was the only official church in England. While separatism in Britain was on the rise, all other religious formations were considered dissenters and sects, and viewed by the official church as irreligious. But those who had been affected by renewal in any way had no real choice. They could leave the official church and be viewed in this way or remain within the church, which for many was in a deplorable state. Rowdon notes:

One contemporary critic described the Church of England as a ‘machine of Anti-Christ’, and looked forward to … when the establishment would be abolished by an Act of Parliament and put on an equality with the other Christian sects tolerated in this country. The Anglican bishops were accused of corruption and of neglecting their religious duties in the favour of lucrative business pursuits. The laity was almost completely excluded from any involvement in the spiritual matters of the church. The sermons given within the church drew the criticism of lacking life, predominantly because a display of enthusiasm...
within a sermon was viewed as being Methodist and regarded as an ecclesiastical misdemeanour. (Rowdon 1967:4)

William Soltau, who later joined the Brethren, said of the preaching of the state church in that period, “he could not remember hearing a clear presentation of the evangelical message” (Rowdon 1967:5). Such churches were viewed by the early Brethren pioneers as “formal and lifeless ... governed by aspirations and motives which were merely worldly and carnal, while demanding little real spiritual experience of their adherents” (Coad 1968:244–45). And they also accused the established church of, what for them became a primary pillar, the “failing to advocate the practices of apostolic Christianity”(Callahan 1996:62). Groves while not as negative as others commented, “I acknowledge the system to be wrong, very wrong, yet my heart finds great repose in those fair pearls which lie within, what seems to me, so naughty a shell” (Groves and Groves 1869:297). This growing dissatisfaction with the church took on a life all its own. The Brethren also took to condemning those who did not share this same dissatisfaction with the church to the point that “dissatisfaction became a mark of ecclesial piety” (Callahan 1996:75; Darby 1971a:35).

While the state of the Church of England promoted a mind of dissent, the growing popularity of the renewal movements provided a more flexible and attractive alternative. “Dissenting churches were on the whole, more flexible, and were beginning to throb with the new spiritual life generated by the Evangelical Revival of the late eighteenth century” (Rowdon 1967:3). However, the dissenting churches themselves also gave cause for concern. Within the dissenting churches there were growing tendencies toward clericalism and social sophistication. This ever increasing sectarian approach to the Church of England eventually began to create internal sectarian problems, resulting in the proliferation of dissenting groups. There soon became the situation in which,

the established church had unity (at least from their own perspective) but did not have purity. On the other hand, the dissenting churches had purity (from their viewpoint), but they did not have unity. They claimed to be the true church because they were pure, yet the by-products of their stance were division and a sectarian attitude. The established church, for its part, claimed to be the true church because of its unity, accusing all the others of creating schisms. The by-products of its unity were cold theology and corruption. (Smith 1986:25)

The Brethren movement was not a unique and original movement, but a product of the ingredients of the past movements and reactions to the surrounding ecclesial environment of the
day (Rusu 2015:19–22). The movement carries with it shades: of Puritanism in its insistence on the authority of the Bible, of the Quaker movement with its zeal for missions and service, and of Methodism with its emphasis on extempore preaching and its desire for purity. Also many aspects of the movement were shaped through their reaction against the Anglican clergy/laity division, its lifeless form and structure, its apostasy, and its lack of evangelism. The Brethren also reacted to the clericalism and social separation, which the dissenting churches were creating. It was within this environment of renewal, sectarianism, and apostasy that the Brethren movement took root and grew in the hearts of those who believed that God and Scripture called them to something other.

The genesis of the Brethren is the story of a number of prominent people whose thoughts and actions solidified in the formation of a number of major centres of Brethren activity, including Plymouth, over a number of years. It is in the early 1820s to the late 1840s, that we uncover the heartbeat which gave life to the Brethren movement. It is from this period of history and onward that we will seek the formational and influential theology and practices of the Brethren that has shaped the movement.

The movement traces its beginning back to Dublin in 1829, where Darby joined Bellett, Cronin, Hutchinson, and others “for communion in the name of the Lord with all, whosoever they might be, who loved Him in sincerity” (Callahan 1996:4).

5.2 KEY THOUGHTS THAT SHAPED BRETHREN ECCLESIOLOGY

In order to fully understand the ecclesiology which arose from within the movement it is firstly essential to understand some of the key thoughts that shaped the formation of the movement.

Perhaps the earliest description of the developing Brethren identity was summed up (possibly by Darby), in the statement, “Separation from the world, union of the saints, and the liberty of, and dependence on the Holy Ghost, according to the word” (cited in Grass 2006:92). Coad believes that it was an urge to freedom which underlined these identity characteristics and the motivations of the early Brethren; “the freedom to express man’s personal response to God fully and without restraint. Those early men looked for a community, they were impatient of anything which would restrict the liberty of Christ to do what He wished with his own” (Coad 1968:244).
The working out of this urge for freedom was characteristic of many as illustrated in the life of Groves:

To satisfy his thirst for God, he turned to the Bible, which he began to read with passion. What he read there reacted on him, to produce an intense devotedness to Christ that expressed itself in the surrender to the service of Christ of property and career, and then in a drawing together with others of like mind. From this developed a quest for the full fellowship of all like-minded men, and the abandonment of all those restrictions of denominational discipline which seemed to frustrate that quest. So there followed his desire for the full unity of the people of God, the free celebration of the Lord’s Supper with all believing men and women, the replacement of ordination by the free exercise of the gifts God had given, the free response to whatever service was committed to them. (Coad 1968:244)

Early on the Brethren viewed the existing church as broken and restricting the free work of the Spirit, they believed a new path needed to be forged. But how should they forge such a path of freedom? Groves, alongside Darby, was one of the most influential of the Brethren founding fathers. He asserted that church history “is to prove what was done, not what ought to be done” (Groves 1835:3). Their approach, based solely on Scripture, sought to ignore history altogether. As Newton and Borlase put it:

To discover the present state of the Church we must bring its present condition into direct and actual comparison with its state as shown in Scripture; which alone will shew how far she has kept her proper ground. It will be useless to compare it with any intervening period, for the appeal can only be made to what it once was; and thus the difference is seen. (Callahan 1996:35).

The desire from the beginning was to find a new freedom away from history and tradition. “The Brethren sought to effect a fresh start without authority, precedent, or guidance beyond the letter of Holy Scripture. For them essentially the garnered experience of eighteen Christian centuries was as though it were not” (Neatby 1901:3). With the sidelining of history and tradition, and the simultaneous rejection of the creeds and confessions of the established churches, and therefore to a large extent any theological reflection, there arose a strong commitment to sola scriptura where Scripture became “not merely the supreme authority, but the sole authority” (Grass 2006:84) for faith and practice, including their understanding of church order (Callahan 1996:21). As a result, the movement, not unlike other dissenting or separatist groups, became both primitivist and biblicist. Such an approach has remained prevalent among the movement (Lang 1985:7) resulting in an ongoing lack of both historical and theological reflection.
As biblicists, the Brethren employed a literal simplicity in their interpretation of Scripture to one’s personal life and to church life and practice. They rejected any interpretive system or interpretive tradition. Darby urged others to “apply themselves, for themselves, to the testimony of Scripture, to draw ideas simply and directly from this ..., but trust no man’s mind” (Darby 1971b:10). They rejected the notion that they were interpreting biblical texts, and argued that they were only reading and applying what God had said about the church and Christendom.... [They] believed that their ideas came from the Bible, not the social, political, and historical circumstances in which they lived and by which their own thought was undoubtedly shaped. (Callahan 1996:211)

Affirming such a belief Henry Soltau, given to grand declarations, announced in 1863 that the Brethren movement “has no parallel in the whole history of the Church of God, because in no other instance has the Word of God (freed from all tradition) been taken as the guide of those who have sought revival in the Church of God” (Coad 1968:91).

Being biblicist they were therefore also primitivist, desiring a return to apostolic Christianity underpinned by a literal reading of the New Testament. According to Groves, to follow any course other than literally applying the practices of “apostolic times and apostolic men” (Groves 2008:9) is to disregard the authority of Scripture. This sentiment summarised their primitivist leanings, which is exemplified by Chapman when he writes, “God was moving among His people and bringing them back to her first foundations of the Church of God, the Divine principles of the Word which, although long forgotten and buried under tradition, they found to remain, and that God had neither withdrawn them nor had time rendered them obsolete” (Callahan 1996:27–28).

Newman also speaks of this primitivist sentiment:

I had become distinctly aware, that the modern Churches in general by no means hold the truth as conceived of by the apostles. I had successively found the prevalent Protestantism to be unapostolic. Hence arose in me a conscious and continuous effort to read the New Testament with fresh eyes and without bias, and so to take up the real doctrines of the Gospel. (Newman 1850:46)

For the Brethren, the apostolic ecclesial practices represented the core of what it meant to be a true church of God; it formed the basis for certainty and unity in an age of separatism, dissention, and confusion. They believed in the simplicity of Scripture and the simplicity of apostolic faith and practice as sufficient, not in the traditions of men. Their approach can be summarised as simply take a literal reading of the apostle’s instructions and apply them. “The movement’s appeal to the
practices of the apostolic church, utilizing a literal application of both the examples and the
teaching provided by the apostolic church to the contemporary ecclesial scene, was solidified as a
focal point of Brethren identity” (Callahan 1996:120). According to Callahan, “There were two
ingredients which combined to form their identity: their negative characterisation of
contemporary Christianity in all its various forms, and their positive affirmation of apostolic or
New Testament Christianity as the norm against which all evaluations must be made. The
negatives, then, are viewed as illustrations of their primitivist convictions” (Callahan 1996:33).
Reaction against the church and the world, coupled with the embracing of Scripture and apostolic
practices, defined the movement in the early years.

Darby’s desire to separate from the world came from both his ecclesiology of a church in ruin and
his eschatology of the imminent return of Christ. Both coalesced “to produce a developed
dispensational scheme in which ruin was both inevitable and irreparable, and the believer’s
responsibility was to separate from the world rushing to judgement and destruction, in the
expectation of the Lord’s immediate return” (Grass 2006:104). He believed,

What is known in present times as the church, as expressed in denominational systems, is
not the true church of God, for, refusing to meet in the simplicity of His name, it is now in
ruins: not merely corrupted, but utterly, hopelessly, quite irreparable. God has discarded
the church, as He set Israel aside, and His testimony is borne in the world by the
assembly, which has existed from the beginning, for it alone meets ‘in His name.’ (cited in
Grass 2006:95).

The ruin and remnant theology was reinforced by their premillennial eschatological perspective.
This perspective anticipated the imminent rapture of the church, with the world descending
further into evil and chaos, ushering in the tribulation. The result is that all members were
encouraged to simply meet in Christ’s name and to separate themselves from worldly things. This
separation from the world, including the existing established churches, was replaced by returning
to apostolic simplicity.

In line with such simplicity, in 1830, “Müller at Teignmouth introduced open ministry in
connection with weekly observance of the Lord’s Supper, and this gradually became the norm,
the vast majority of assemblies moving in the direction of making worship completely
unstructured and spontaneous” (Grass 2006:98). At this time the gathering of the Brethren for the
“Breaking of the Bread” service was conducted according to three primary principles which
incorporated these developing themes:
1. The sole presiding authority of the Spirit over the gathering.

2. The open and unstructured and therefore spontaneous and participatory nature of the service.

3. The sole focus on Christ’s death for us. (Grass 2006:98)

Groves, however, disagreed with the spontaneous nature of the service and the setting aside of all preparation and training. He viewed such an approach as impulsive, believing, “Just as believers laboured to obtain their daily bread, so too spiritual food required the labour of preparation; Timothy, he pointed out, was exhorted to give himself to study of the Scriptures” (Grass 2006:99). But his voice was not part of the majority.

Along with this embrace of spontaneity and apostolic simplicity, and the accompanying separation from structure, came the devaluation of education and training. It was considered that all education could do was to “fit [you] for life in a world which was heading for destruction because of its rejection of Christ” (Grass 2006:86). “Müller was sure that the immediate teaching influence of the Holy Spirit, insured through ‘laying aside commentaries, and almost every other book, and simply reading the Word of God and studying it’ would result in his apprehension of trustworthy ecclesial doctrine” (Müller in Callahan 1996:50). Involvement in any structured training was viewed as replacing the role of the Spirit in one’s life.

From the brief discussion above it is clear that essentially the early Brethren were:

biblicist, primitivist, anti-structural, anti-training, led spontaneously by the Spirit, while viewing themselves as a faithful remnant, withdrawing from the evil world and the apostate ruined church, awaiting the imminent return of Christ.

History records that in pursuing freedom at the expense of the guidance of tradition, creeds, and a substantive body of referential theology, it was not long before cracks appeared. Differences of interpretation arose due to their imposing on “Scripture their own systems of interpretation, which rapidly hardened into as rigid a tradition as any” (Coad 1968:250). Embley concurs, concluding that the “founders ... had no programme, manifesto or creed, and their actions were dictated far more by common sentiment than by explicit theory” (Embley 1967:213). The early formational years ended in the split of the “Exclusive” and “Open Brethren” in 1848, largely over differences in opinion on how best to pursue unity.
These key theological themes provide the broad historical context in which the ecclesiology of the movement was shaped. Within this context we now turn our focus to the historical/referential and the contemporary/experiential ecclesial theory of the movement and the carrying out of the practical theological ecclesiology tasks of grounding, integrating, aligning and improving.

5.3 GROUNDING

In carrying out the task of grounding we are answering the following two questions:

1. What is the ecclesial theory (the essence, expression, and goal theory) of the faith community?

2. Is the faith community’s ecclesial theory (the essence, expression, and goal theory) theologically grounded: having its faith origin in Christ, its mission of love in the Spirit, and its hope destination with God?

To comprehensively answer question one requires historical referential research to provide a picture of the referential ecclesial theory, and also current praxis research to provide a picture of the contemporary experiential ecclesial theory of the faith community. The collation and comparison of the historical and the contemporary pictures will provide both an understanding of the movement of the current praxis from the historical referential theory and create the frame for an ongoing theological and biblical grounding conversation which is required to answer question two. The intended result is a thoroughly grounded and improved operational ecclesiology which serves as a grounded reference point for the future praxis of the community. Such a comprehensive grounding is not within the scope of this thesis. However, our research will provide referential/historical and experiential/contemporary pictures of the movements ecclesial theory. These pictures will provide the necessary starting point for additional future research, by the faith community, to pursue a comprehensive and improved grounding of their ecclesial theory. We first undertake the historical research to present an overview of the movement’s referential ecclesial theory.
5.3.1 Historical Referential Grounding

To ascertain the referential voice which contributes to the operational ecclesial theory of the Christian Brethren, a brief survey of historical literature will be undertaken. This research will be carried out through a literature review, including where possible, analysis of the movement’s source documents and its early historical writings, giving specific attention to the formative years. The movement, although existing since the early 1820’s, has not developed a substantive body of widely accepted theological work, nor a comprehensive ecclesiology (Yeager 2006:7). Its anti-creedal and anti-leadership stance has worked against such development. Thus the historical literature tends to comprise records of historical events, correspondences, personal topical writings, conference papers, biographies and the like. The exception to this is the prolific writings of Darby, which includes biblical and theological works. However, while formative in the Christian Brethren movement, his theological leanings created the schism of 1848, which formed the Exclusive Brethren. The specific focus of this research will be on the documented works of the major foundational pioneers and the resulting influences which flowed through the movement. The early significant pioneers of the movement include: Anthony Norris Groves (1795-1853), James Nelson Darby (1800-1882), George Müller (1805-1898), Henry Craik (1805 – 1866), and Benjamin Newman (1807-1899).

The theology that arose from the work of these key founders and their peers forms the basis of the referential ecclesiology of the movement. It is from such works that we will seek to uncover the focal areas of the historical operational ecclesiology of the Brethren. From these findings a picture of the movement’s historical operational ecclesial theory pertaining to the essence, expression, and goal dimensions will be created.

In 1827, according to Darby, the answer to the question “What is the Church of Christ in its purpose and perfection?” is “It is a congregation of souls redeemed ..., a people purified to Himself by Christ, purified in the heart by faith, knit together, by the bond of this common faith in Him” (Darby 1971a:5). Borlase described the true church this way, “For what is a Church – the Church of God? Scripture testifies of what it once was – a gathering together of believers upon the ground of the common salvation, (for this was the simple bond of union which knit them together,) and ordered by the power of the Holy Ghost” (Callahan 1996:44). The ecclesial focal points for the early Brethren were unity in faith, holiness in life, and order by the Spirit. One of
the first expanded statements which encompassed the essential nature and practice of the Brethren came in 1913 with the writing of Short. He stated,

[The] apostolic principles of faith and practice which the Brethren feel it their duty to reinstate [were]:

1. We believe in the Deity of Jesus Christ.
2. In the Divine Inspiration and Authority of the Bible.
3. In the primitive Gospel of eternal life only by personal faith in our Lord Jesus Christ and His Sacrifice in our room and stead.
4. We practise the baptism of believers only, and that by immersion.
5. We meet around the Lord at His Table on the first day of the week, and at this meeting we allow open ministry to any who appear to be led of the Spirit. The utmost simplicity of form is aimed at.
6. There is no ordained ministry, although a number of brethren give their whole time to the work of oversight or of preaching the Gospel, and are supported, in dependence on the Lord, by gifts. They have no stated salary. The spiritual leaders of a meeting are not elected by vote, but when God manifestly equips them they are recognised by their brethren.
7. Like the Apostolic Church we welcome at the Lord’s Table all believers who are sound in the fundamental principles of the faith and godly in life, but we do not receive those of whom this cannot be said. (Short 1913:77)

Acknowledging that the above is but a small representation, it nevertheless illustrates the largely faith and practice or expression driven nature of the church and likewise the absence of any underlying essence theology with the notable exception of the consideration of unity connected to faith and a godly life.

We now turn to consider each of the essence, expression, and goal categories in turn to provide a survey of the referential ecclesial theory of the Brethren. Such an exercise if done in detail would be extensive and is beyond the scope of this thesis. In order to keep this review brief we will focus on the grounding elements for each operational ecclesiology category and use the grounding grading process previously outlined (4.3.3 Grounding Analysis), but reproduced in summary here for convenience.
The grounding scores used are a product of both the completeness of grounding, and the consistency of data gathered. The completeness of grounding is determined using the grounding elements. Each category has two elements that should exist within each ecclesial theory category. The grade percentage attributed to the completeness of the grounded theory will be as follows:

- 10% Minimal - Where no apparent grounding factors exist.
- 50% Moderate - Where one of the grounding factors exists.
- 100% Substantive - Where both of the grounding theory elements exist.

The consistency of the theory present will be assessed according to the data support of the ecclesial grounding elements under consideration. The grade factor attributed to the consistency of the data surveyed will be as follows:

- 10 Minimal - Where there is no apparent theory or no apparent consistency of views on the grounding elements surveyed.
- 50 Moderate - Where the data for the grounding elements surveyed is divided between a small number of different views.
- 100 Substantive - Where a majority of the data consistently supports the grounding elements surveyed.

The grounding result for each category is the product of the grounding completeness grade and the consistency grade of the data surveyed. Colour will be used to depict the extent of grounding of each theory category using the following coding:

- 1 = No Apparent Theory Exists = White
- 5 or 10 = Minimal Theory Exists = Yellow
- 50 = Moderate Theory Exists = Orange
- 100 = Substantial Theory Exists = Green

The grading above will be undertaken by comparing the research support found for each predetermined grounding element for each essence, expression and goal category.
5.3.1.1 The Essence Categories

To assist in the grounding process the operational ecclesiology grounding elements and opposing factors for the essence categories (from Figure 67) are reproduced here (see Figure 72):

Figure 72 Essence Grounding Elements and Opposing Factors

5.3.1.1.1 One

In the essence category of oneness we seek a consistent theory of one faith and one people. The Brethren movement’s focus on oneness germinated in the environment of sectarianism. Darby described the situation this way: “The division of the body of Christ was everywhere apparent rather than its unity.” Borlase continued, “the Church is not in a position in which she can exercise in any corporate shape the functions of the body of Christ” (Rowdon 1967:267–68). With the church at large splintering in all directions due to the apostasy of the established church, the Brethren, influenced initially by Groves, sought to find a place where the unity of Christ could be expressed in a non-sectarian way. For the Brethren, unity was not ecclesial conformity, for them conformity to the existing state of the church would only perpetuate its sinful state. For light to be effective it must be seen and for Darby unity within the church must be visible. He felt that “as long as Christians were satisfied with the cultivation of spiritual unity alone, the visible appearance of the Church must remain divided” (Rowdon 1967:269). For Darby, unity was more than a union of churches, this would again only serve to perpetuate the current sad situation, it must be a unity first found in Christ and yet also visible. The pursuit of unity was for Darby a matter of obedience, to not pursue it was to disobey God’s command. The Brethren also saw that a unity based around a creedal system promoted an intellectual unity which may not penetrate the heart. They saw the current state of the established church as emanating from this very problem. A creed or confession was also viewed as a barrier to free communion with all Christians and as being the instrument responsible for the schismatic state of the dissenting churches.
The Brethren felt that the basis for unity was to be found in and with Christ. For the individual, it was a life of sacrifice united with Christ in his death, dead to the world and to self. For the church, Darby found the solution in Matthew 18 “Where two or three gather together in My name, there am I in the midst of them.” He placed this verse within the context of communion, which was taken as the outward symbol of union with Christ and simultaneously as the visible symbol of the unity of the church. “Thus in his ‘manifesto’ of 1828, Darby wrote not only of the gatherings of ‘two or three’ but also of the partaking of the Lord’s Supper as ‘the outward symbol and instrument of unity’ since it is the commemoration of the death of Christ which is the means of ‘gathering together in one, the children of God who are scattered abroad’” (Rowdon 1967:288). For this reason it was important to the early Brethren that the Lord’s Supper be open to all Christian believers irrespective of their particular points of view on doctrine. This communion event was oneness at work. As Darby says, “You are nothing, nobody, but Christians, and the moment you cease to be an available mount for communion for any consistent Christian, you will go to pieces or help the evil” (Darby n.d.:18). For the Brethren, unity was paramount and the acceptance of all became one of the most attractive attributes of the movement early on. Unity was to be found in Christ, and expressed in the Lord’s Supper. But questions remained. Who does Christ accept? What constitutes a consistent Christian, and is purity essential to unity? And so the movement developed the theology of oneness and unity further.

On oneness and the church, Groves essentially followed Ignatius, “Wherever Jesus Christ is, there is the Catholic Church” (Ignatius in “Epistle of Ignatius to the Smyrnaeans” in Roberts 1996:90) and Irenaeus, “For where the church is there is the Spirit of God; and where the Spirit of God is, there is the Church ...” (Irenaeus in “Irenaeus against heresies” in Roberts 1996:458). For Groves, as with many of the early Brethren, the unity of the church was to be found only in Christ. “Now believing as we do, that the constitution of the family of God was a collection of several households of the faithful, all united by the bond of a common life to a common head – the Lord Jesus Christ” (Coad 1968:120). Unity for Groves was based “not in any form of human system but because Jesus is one” (Groves and Groves 1869:46).
Later, for Darby, as a result of his developing remnant theology, it became different; unity and separation from evil went together. He writes, regarding being in the world, “there cannot be union of which the Holy God is the centre and power but by separation from it. Separation is the first element of unity and union” (Darby 1971a:358). Unity for Darby became connected to not only the Lord’s Supper but with visible separation. One must bear in mind that these questions were considered within the context of what the Brethren saw as the apostate state of the church. Therefore, for Darby, discipline and purity became increasingly an important focus of his leading. Darby sought to withdraw from any sign of sin or evil or worldly system. Therefore, his answers to the question were along the lines of, Christ accepts those who obey and strive to be pure, removing themselves from the effects of the world.

Seeing the dangerous direction of Darby’s efforts to separate from all whom he determined to be evil, Groves replied, “I would infinitely rather bear with all their evils, than separate from their good” (Coad 1968:25). This Open Brethren position is reflected in Müller’s address given in 1863:

> Yet, while we hold fast the truth, all the truth which we consider we have been instructed in from the Holy Scriptures, we must ever remember, that it is not the degree of knowledge to which believers have attained which should unite them, but the common spiritual life they have in Jesus; that they are purchased by the blood of Jesus; members of the same family; going to the Father’s house – soon to be all there: and by reason of the common life they have, brethren should dwell together in unity. It is the will of the Father, and of that blessed One who laid down His life for us, that we should love one another. (Coad 1968:275)

Historically the basis for oneness within many Brethren churches was a combination of Darby and Müller’s position. Although initially the Open Brethren position on unity followed the work of Müller’s and Groves more closely - in accepting all who Christ accepts, the practice of unity found its basis early on in the spirituality of the believer, where Darby placed it. “As Darby developed his theology of the church in ruin, as well as his concept of separation from evil, God’s principle of unity – the Lord’s Supper - became not a symbol of unity but more of purity” (Smith 1986:87).

The Brethren therefore have pursued oneness in faith. However, due to the widespread insistence on purity, both in life an in doctrine, this oneness in faith, is not necessarily oneness in Christ, but oneness derived from a purity or uniformity in faith. And thus the idea of being one people in Christ has fractured into being unified around uniformity and purity. The result is that while the idea of any faith is rejected outright, the concept of one faith and one people is reduced
to our faith and our people. While we must say that there is a general consensus surrounding the idea of one faith, the ideas around one people are disparate and lacking depth. Therefore according to our grading system we can say that the grounding completeness of oneness is moderate (only the element of one faith is present) while the theory consistency (for one faith) is substantive. As a result we assess the grounded theory of oneness to be moderate (50% * 100 = 50). We could express the historical theology of the Brethren with respect to oneness as “our one faith.”

5.3.1.1.2 Holy

In the essence category of holiness we seek a consistent theory of personal holiness and relational holiness. From their perspective, the Brethren, were caught between the apostasy of the church on one hand and the ideal unattainable apostolic Christianity on the other. So what were they to do? According to them the apostasy of the church made looking “for a restoration of that (apostolic) symmetry which has been so entirely destroyed ... a vain hope.” The response according to Borlase was, “Nothing but sorrow and abasement of heart ... and the more they have of His Spirit the more it will be their feeling” (Borlase in Callahan 1996:187). For Borlase, like Darby and the majority of the leaders of the movement at that time (Callahan 1996:189), the constant position of the Christian was to separate from evil and from all forms of ecclesial organisation, and actively pursue a life of imitation. For Groves, “imitation was the means to God’s blessing, in personal as well as ecclesial piety – imitating Jesus was the basis for Christian devotedness ... and imitating apostolic practice was the basis for godly Christian ministry” (Groves in Callahan 1996:163). Holiness is then equated to right belief, the imitation of Christ in life, and the visible separation from evil. Ecclesial “piety is then equated with obedience to the ecclesial ideal of reclaiming the primitive church life or principles found in the New Testament and by rejecting the accumulated history of Christendom” (Callahan 1996:218). Holiness was viewed as an individual’s visible spirituality expressed predominantly in belief, separation from evil, and personal and ecclesial obedience.

Holiness was largely viewed as the domain of the individual and the Holy Spirit; as a process of self-nurture. Structured approaches to discipleship and nurture were largely overlooked due to, the resistance of any structure, the belief in the spontaneous work of the Holy Spirit, and the firm belief in the imminent return of Christ. With the private nature of holiness among the Brethren, between you and the Spirit, elements of holiness that foster relational maturity are also largely ignored.
While having a definite theory of holiness grounded in right belief, right action, and right ecclesial practice, Brethren holiness was more conformative than relational, more practice than positional. Yes they seek to image Christ; however, their allegiance is more in rejecting the world and conforming to ecclesial practices, rather than a relational connecting to one another that flows from a oneness in Christ. Therefore, there exists a theory of holiness, but a theory that is not grounded fully in Christ; it is not based on full allegiance to Christ which incorporates a relational holiness that would free the church toward unity, openness, and engagement with the world. Their theory tends toward personal righteousness, purity and a rejection of the world. We conclude that the grounding completeness of holiness is moderate (only the element of personal holiness is present) while a holiness theory consistency (for personal holiness) is substantive. As a result we assess the grounded theory of holiness to be moderate (50% * 100 = 50). We could express the historical theology of the Brethren with respect to holiness as “personal holiness.”

5.3.1.1.3 Open

In the essence category of openness we seek a consistent theory of communal love and an inviting kingdom focus. The principle of openness normally flows from the nature of oneness and unity. With unity expressed in the terms of, “Where Christ was, there was a valid local church” (Coad 1968:276), or as Groves put it “to receive all, as Christ receives them, to the glory of God the Father” (Groves and Groves 1869:409), openness followed easily. Groves along with those who became known as the Open Brethren initially sought to embrace the whole church, which Newton believed Acts 20:28 described as “all for whom Christ had died.”

A change of emphasis relating to unity and the openness of the Brethren to all was observed in the late 1830’s. The move was from that of “the earliest Brethren who had sought to demonstrate positively the truth of the unity of Christian believers ... to witness against what they felt to be error in the churches” (Embley in Callahan 1996:97). This shift was then exacerbated when Darby and his followers prioritised separation from evil over the acceptance of others. This resulted in the writing of a pamphlet which was titled Separation from evil God’s principle of unity (Coad 1968:121; Groves and Groves 1869:410). According to Callahan this negativity became synonymous with the identity of the Brethren from then on. They became open to those only with whom they were in agreement, standing separate from other churches and the world.

History records that the Open Brethren, who followed Groves, followed the call to accept all who Christ accepts. And being known as the Open Brethren following the split of 1848 one would
expect openness to be the hallmark of the movement. This is specifically true in relation to the communion of believers at the Lord’s Supper, all who believe are accepted. However, the wide influence of Darby with his desire for separation has impeded the local church’s willingness to be open to other churches and in many places even to other Open Brethren congregations. The initial Brethren openness was replaced with an air of scepticism of others. And so openness became limited to those who are in full agreement in faith and practice.

It cannot generally be said that the Brethren had an inviting kingdom position. In many places a closed inward focus was allowed to rule. Therefore one must conclude that there is no completeness (with no element existing) and no consistent grounded theory relating to openness. At best one could conclude that there existed an environment of guarded, filtered, or sceptical openness. As a result we assess the grounded theory of openness to be not apparent (10% * 10 = 1). We could express the historical theology of the Brethren with respect to openness as “sceptical.”

5.3.1.1.4 Sign

In the essence category of sign we seek a consistent theory of gospel presence and gospel confession. In 1830, Groves stated that the “two great objects of the Church in the latter days, independent of growing herself into the stature of the fullness of Christ, seem to me to be the publication of the testimony of Jesus in all lands, and the calling out of the sheep of Christ who may be imprisoned in all the Babylonish systems that are in the world” (Groves and Groves 1869:91). In Darby’s opinion those who have a premillennial understanding and believe in Christ’s imminent return have a stronger motivation for mission, as they seek to gather out the elect from the world before the coming judgement (Darby 1971b:25). For Groves, Darby, and others, mission was paramount.

Their premillennial view combined with a belief in the imminent return of Christ produced a missional fervour which while enthusiastic and productive was largely devoid of social reform. The Brethren “decried what they regarded as the attempts of missionary societies to convert the world by human agency, and placed little value upon efforts to introduce measures for social reform” (Grass 2006:102). Mission therefore largely “became a rescue mission to save a few souls from the coming destruction” (Grass 2006:103). Müller provided an exception, incorporating a theology of presence and social justice into his mission among the orphans. He saw his mission as providing an opportunity for bringing “glory to God by providing a practical outlet of faith that
demonstrated God’s power in real circumstances” (Müller in Yeager 2006:126). Müller provides us with an example of what could have been if such full openness and presence held sway. The result, affected by the theology of separation from the world, was for the Brethren to be a confessional sign, actively involved in mission through proclamation to save the lost, but not to immerse oneself into the world as a presence to transform for the kingdom.

There existed a substantive theory of confession but not of presence; mostly a heart for the gospel by word not an accompanying heart for the people. Therefore, there exists a theory of sign, but a theory that is connected to confession alone, and largely excludes any theory of sign as presence in the world. We conclude that the grounding completeness of sign is moderate (the element of confession is present) while the sign theory consistency (for confession) is substantive. As a result we assess the grounded theory of sign to be moderate (50% * 100 = 50). We could express the historical theology of the Brethren with respect to sign as “word sign.”

5.3.1.1.5 Ordered

In the essence category of ordered we seek a consistent theory of clear direction and empowering body life. The early movement was chiefly taken with practicing soteriological unity rather than belonging to any order. They rejected any structure and anything that was put in place by man. Groves said, “As for order, if it be God’s order, let it stand; but if it be man’s order, I must examine whether or not it excludes the essence of Christ’s kingdom; for if it does, I remember that word, ‘Call no man master upon earth; for one is your Master, even Christ, and all ye are brethren’” (Groves and Groves 1869:49). Craik however, initially took a less reactionary and more reflective approach and confessed, “I am disposed readily to admit that there are passages in the inspired writings that seem, to some extent to favour a species of Episcopacy; others that may appear to support Presbyterianism; very many, again, that uphold Congregationalism, and others, as clearly teaching what may be described as less systematic than any of the above organisations…. It appears to me that the early Churches were not, in all places, similarly constituted” (Craik 1863:3–4). But Craik’s view expressed here was in the minority, and it appears he also drifted toward what became known as the Spirit appointed approach where any order was to emanate firstly from the Spirit under Christ. Craik, Müller, and Newton stated, “in post-apostolic times, the assembly was to recognise Spirit-appointed elders by acknowledging their gifts and submitting to them” (Dickson 2002:149–50). Craik summarises the position of the Brethren in stating:
A more fully developed church-organization and official position were introduced as occasion called for them. Common life in Christ was the one essential requisite for fellowship. Organisation, ministry, discipline derived all their importance from their relation to that life and its healthy manifestation. Order was secondary to spiritual vitality; legitimate and desirable, if it aided that, but worse than worthless if permitted to hinder its vigour or its growth. (Craik 1863:24).

For the Brethren, the Spirit did not approve of nor could he use any structure. Darby categorically rejected any form of a clerical class that is humanly appointed because it replaces dependence on the Holy Spirit and assumes the role and authority of the Holy Spirit (Darby 1971a:40–41). Furthermore, the appointment of the clergy by the state under the parochial system entailed the church’s involvement with a world which had rejected God” (Grass 2006:100). The Brethren “portrayed all forms of ordination as merely human appointments that were clearly a displacement of the role of the Holy Spirit in ministry through gifted believers” (Callahan 1996:57). The Holy Spirit qualifies and the Holy Spirit appoints, any human achievement, appointment, or structure was viewed as against the Spirit.

Müller was convinced that having examined the New Testament “there should be no dichotomy between clergy and ordinary members of the congregation. Instead, Müller believed in the priesthood of all believers and the freedom of all church members to speak what God had placed in their hearts” (Yeager 2006:28). With their rejection of any formal structure and the embrace of the concept of the priesthood of all believers the clergy laity mindset was replaced. Harris states, “The Church itself is God’s clergy.” He continues, “The presence of God’s Spirit constitutes the Church; and His gift to any individual, alone qualifies him for office in the Church” (Harris in Callahan 1996:56–57). The removal of the clergy was replaced by, in their eyes, “God’s design for ministry, that advocated within the apostolic church, namely, the service of the entire believing congregation” (Callahan 1996:58), as the priesthood of all believers.

With the absence of a binding structure the Brethren saw that each local church is an “entity in itself and a unity; it is bound to other churches in other towns by bonds of love, but it is unable

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38 While the theology of the priesthood of all believers is embraced in principle, in practice it was originally only the men who were invited to speak in corporate gatherings. At the inception of the movement the churches were united on this “men only” participation position. Given the context of the day this position created little discussion, however, it has created much discussion and division more recently with the result that today gender participation practices vary from church to church.
either to rule them or to be ruled by them” (Ellison 1963:20). Thus each church viewed itself as autonomous. This autonomy, over time moved to complete independence and the binding love that Ellison speaks of between churches eroded. Coad, reflecting on the autonomous independent nature of the Open Brethren, believed:

Ironically, the very looseness of the independent structure prevents the independents’ ideals being fully developed among themselves…. [T]he full release of the gifts and powers of every member of the Body of Christ, and many of the most effective expressions of Christian devotion in ministration to the desperate material and spiritual needs of mankind are normally beyond the scope of an unorganised collection of independent congregations. So too are some important expressions of visible Christian unity, and (some would add, though less convincingly) so has in the past been the safeguarding of the historic faith. (Coad 1968:283)

The Brethren rejected any form of structure as human and unspiritual and embraced spontaneous vitality as of the Spirit and as spiritual. While the embrace of spontaneity released the gifts, specifically those of a teaching nature, it reduced the ability for leadership to provide clear direction for fear of erring from the Spirit into the human. The autonomous nature of the local church which transformed into independence, served to reduce the strength and fuller expression of the body. The Brethren have adopted a theology of the priesthood of all believers without a clear theology of leadership. Therefore, while the gifts are mostly embraced they are not always empowered or encouraged through clear direct leadership. This can result in a body life that is chaotic or confusing, being unclear for fear of human direction, or stifling, with a lack of freedom due to unwritten expectations which are to be more discerned rather than being clearly made known.

Therefore, we must conclude that there is no grounded theory of order (no element exists) but rather a pursuit of Spirit freedom and autonomy. Any order theory that exists is unclear, nondirective, and inconsistent. As a result we assess the grounded theory of order to be not apparent (10% * 10 = 1). We could express the historical theology of the Brethren with respect to order as “autonomy.”
5.3.1.2  The Expression Categories

Now our attention turns to the examination of the historical referential expression categories. To assist in the grounding process the operational ecclesiology grounding elements and opposing factors for the expression categories (from Figure 67) are reproduced here (see Figure 73):

![Figure 73 Expression Grounding Elements and Opposing Factors]

5.3.1.2.1  Unifying Worship

In the expression category of unifying worship we seek a consistent theory of unifying corporate worship that is God focussed. With respect to oneness and unity the Brethren always struggled between the openness of Groves and the “remnant mentality”39 (Coad 1968:280) of Darby which influenced some Brethren circles to move the grace of God into an “admission to an exclusive club” (Coad 1968:280). According to Neatby, “In his evolutions, Darby ended at a point exactly opposite to that from which he started. He began ... with universal communion, and ended with universal excommunication” (Neatby 1901:59). The defining characteristic that distinguishes the Darbyite or Exclusive Brethren from the Open Brethren is the continued offering of communion by the latter to “any and all Christians wishing to partake of communion” (Yeager 2006:45). For Groves, the only point of consideration should be “to look for Christ in another, and His Spirit in each congregation, and when they are found, to recognise the man as my true brother in Christ, and the congregation as a true church of the living God” (Coad 1968:280).

Certainly faith in Christ was the basic starting point for any expression of unity. However, with oneness being connected to soteriology alone, the idea of unity expressed in purity was introduced, which limited any pursuit of a visible active expression of unity. According to Coad,
the “Brethren chose to build their church life at the precise spot where the tension between the ideals of unity and of purity was felt the most severely” (Coad 1968:246). The Darbyite exclusives chose purity as a marker of those within the remnant. The Open Brethren chose a more “stable middle course, and they have done so only because their strict independency has allowed the idealistic freedoms of the early movement to remain alive, despite oppressive beliefs and conduct in individual local churches” (Coad 1968:246). Nevertheless, according to Callahan, “Their concern for ecclesial piety was dependent upon a soteriological principle of union, but real and discernible Christian union was not therefore accomplished or viewed as axiomatic” (Callahan 1996:210). With regard to visible unity, “The underlying principle that this group agreed upon was Christian unity through participation in the Lord’s supper, which Groves first suggested might take place without a minister” (Yeager 2006:18). The focal point of expressing their unity of faith, as with most things Brethren, was the celebration of the Lord’s Supper.

The primary expression of unity of one faith was corporate worship centred on communion, because it is the only regular act of worship expressly commanded in the New Testament. Holy Communion, the Lord’s Supper, or as they increasingly came to call it, “the Breaking of Bread, became the centre of their spiritual fellowship; unless there were good reasons to the contrary, it was celebrated every Sunday” (Ellison 1963:15). According to Grass, the Brethren embraced a “distinctive approach to corporate worship which centred on the Breaking of the Bread and stressed the Spirit’s leading ...” (Grass 2006:98). Essentially for the early Brethren, worship was synonymous with the celebration of the Lord’s Supper as both a Scriptural and an apostolic practice.

Gathering around the table was considered to be both the core of corporate worship and of the unity found in Christ. It was to be a visible expression of the oneness of a shared faith found in Christ. If you had faith you belonged to the one people of God and you would gather in such a manner. However, while this produced a corporate visible expression of a oneness of “our faith,” it did not produce any further observable expression of all belonging together as one people before God. The Brethren withdrawal from the world resulted in the church drawing back from an embrace of a wider God focussed oneness, the embrace of all who are one in Christ, being all Christians. Therefore, we can say that a substantial theory of the expression of unifying worship exists, but it is restricted to the corporate gathering of those with like faith and practice, being the faithful. We conclude that the grounding completeness of unifying worship is moderate (only the element of corporate worship is present) while unifying worship theory consistency is substantive.
(for corporate worship). As a result we assess the grounded theory of unifying worship to be moderate \((50\% \times 100 = 50)\). We could express the historical theology of the Brethren with respect to unifying worship as “gathering for communion.”

5.3.1.2.2 Sanctifying Nurture

In the expression category of sanctifying nurture we seek a consistent theory of maturing life and maturing relationships. The Brethren movement firmly believed that the Holy Spirit should be their teacher rather than the clergy of the established church. The thought was that any system is manmade and therefore replaces the work of the Holy Spirit. “Any prearrangement and advanced preparation was considered a practical denial of the Holy Spirit’s leading” (Smith 1986:92). The work of the Holy Spirit among them was believed to be experienced in the spontaneous exhortations by members from within the midst of those gathered. The Holy Spirit would edify the people as he saw fit to exercise the gifts among his people. Thus the early Brethren movement endeavoured to lay aside all forms of structure or planning, for this would be a hindrance to and foreign to the work of the Holy Spirit among them. The Brethren would then gather in the name of the Lord and wait upon the Holy Spirit to lead them and edify them spontaneously as he saw fit from those gathered there. Initially this was the pattern for any meeting that they held. Eventually this pattern was dropped from other meetings but remained the central theme of practice in the Lord’s Supper meeting. This approach was seen to be the answer to formal and lifeless services of the established church, where the life of the Holy Spirit could scarcely be found. In the context in which the Brethren movement began, this approach provided immense freedom and gave much needed life to the church.

However, equating spontaneity with the work of the Holy Spirit also precluded any planned discipleship, or the seeking after training or formal biblical education. These were seen as a denial of the work of the Spirit and therefore only the work of man. “The ironic fact is that almost all the early Brethren leaders had been trained ... some as top-rated scholars” (Smith 1986:92), and that it may just have been the theological training which gave rise to the founders being able to discern the need for a new path for the church. This stance against planning and training had little effect on the biblical teaching within the church during the lifetime of the founders. However, although other cultural factors have compounded the problem, over generations the result of this

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40 That is the men who were gathered. See the footnote 35 for more on this.
anti-education stance has taken its toll on the biblical scholarship, depth of leadership and therefore the deep nurturing of the movement.

Grass adds that for many the “immanence of the Second Coming and the consequent urgency of the commission to preach the gospel precluded the adoption of any kind of long-term strategy for reaching an area. Early Brethren reacted against the postmillennial hope which had motivated eighteenth-century missionary pioneers such as William Carey, believing that their task was simply to rescue a few individuals from the Babylon of apostate religion” (Grass 2006:109). Coad also suggests that, because of the widely held belief that the Second Coming was imminent, “a church living so near to its removal from the scene of its activities has no need to create the structure of an enduring teaching ministry” (Coad 1968:56). The fact that today there is little evidence of planned, deliberate, long term focussed sanctifying nurture among the Brethren, is also confirmation that this position was widely believed and strongly influenced the movement.

Given the factors mentioned above there appears to be no substantive theory relating to ongoing sanctifying nurture (no elements exist) with the expression of holiness being restricted to faith and practice compliance rather than an ongoing environment that deepens and orients life and relationships toward God and others. We conclude that no wider sustaining nurture theory exists while there is substantive consistency in the call for life and practice compliance. As a result we assess the grounded theory of sanctifying nurture to be minimal (10% * 100 = 10). We could express the historical theology of the Brethren with respect to sustaining nurture as “compliance.”

5.3.1.2.3 Embracing Community

In the expression category of embracing community we seek a consistent theory of loving community that actively embraces others. For Groves and many of the early Brethren including Müller, Craik, and Chapman, there was an unwillingness to exclude themselves from any Christian from any church. “So long as we judge Christ to be dwelling with a man, that is our warrant for receiving him” (Groves and Groves 1869:534). Groves position was, “I desire to love all that love Him” (Groves and Groves 1869:49). And according to Callahan initially the early movement scheduled their meetings to “accommodate the diversity of participants” (Callahan 1996:15). Initially there was a posture of relational acceptance of all.

However, increasingly Darby and others insisted on separation from the corrupt established churches. Wigram puts it this way that “it is by realising the power of our union with Christ that
we shall separate from the world, and this will unite us to one another” (cited in Grass 2006:93). Newton taught, “true believers were always a small remnant who separated themselves from the professing church” (Grass 2006:93). This separation was more than action; it was seen as a virtue, essential to their holiness, and crippling to openness and the embracing of the wider church community.

While the Open Brethren took a more moderate position the expression of openness among the Brethren was never full. It was generally marred by the scepticism of others, especially those from other denominations. Accept and embrace all became accept and embrace only those who are determined to be acceptable. This environment precluded a full kingdom mindset and impeded the development of an embracing community offering relational grace to all. Such a stance fed: the scepticism of other churches, non-association stances, and the reluctance to engage meaningfully with the wider Christian community or indeed the world. Along with the lack of theory of open embrace there was also no consistent theory for being a loving community aside from the desire to belong with those with whom they agreed. And acceptance by faith agreement did not necessarily translate into loving community. Therefore one must conclude that there is no complete and no consistent grounded theory relating to being an engaging community. At best one could conclude that a selective embrace was exercised widely among the Brethren. As a result we assess the grounded theory of embracing community to be not apparent (10% * 10 = 1). We could express the historical theology of the Brethren with respect to embracing community as “selective fellowship.”

5.3.1.2.4 Signifying Witness

In the expression category of signifying witness we seek a consistent theory of public witness and personal concern. The Brethren rejection of structure also resulted in their rejection of structured mission through missionary societies. This thrust them into a mission by faith situation, which gave them more missional freedom than their counterparts. This may account for the quick spread of the movement into many nations, to the point that today the movement exists in 128 countries and territories with over 2.1 million adult adherents (Newton 2015:xxiv).

While mission was largely seen as confessional proclamational, to win souls for Christ before the imminent return, mission also initially extended to include service to the underprivileged. From the outset the principle of sacrificial living and of living to serve others, was expressed and practiced among the Brethren. Although the Brethren church initially began with ex-clergy and
associates, many who were rich, the movement soon became a movement for the people, including the poor and oppressed. Members considered that it was their duty to give up much to meet the needs of the poor in the name of Christ. They “renounced the possessions, pleasures and status of the world” (Dowley 2013:452). This became a defining mark of the early Brethren.

As Groves stated, “It was the duty of every one to give up all for Christ absolutely and unreservedly” (Groves and Groves 1869:18). This attitude is exemplified in the life of Groves, who spent his days on the mission field, and by the work of Müller among children and orphans. “Groves, Darby and others renounced wealth, comfort and worldly prospects in order to pursue a vocation of self-denial as missionaries abroad or at home” (Rowdon 1967:304). The established church had become to a large extent a class symbol. It represented the higher classes of society. One aligned oneself with the established church in order to move up in society. The sectarian movement of the time also served to create a club atmosphere alienating the poor and oppressed. Against this church culture, the Brethren movement refused state money and systems of raising money such as pew rents, preferring to trust God for all provisions. Their desire to serve and reach others went largely unmatched.

However, as Darby’s doctrine of separation from the world gained influence, the movement’s sacrificial living for others began to become tainted by the separatist attitude to the world, which also meant giving up anything that was seen as worldly. How subtle the shift was. What began as surrender to God in service, with and among the people, counting nothing for themselves, changed to withdrawal from the world and its things in order to count themselves as pure. The focus toward others began to turn inward toward self. In reply to this tendency within the movement, Groves stated: “If ever there was a witness for God on earth, that witness was Jesus, and He never separated Himself from the synagogues; and this, if it proves nothing more, proves that separation is not the only way of witness, and yet He was emphatically ‘separate from sinners,’ not from their persons or their assemblies, but separate from their sins” (Coad 1968:264).

There is no doubt that the Brethren movement was and remains mission minded. Newton suggests, “no other group (with the exception of the Moravians in the previous century) had given mission the priority which the early Brethren did” (Grass 2006:108). Without taking away from the long and distinguished history of mission among the Brethren, their witness expression, due partly to the withdrawal from the world mentality, still remains largely word based. Their witness
was expressed predominantly through public proclamation and confession not by being presence driven or holistic.

Therefore, one must conclude that while there is a consistent theory of public witness by proclamation of the word, there is no accompanying theory of witness through personal concern and presence. As a result we assess the apparent grounded theory of signifying witness to be moderate (the element of public witness is substantively present) (50% * 100 = 50). We could express the historical theology of the Brethren with respect to signifying witness as “proclamation.”

5.3.1.2.5 Sustaining Leading

In the expression category of sustaining leading we seek a consistent theory of clear governance that provides an empowering gift strategy. Due to the rejection of a clergy class there was no trend of appointing pastors in the churches and according to Bellett the earliest gatherings of the Brethren were conducted with no apparent consideration of formal leadership. “In a little time no appointed or recognised eldership was understood to be in the midst of us, and all service was of a free character, the presence of God through the Spirit being more simply believed and used” (Callahan 1996:52). This rejection of order came from the belief that structure and order belonged to the domain of human wisdom. Harris argued that “In a word, an Establishment is in theory the attempt of man’s wisdom to do God’s work in its own way” (Harris in Callahan 1996:78). Groves, also later rejecting structure, believed that “each individual church should send out its own missionaries, responsible to itself, in contrast to the contemporary organisation of societies” (Coad 1968:120). Anything seen as pertaining to the establishment was considered as standing against the work of the Holy Spirit. Darby drew a “distinction between the actions of men and the actions of the Spirit. The arranged and formal became equated with that which was ‘of man,’ and the spontaneous and informal with that which was ‘of the Spirit’” (Coad 1968:125) On this position Coad writes, “Darby and his fellows took little account of the personal self-discipline and order which their own years of schooling within a formal structure had developed within them. In their own self-discipline they saw nothing of the results of the influence upon them of years of outward order, but only the fruits of a spontaneous grace of the Spirit” (Coad 1968:125). In this regard Darby considered that Christians should lay hold of the promise that wherever two or three gather in the name of Christ he is present. Christians should wait upon the Lord and nothing more. Because of the supposed ruin of the church, “To choose presidents or pastors is to organise a church, and even the appointment of elders is now impossible. The only
government of the church was the acknowledgement of the Spirit of God” (Coad 1968:127). However, Groves disagreed with this approach believing strongly that such a position is nothing more than the “urging on of our own spirits” (Groves and Groves 1869:420).

In contrast, some like Müller and Craik functioned as pastors alongside a group of elders. “This meant that a group of elders shared leadership...; Müller and Craik did not lead by themselves.... Eventually pastor-led congregations disappeared altogether among the early Open Brethren” (Yeager 2006:100). The Plymouth church considered it “to be right to appoint an Elder for preserving order in the assemblies.... The appointment of an elder was particularly, I believe, in connexion with ministry in the assembly; at least when appointed he was expected to exercise an especial oversight in that particular” (Coad 1968:124). Concurring with Plymouth, Groves states, “For myself I would join no Church permanently that had not some constituted rule. I have seen enough of that plan, of everyone doing what is right in his own eyes, and then calling it the Spirit’s order, to feel assured it is a delusion” (Groves and Groves 1869:420). Müller and Craik themselves, “After a two-week retreat to consider church order (February 1839) ... concluded that the church should be governed by a plurality of elders” (Vogl and Fish 1999:28). Governance through plurality of elders became the norm for the Open Brethren.

While the practice of appointing elders grew, the focus on the priesthood of all believers remained strong. The axiom underlying this principle is that God gifts all believers and all should therefore be free to exercise those gifts to benefit the church body. The initial movement in this direction was a movement toward freedom away from form and restriction. The original members of the Brethren movement were highly educated, many of them trained as church clergy in the Church of England system. They felt that the established church and the clergy system restricted the work of the Holy Spirit. By restricting those who could minister in the church to clergy only, the Brethren believed that the work of the Spirit in the church was being stifled. Thus the early founders sought a freedom of expression of gifts within the church. Accordingly the Brethren were united in their “understanding of local leadership which dispensed with the need for ordination as a prerequisite for ministry” (Grass 2006:98). Ordination and its associated training processes were viewed as manmade, unbiblical, of the world, and therefore unnecessary. “Groves came to the conclusion that academic qualifications were unnecessary for a missionary; in fact, training, ordination, and subscription to the 39 Articles would actually conflict with the teachings of the New Testament” (Callahan 1996:3). The Brethren rejection of ordination led to the rejection of any formal training being essential for ministry. “The point with them was, that
they had liberty from God to use whatever gifts the Holy Ghost might have bestowed on any, irrespective of human ordination or appointment” (Tregelles in Callahan 1996:55). This of course is true, the Holy Spirit can use anyone irrespective of training or position. However, this principle in practice created an anti-intellectual stance. Rather than creating freedom for the Holy Spirit it created a barrier to further and formal learning which has diluted the knowledge, understanding, and wisdom of the movement.

The Brethren reaction to ordination and structure, their association of structure with the human and therefore the world, their association of spontaneity with the Spirit, and the belief that the second coming was imminent and therefore required immediate action rather than enduring guided ministry, worked against significant consideration being given to sustaining leading. The priesthood of all emphasis, precluded an emphasis on leadership, as all were encouraged to use their gifts. “That implied that in very large measure, apart from the care taken by the elders that the unseemly was avoided, there was no formal leadership in their meetings” (Ellison 1963:15). In practice, however, leadership commonly existed in the form of a plurality of elders whose primary role was to ensure that the spiritual life, belief and practice of the church continued in accordance with Scripture until Christ returns. One would have to conclude that while the practice of the priesthood of believers meant that the gifts were embraced, there was neither a clear church polity nor a strategy for gift development, empowerment or deployment to advance the church and the kingdom, aside from individuals relying on the Holy Spirit for guidance and direction. At best leadership was directed toward maintaining personal faith and ecclesial practice, until Christ comes. A consistent corporate understanding of substantive leadership that sustains and grows the church is lacking. As a result we assess the grounded theory of order to be not apparent (10% * 10 = 1). We could express the historical theology of the Brethren with respect to sustaining leading as “informal maintenance.”

5.3.1.3 The Goal Categories

To say the Brethren are not eschatologically focussed would be wrong. Within their theology thoughts of the end play a large part. End times theology is key to the concept of the church as a remnant. And it is this very concept which led the Brethren to believe that the restoration of the existing apostate dispensation was never an option (Newton and Borlase in Callahan 1996:200). For them simple obedience and waiting for the Lord was the only response of the faithful remnant
(Callahan 1996:201). As Darby said, “It was not God’s will that it be restored to its primitive glory” (Darby 1971a:142). Thus their eschatological focus remained one of faithfulness until the end, rather than being energised to be a sign of the end now. Their eyes remained on right life and right practice now, rather than on seeking to constantly move toward becoming now something of the perfection that is to come. So in one sense they firmly held the end in sight, but without the end becoming a guide and goal for the present. As Callahan suggests, the Brethren while guided were to a great extent goalless. “Set adrift by severing themselves from contemporary and historic Christendom, the Brethren sailed by the guidance of the star known as the apostolic church. But that star was not their goal or destination or home, only their infallible guide” (Callahan 1996:213–14). With such a lack of an overall eschatological goal it is only possible to make sketches of the ecclesial goals of the Brethren movement in relation to each essence category and relational line.

To assist in the grounding process the operational ecclesiology grounding elements for the goal categories (from Figure 67) are reproduced here (see Figure 74):

![Figure 74  Goal Grounding Elements](image)

### 5.3.1.3.1 United with God

In the goal category of being united with God we seek a consistent theory of united faith and united people. Given the influence of remnant theology and the desire to abandon the apostate church and any potential apostate churches and individuals, how did they expect such separation to accomplish any oneness or unity of the church? Their response was,

that God would accomplish what he willed for the church; their duty was to obey God’s word, to separate from ecclesial evil and apostasy, and to recognise the soteriological unity of salvation – that which is God’s doing, not theirs. They were not called to erect a façade called the church, or to set themselves up as the church the Bible speaks of. The
Brethren abandoned the piety of restorationism in favour of a piety of primitivism. (Callahan 1996:192)

What was left was a goal of soteriological oneness. According to Darby, “the true church of God was, those that were united to Christ in heaven ...” (Darby n.d.:515). Agreeing, Tregelles explained in his tract, The Blood of the Lamb and the Union of the Saints, our union in heaven is based on having been washed in the blood of the Lamb. And therefore, this basis for our heavenly union “is quite sufficient for our union on earth; and even as we shall then be manifested on that ground, so ought we now stand manifestly joined together on that alone” (cited in Grass 2006:92). The goal then of such soteriological oneness was a unity expressed through gathering in accordance with Scripture. The goal became to faithfully gather as Christ centred people in accordance with the apostolic practice of Scripture.

We find an exception in Müller, who pursued a larger almost eschatological expression of unity. He states, “If my brethren differ from me, I must not say, ‘It is a matter of no moment;’ neither should I say, ‘I shall never know this or that truth,’ which may not as yet have been revealed in me. Let there be more prayer, more study of the Word, more humility, more acting out what we already know; thus shall we be more united together, not only in love, but in one judgement. There will be no difference in heaven” (Müller 1876:34). He always believed there was possibility for unity and reconciliation.

While exceptions, like Müller and others existed, overwhelmingly the goal of oneness in Christ, having no eschatological orientation to a greater reality, was replaced with gathering now around a uniform faith in Christ and the apostolic ecclesial practice provided in Scripture, centred around the Lord’s Supper. The goal was uniformity of faith in Christ, not unity in Christ, or unity within the larger body of Christ with God. We conclude that while a consistent goal theory for unity of faith exists in the now, key eschatological elements are missing from the goal theory. Thus the completeness of the goal theory of being united with God is minimal at best. As a result we assess the grounded theory of being united with God to be minimal (10% * 100 = 10). We could express the historical theology of the Brethren with respect to the goal of oneness and unity as that of being “uniform” in faith in the present.

5.3.1.3.2 Perfect before God

In the goal category of being perfect before God we seek a consistent theory of perfect image and perfect relationships. The theory of holiness for the Brethren leans toward rejecting the apostate
church, withdrawing from the world and others, and therefore away from loving relational engagement toward personal righteousness and purity. The goal of holiness for the movement is to be personally and as a result corporately untainted and uncompromising in faith and practice rather than being grounded in an ongoing sanctifying nurture that brings personal, relational and corporate maturity with God and others. Thus without any eschatological orientation the completeness of the goal theory of being perfect before God is minimal at best. We conclude that while a consistent goal theory for personal holiness exists, key relational, eschatological, and corporate elements are missing from the goal theory. As a result we assess the grounded theory of being perfect with God to be minimal (10% * 100 = 10). We could express the historical theology of the Brethren with respect to the goal of holiness as that of being “pure,” rather than mature.

5.3.1.3.3 Loving with God

In the goal category of being loving with God we seek a consistent theory of loving community and loving kingdom. In speaking of the goal of openness and of being a loving community within the wider church and also toward others, Groves writes, “Does it not then appear clear that the nearer the principles of the communion of the Church on earth assimilate to those which must finally prevail in the kingdom of heaven, the more perfect they must be? Then what are these principles of heavenly communion? Loving all whom Christ loves because they bear His impress: let this same rule then decide the question as to the subjects of our communion on earth” (Groves and Groves 1869:533). However, from what has been discussed on the essence and expression of openness, such a wide openness goal of being a loving community together with God, as stated by Groves, has been lost.

It appears that the Brethren goal of oneness and holiness have together shaped the goal of openness. A true oneness combined with a holiness that is relationally oriented creates an embracing loving openness to others. A conditional oneness, which is combined with a holiness that lacks a relational orientation and relies on conformity to belief and practice, produces a narrow sceptical filtered openness. The Brethren, while in some places seeking the former, similar to Groves, have tended to restrict openness. Openness became somewhat conditional; the goal of being an open embracing and loving community was reduced to a goal of accepting those who fit into the set pattern of belief and practice. Rather than having a goal of openness and embracing for all, the embrace of the community was restricted to only those who are right. Loving community was expressed and experienced within this framework. But outside, the expression of
being an embracing loving community disappeared. The goal was to be a right community before being a loving community and certainly not a loving kingdom community. Therefore no goal of being open and loving with God exists. As a result we assess the grounded theory of being loving with God to be not apparent (10% * 10 = 1). We could express the historical theology of the Brethren with respect to the goal of openness as that of being a “right community,” rather than of being a loving kingdom community with God.

5.3.1.3.4 Reconciled to God

In the goal category of being reconciled to God we seek a consistent theory of reconciled position and reconciled people. On the goal of witness and mission Groves writes, “I consider the testimony of Jesus is to be published through every land before the Bridegroom comes. This makes my heart feel an interest in heathens, that we may hasten the coming of the Lord” (Groves and Groves 1869:258). This statement by Groves encapsulates the context the early Brethren thought they were in at the time. With the end being so near there was no time for long term strategies, training, or holistic mission (with Müller the notable exception), as many souls (not people) needed to be saved before the return. Indeed the saving of others would bring the immanent coming, which was the ultimate goal of the church. The goal of the Brethren was to ensure people received salvation and had a reconciled position before God spiritually via proclamation. In the main it excluded having a significant personal and presence involvement in social justice and world issues that point to the reconciliation of all things, not only people, to God. The goal was saved souls not a reconciled people or a reconciled world. There exists a consistent theory of word and proclamation only. As a result we assess the grounded theory of being reconciled to God to be moderate (50% * 100 = 50). We could express the historical theology of the Brethren with respect to the goal of sign as that of “saved souls,” rather than of being a reconciled people who are a kingdom sign of all that is to come in Christ.

5.3.1.3.5 Complete with God

In the goal category of being complete with God we seek a consistent theory of the community of faith being completely mature and being a complete body. Coad rightly observes the tension that exists between order and freedom within the Brethren movement: “They face a living contradiction within themselves; how to harness the gifts which God gives them, and at the same time to retain the freedom which is God’s gift, in them, to the church” (Coad 1968:284). The movement has struggled to navigate well between the work of the Spirit and the need for good leadership and governance structures to mature the body of Christ. The tendency has been to
lean away from leadership to reliance on the Spirit, most often viewed as being manifest outside of any structure or order. Bellett wrote in 1829, “no appointed or recognised eldership was understood to be in the midst of us, and all service was of a free character, the presence of God through the Spirit being more simply believed and used” (Lang 1988:153). Leadership since then has often remained informal and nondirective, resulting in the overall lack of a substantive eschatological goal for the church.

Such informality in church governance and leadership leads to abuses of two extremes, “autocratic dictatorship where strong individuals have been present, and democratic disorder elsewhere” (Grass 2006:101; Lang 1988:153). This has often led to the leadership’s goal being to protect and maintain the church, while the Holy Spirit’s role is to lead the church, or to leadership being driven by surface success rather than growth in both dimensions of essence and expression. The goal then of the early elders of the church was more protection from the world and the apostate church, than providing proactive sustaining leadership directed toward a maturing and a completeness of the body. Therefore no consistent theory of being complete with God exists. As a result we assess the grounded theory of being reconciled to God to be not apparent (10% * 10 = 1). We could express the historical theology of the Brethren with respect to the goal of order as that of being “protected.”

5.3.1.4 Summary - Historical Referential Ecclesial Theory

Having completed a basic overview of the historical theology of the early Brethren it is now possible to provide a summary of the grounded theory for each ecclesial dimension and category. The following summary picture (see Figure 75) provides both an important snapshot of the time and also illustrates the importance of the operational ecclesiology model developed.
From this operational ecclesiology summary (see Figure 75) it would be possible to say that the following statement represents the essential characteristics of the historical church:

The church is an autonomous gathering of believers given to an agreed faith, personal holiness, right relationships, and proclaiming the gospel.

The historical referential ecclesiology summary chart (see Figure 75) clearly outlines the theory categories which required historical grounding attention. Of the fifteen categories of ecclesial theory considered none delivered a substantive grounding, only six showed a moderate grounding, three had minimal grounding, and the remaining six had no identifiable grounded theory. Specifically, relationships with other churches which are guided by the theology of openness needed critical attention. Also the body, with its order and leadership categories of the church historically received little attention. It may be concluded that it was this lack of leadership focus that led to the lack of reflection on ecclesiology by the movement in its entirety. The other categories of essence, expression, and goal, all required further work in the historic praxis because, according to the conclusions depicted above, not one category displayed both...
completeness and consistency in both elements of ecclesial theory. Therefore, overall we can say that the historical referential operational ecclesiology of the early Brethren was only grounded to a minimal extent. Our attention now turns to analysing and completing the contemporary picture.

5.3.2 Contemporary Experiential Grounding

To assist the grounding process, the experiential theory ascertained from qualitative research undertaken on the movement in Australia will be placed alongside the historical picture. These two ecclesial theory pictures will form the basis for, and the possibility of, an ongoing conversation to improve the grounding of the operational ecclesiology of the Christian Community Churches of Australia.

A qualitative approach is often employed in the early stages of praxis investigation where only a limited knowledge of the praxis is at hand, in order to grow that body of knowledge. In this current study, because the available body of knowledge relating to the praxis theory in operation is relatively limited, and the goal at this time is to ascertain the nature of the existing praxis, the analysis of the praxis will follow the “what is happening in the practice” (Heyns and Pieterse 1990:76; Osmer 2008:4) approach. Therefore, since we are seeking to develop knowledge about the praxis and compare it to our operational ecclesiology, rather than test its operation, define and explain relationships, or change the praxis, we will employ a qualitative “exploratory-descriptive” (Van der Ven 1998:126) research plan where “Description, interpretation and understanding” (Swinton and Mowat 2006:46) are the key outcomes.

This qualitative approach entails using an empirical method which “consists in establishing a descriptive ... inventory by systematically questioning people about one or more issues” (Van der Ven 1998:127), or in our case the ecclesial categories. The empirical study will consist of semi-structured interviews of church leaders. This entails “asking both open-ended and closed-ended questions in a planned sequence, which is adapted to the emerging flow of the conversation” (Osmer 2008:63). The church leaders will be given structured questions (see Appendix 2) on their views on the movement’s essence, expression, action and goal theory and praxis, and then probed further in relation to their responses for clarification if required. Such an approach requires individual permission to be granted by the respondents and that the material received will be handled anonymously and kept secure for at least ten years.
Based on the research focus and the research questions themselves (Mason 2002:32), I believe the national board of the Christian Brethren movement in Australia, the directors of the Christian Community Churches of Australia Inc. (CCCAust), will provide the best cross section of church leaders who are able to represent and influence the movement in relation to its theological beliefs and practices. The board has representatives from each of the six Australian states and from key para-church organisations. The CCCAust board serves as a representative body for the movement in Australia. This is the population group from which I draw a sample for the empirical case study. At the time of research the board consisted of fourteen members and meets three times a year. As a current member of the national board I have immediate access to all members which means that the data is easily accessible and can be obtained in a timely manner. Seven of the fourteen members agreed to participate and provided a full set of survey data.

This qualitative empirical study, based on the responses of these leaders, will be the basis for developing a basic understanding of the practical theological ecclesiological position of the movement today. The qualitative analysis will serve to describe the current praxis situation within the movement in Australia and thereby enable us to ascertain its ecclesial theory and its current operating praxis, allowing for grounding, integration and alignment reflection, and thereby pose possibilities for future improvement. We now continue the grounding task with focus on the research of the contemporary praxis.

Two comments of a general nature regarding the initial reaction to the survey are relevant. Firstly the task was considered difficult by several in the research group. Thinking in the categories proposed, especially the categories of essence and goal, appeared to be foreign to a large number. This underlines the pragmatic and action focussed thinking that is prevalent within the movement, leading to significant blind praxis problems. And secondly, many of the responses to the essence questions resulted in expression or action responses, and the goal responses were often static or purpose responses rather than future oriented and eschatological.

To reduce the scope and depth of the research the questionnaire sought to probe the participants largely on the presence or absence of the ecclesial categories contained in the operational ecclesiological model and whether each category contained both of the essential elements. Given our qualitative research approach it is possible to combine the completeness of grounding and the consistency of data gathered into one score. We will employ a grounding process similar to before, but because of the greater objectivity of the data a simplified grading system can be used.
First, we will grade each element in each ecclesial category according to its data support using the following colour coding:

- None = Element not mentioned or mentioned only once = White
- Minimal = Minority support for element = Yellow
- Substantive = Majority support for element = Green

The grounding grade for each element will then be combined to provide a single grade for each ecclesial category using the following approach:

- None – Where no grounding elements are mentioned or they are mentioned only by 1 participant and therefore there is no consistent theory.
- Minimal - Where one or both grounding theory elements receive only a minority of the participants recording a supporting entry.
- Moderate - Where only one of the grounding theory elements exists with a majority of the participants recording a supporting entry for that element.
- Substantive - Where both of the grounding theory elements exist, with a majority of the participants recording a supporting entry for each element.

Then we will depict the extent of grounding of each ecclesial theory category using the following colour coding:

- No Apparent Theory Exists = White
- Minimal Theory Exists = Yellow
- Moderate Theory Exists = Orange
- Substantive Theory Exists = Green
5.3.2.1 The Essence Categories

The research received from the 7 participants returned 37 category responses to the essence category questions (see Appendix 1 – Essence Questions) spread over the operational ecclesiology model essence categories as follows:

![Pie Chart - Essence Category Entries](image)

**Figure 76 Essence Category Entries**

This chart (see Figure 76) immediately shows a domination of the categories of sign, holiness, and oneness, over those of order and openness (with 5 possible categories an average response percentage would be 20%). Each person can make multiple entries into each category. To ensure that a few participants have not skewed the data pictured above (see Figure 76) it is necessary to compare these results with the following chart (see Figure 77) which shows the percentage of participants who responded in each category.
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Figure 77  Participants Responding by Essence Category

The participant chart (see Figure 77) paints a very similar picture to the entry chart (see Figure 76). The categories of sign, holiness, and oneness dominate the essence scene, with openness and order falling into the background. A quick glance back at the historical referential chart (see Figure 75) shows that those categories which historically have received more attention, and therefore more grounding, correlate closely to the picture we have above.

5.3.2.1.1  One

In this category what we are looking for is a focus on relationship with God demonstrated through oneness in faith and a oneness together as a family in Christ. The research shows that 71% (5) of participants included entries that fall into this category and this category contained 19% (7) of the essence entries. This category is therefore a reasonably strong category in the minds of the current faith community.

Overall the responses focus on relationship with God and have a corporate flavour. However, looking closely at the entries only three participants mention oneness as a people, and while there are 5 entries referring to the necessity of a oneness in faith these responses came from only 3 participants. The remaining responses are connected to the actions of worshipping God rather than referring to essence characteristics.

In this category of oneness the concept of one faith and one people both receive minimal references. With such a poor emphasis existing around the idea of one faith and one people, it is possible that both have been affected by individualism and the social pressure for tolerance. At best it leaves the door open for individualism and pluralism to progress. Therefore, according to
our grading system we can say the contemporary praxis grounded theory of oneness is minimal (both elements are mentioned but neither has majority support). We could say that the contemporary theology of the movement, with respect to oneness, has declined in relation to their historical theology. The common theme with the participants who provided responses in this category relates to corporate worship. It would be fair to say that oneness for the contemporary movement is largely found, not in the essence of being one, but in the corporate expression of worship. We could express the movement’s majority position on oneness to be “gathering together” for worship.

![Figure 78](Contemporary Praxis Oneness Grounding)

5.3.2.1.2 Holy

In this category we are looking for a focus on relationship with other Christians demonstrated through a relational holiness that comes through allegiance to Christ and one another as brothers and sisters in Christ, and a personal holiness that is the reflection of the image of Christ. The research shows that 86% (10) of participants included entries that fall into this category and this category contained 27% (7) of the essence entries. This category is also a strong category in the minds of the current faith community.

Overall the responses focus on personal holiness and integrity and what is required to deliver these. Some responses refer to a corporate holiness, but only 1 goes the full distance and refers to the need for a holiness that is communal and relational. The call to the image of God in personal holiness is referred to 9 times by 5 participants, with only the 1 participant referring to relational holiness.

In this category of holiness, while the idea of allegiance to the world or moving away from the image of Christ is clearly rejected, the concept of relational holiness is largely absent. We can say that there is a general consensus surrounding the idea of personal holiness, being conformed to the image of God in one’s private life. However, ideas around holiness being relational are minimal, having possibly also been affected by the privatisation of salvation in the church, the privatisation of spirituality by the world, and the impact of individualism. Therefore, according to
our grading system we can say the contemporary praxis grounded theory of holiness is moderate (one element has majority support). Again we can say that the contemporary theology of the movement is very similar to their historical theology with respect to holiness and express it as “personal holiness”.

![Image](image.png)

**Figure 79  Contemporary Praxis Holiness Grounding**

5.3.2.1.3 Open

In this category we are looking for emphasis on relationship with others, especially other churches, demonstrated through possessing an inviting loving disposition and a wide kingdom focus. The research shows that 43% (3) of participants included entries that fall into this category and this category contained 8% (3) of the essence entries. This category is one of the weaker categories in the minds of the current faith community.

The few responses received have a similar theme. The church is to be a place of love and is also to be known for loving those outside. This captures the essence of the communal love factor. The two responses that refer to loving those outside are very general. Because of my understanding of the culture I would suggest that these participants are referring first to an expression of love to those who need Christ. These responses would not be a statement that would include a reflexive strong concern for the love and inviting embrace of other churches. Being a people of love is mentioned three times, and while a love of others is mentioned twice no direct mention of having a wider kingdom focus is included.

In this category of openness, we can say that there is a minimal theory surrounding the idea of communal love, and at best there exists a minimal concern for others. This leads the church to focus on loving those inside the church and the lost, while largely ignoring other churches. Such an inward focus is connected to the absence of the relational element of holiness. Therefore, according to our grading system we can say the contemporary praxis grounded theory of openness is minimal (both elements exist, but no element has majority support). Again we can say that the contemporary theology of the movement is very similar to their historical theology with respect to openness and express it as “selective”.
5.3.2.1.4 Sign

In this category we are looking for emphasis on relationship with the world demonstrated through the existence of the sign elements of presence and confession or proclamation. The research shows that 100% (7) of participants included entries that fall into this category and this category contained 35% (13) of the essence entries. This category is the strongest category in the minds of the current faith community with all participants recording responses and many making multiple entries.

Five participants offered responses that referred to aspects of presence such as justice, compassion, grace, and being Christlike. The focus on these responses was largely that of active service toward those who are not Christians. Six participants recorded entries relating to confession of Christ through proclamation which has remained a strong focal point for the movement throughout its history.

In this category of sign, we can say that there is a substantive theory surrounding the idea of presence and confession, while that of confession through proclamation remains the strongest. According to our grading system we can say the contemporary praxis grounded theory of being a sign is substantive (both elements exist, and both elements have majority support). Proclamation of the word through local evangelism or overseas mission has always been a strong focus of the Brethren and remains so to this day. It is obvious from the research that there is a growing emphasis on aspects of the element of presence. However, it is interesting to note that only four participants provided responses that included both elements of presence and confession. Sign theory for the contemporary movement is compartmentalised. Therefore, while it is encouraging that presence theory has grown beyond the historical roots, presence and confession theory are yet to exist in a substantive way as a holistic theory. Therefore, we can state the contemporary grounded theory of sign to be “word and deed” rather than a holistic confessing presence.
5.3.2.1.5  Ordered

In this category of body life and order we are seeking an emphasis on clear direction that provides an empowered body life that serves to activate the gifts of all. The research shows that 43% (3) of participants included entries that fall into this category and this category contained 11% (4) of the essence entries. Based on the summary statistics, this category together with the category of openness are the weakest categories in the current faith community. Only one response in this category touches on the elements considered essential.

There are no responses that contain reference to leadership, governance, or the need for clear order or direction. This situation mirrors the historical roots of the movement, with its abandonment of any form of structure and order in favour of reliance on the spontaneous work of the Spirit. One response actually refers to this sentiment. There is only one response which values the importance of a vibrant body life that incorporates all gifts to advance God’s kingdom.

In this category of order, we can say that while the idea of an empowering body life is mentioned, because it received only one reference there is no evidence of a consistent grounded theory, and no theory exists for the element of clear direction. Therefore, according to our grading system we can say there is no contemporary praxis grounded theory of order (one element exists, but it was mentioned only once). Obviously the heritage of the Brethren in the area of order is significant. Given the scant reference to order by the participants it is difficult to summarise their contemporary position. It seems that currently the theology of ecclesial order is left to the reflection of each individual autonomous church. At best we could propose that the theory of order tends toward each church seeking “autonomy.”
5.3.2.2 The Expression Categories

The research received from the 7 participants returned 39 category responses to the expression category questions (see Appendix 1 – Expression Questions) spread over the operational ecclesiology model expression categories as follows:

This chart (See Figure 83) displays a domination of the categories of signifying witness, sanctifying nurture, and unifying worship over those of sustaining leading and embracing community (with 5 possible categories an average response percentage would be 20%). Each person can make multiple entries into each category. To ensure that a few participants have not skewed the data pictured above (see Figure 83) it is necessary to compare these result with the following chart (see Figure 84) which shows the percentage of participants who responded in each category.
The participant chart (see Figure 84) paints a very similar picture to the entry chart (see Figure 83). The categories of unifying worship, sanctifying nurture and signifying witness dominate the expression scene. Actually each of these categories recorded entries from all participants. Again the categories of sustaining leading and embracing community received significantly less attention. Another glance at the historical referential chart (see Figure 75) shows that the three expression categories which receive the most attention today were also historically better grounded.

5.3.2.2.1 Unifying Worship

In this expression category we are looking for elements directed toward God focussed corporate worship that builds a growing unity. The research shows that 100% (7) of participants included entries that fall into this category and this category contained 23% (9) of the expression entries. With every participant contributing to this category, this is a strong category in the minds of the current faith community.

However, a closer look at the responses provides an interesting read. Six of the seven participants included responses relating to worship and five of these referred to its corporate nature. But only 3 participants noted that such worship is to be God focussed and no participant mentioned the unifying nature of such corporate activity. The assumption by all participants would be that worship is unifying and God focussed. However, the lack of intentional inclusion of these aspects,
leads one to suggest that in the praxis a focus on the corporate event of worship itself has superseded the purpose of such worship, which is to lead us together in unity to God.

In this category of unifying worship, the concept of corporateness received majority support and the element of being God focussed received only a minority of references. Worship as an expression is strong in the praxis, but it may be serving individual ends rather than being a unifying and God focussed expression. Therefore, according to our grading system we can say the contemporary praxis grounded theory of unifying worship is moderate (one element has majority support). We could say that the contemporary theology of the movement with respect to unifying worship has declined in relation to their historical theology. It would be fair to say that oneness and unifying worship for the contemporary movement is largely found, not in the essence of being one, nor in the expression of unifying worship, but in the corporate event of worship. We express the movement’s position on unifying worship to be “worshipping together”. Such a position allows for the possibility that the expression of worship becomes the gathering of a group of individuals to worship individually in one place. It is possible that the focus on unity may be replaced with a focus on self; being there with and for others may be replaced by being there to meet my own needs. And being God focussed may become being event focussed; where entering the awesome presence of God is replaced with the awesome experience of the event.

![Figure 85](Contemporary Praxis Unifying Worship Grounding)

5.3.2.2.2 Sanctifying Nurture

In this expression category we are looking for elements that focus on sanctifying nurture that leads to a maturing life and maturing relationships. The research shows that 100% (7) of participants included entries that fall into this category and this category contained 28% (11) of the expression entries. With every participant contributing to this category this is also a strong category in the minds of the current faith community.

All participants contributed to the element of personal holiness, expressed through aspects of discipleship. This is the first time the research has returned such a unanimous grounding of an element of an ecclesial category. Sadly this does not flow into the area of relational holiness and
of maturing relationships. Only one response referred to nurturing relationships and the importance of interdependence for the body. Consistent with the essence focus on personal holiness the current praxis is strongly focussed on participating in and being formed by disciplines that are seen as consistent with growth in personal holiness. A deep discipleship process or a commitment to relational maturity is absent.

In this category of sanctifying nurture, the concept of maturing life received unanimous support, while the element of maturing relationships received only one reference. Therefore, according to our grading system we can say the contemporary praxis grounded theory of sanctifying nurture is moderate (one element has majority support). We could say that the contemporary theology of the movement with respect to sanctifying nurture has not changed from its historical roots. Historically we termed this approach as compliance. While compliance to standards was not mentioned by the participants, the majority of the responses were couched in terms of actions to participate in, rather than a focus on the maturing process in life or relationships. The contemporary movement’s position on sanctifying nurture is best referred to as participating in “disciplines”.

![Figure 86](Contemporary Praxis Sanctifying Nurture Grounding)

5.3.2.2.3 Embracing Community

In this expression category we are looking for elements that focus on a loving church community that embraces others, especially other churches, and which will overflow as an inviting kingdom presence sign into the world. This loving open embrace is the environment in which the maturing of loving relationships takes place. The research shows that only 42% (3) of participants included entries that fall into this category and this category contained only 8% (3) of the expression entries. With such a low number of participants contributing to this category, this is a very weak category in the minds of the current faith community.

Of the three participants who recorded entries in this category each noted the importance of love for one another within the church community. It seems the love stops at the borders of the church. There were no entries referring to the need to express this love in an open invitational
way to those of other churches within the movement, to other denominations, or to the wider
world. The element of embracing others with the invitational grace of God is sadly missing. With
the influence of the history and tradition of the movement, this lack of embrace has led to a
number of churches harbouring a closed, separatist, and at times critical stance toward other
churches, other denominations, and sometimes to others in the world generally.

In this category of embracing community the concept of loving community received only minority
support, while the element of embracing others received no reference at all. Therefore, according
to our grading system we can say the contemporary praxis grounded theory of embracing
community is minimal (one element is mentioned but has minority support). We could say that
the contemporary theology of the movement with respect to embracing community has not
changed much from its historical roots. Historically we termed this approach as “selective
fellowship”. A term that is similar yet captures the language and mood of the contemporary praxis
in this category is “conditional community”.

5.3.2.2.4 Signifying Witness

In this expression category we are looking for a focus on the church being a public witness in the
world for Christ, one that carries with it the elements of proclamation and a personal loving
concern for the people of the world. The research shows that 100% (7) of participants included
entries that fall into this category and this category contained 31% (12) of the expression entries,
which is the most of any expression category. With all participants contributing and with the
largest volume of entries one would conclude that this category is the strongest in the current
faith community.

All participants contributed to the element of proclamation, expressed through evangelism,
mission, or public proclamation. This is the second time the research has returned such a
unanimous grounding of an element of an ecclesial category. Sadly this agreement does not flow
into the area of personal concern and compassion, with only two participants including entries
referring to this element. The research relating to the essence category of sign showed that four
participants placed importance on the personal or presence element of being a sign of Christ. Yet it appears that this initial heart concern has not translated into active expressed concern. Again, consistent with history and tradition, the witness of the gospel has been dominated by concern for proclamation which is not matched by an equal concern for people. It appears the essence element of being a reconciling presence has not yet been able to be effectively expressed across the movement. A case of blind theory.

In this category of signifying witness, the concept of public witness received unanimous support, while the element of personal concern received only minority support. Therefore, according to our grading system we can say the contemporary praxis grounded theory of signifying witness is moderate (one element has majority support). Again we could say that the contemporary theology of the movement with respect to signifying witness has not changed from its historical word based roots. The contemporary movement’s position on signifying witness remains as “proclamation”.

5.3.2.2.5 Sustaining Leading

In this expression category we are looking for a focus on clear leadership and governance polity that facilitates a defined church strategy which in turn effectively deploys the gifts of the church community. We are seeking good governance and effective gift strategy. The research shows that 57% (4) of participants included entries that fall into this category and this category contained 10% (4) of the expression entries, which is a very low response. With this relatively low number of participants contributing to this category one would see this as a weak category in the minds of the current faith community.

Of the four participants who recorded entries in this category, only one noted the importance of any form of identifiable leadership and coordination of roles which could hint at the possibility that good governance polity is essential and in existence. The remaining three responses referred to the need for people to serve in paid or voluntary capacities, to facilitate the work of God according to the giftings given to the people. It seems that there is more clarity around the need
for the gifts to be used effectively in the church, but little attention given to providing clear leadership to facilitate this in a coordinated and sustaining way. Here again, we see the influence of the history and tradition of the movement with its rejection of order and structure.

In this category of sustaining leading, the element of gift strategy received only minority support, while the element of governance polity received only one reference. Therefore, according to our grading system we can say the contemporary praxis grounded theory of sustaining leading is minimal (both elements are mentioned, but only one has minority support). We could say that the contemporary theology of the movement with respect to sustaining leading has not changed much from its historical roots. Historically, we termed this approach as “informal maintenance”. There appears a greater focus on the use of gifts than was true historically. The church has moved from merely maintaining purity and practice. However, its body life remains largely uncoordinated and reliant on the spontaneous guidance of the Spirit, rather than being clearly directed. It would therefore seem appropriate to state that the contemporary movement’s position on sustaining leading is “spontaneous gift action.”

![Figure 89 Contemporary Praxis Sustaining Leading Grounding]

5.3.2.3 The Goal Categories

Similar to the historical referential findings of the early Brethren, there is a distinct lack of eschatological and relational focus in the responses regarding ecclesial goals from the contemporary community. To illustrate this, the actual research participant responses to the question “What is the overall ultimate goal of the church?” (see Appendix 1 – Goal Questions) are reproduced here:

1. To be a community who, as an act of worship to the God who has restored them to himself and others, partners with God in building his Kingdom. As this community, to be salt and light in a needy world and so bring glory to God.

2. To know Christ and make Him known.
3. To enable Christians to meet and to equip and encourage those who attend to communicate their faith with others so that they may become Christians.

4. To display Christ to the world and to fulfil the great commission – which is to reach the world for Christ.

5. To stand united in service to a loving relational God. Responding in obedience to His instruction and example to love others with the intent to lead and welcome them as brothers and sisters into the Kingdom of God for eternity.

6. The church exists to introduce people to Jesus Christ.

7. To be a place where God is honoured.

In summary, the key words in these responses all relate to being or acting here and now: to build his kingdom, to know and make known, to meet and encourage, to reach the world, to stand united in service, to introduce people to Christ, and to be a place. There is nothing in the responses that pushes the essence of the church through expression and on toward the ultimate eschatological goals of being united, perfect, loving, reconciled, and complete with God. So if the responses are not eschatologically focussed, as they should be, what then does the contemporary movement see as the goals of the church in relation to each goal category.

5.3.2.3.1 United with God

A majority of the goal responses in this category see the concept of bringing worship to God as the end goal of oneness. Similar to the early historical community, the goal of oneness in Christ has no eschatological orientation toward a greater reality of becoming united with God. However, there is a change from the past; the focus on gathering for communion has been changed to gathering for worship. Actually, oneness falls away, and the goal is the bringing of worship which is not necessarily corporate or communal in nature. While worship is a valid expression and worshipping God an admirable goal, the goal of oneness is not a worship event, or merely a gathering, but being fully unified, just as God is one.  

The goal of oneness of faith and oneness as a people has all but been lost from view, with each of these elements only receiving one related response each. We conclude therefore, that all key eschatological factors are missing from the goal theory for oneness, and with only one response connected to each goal element there is not enough evidence to state that a goal theory of being united with God exists. As a result we assess

41 John 17:21
there is no grounded theory of being united with God in existence (each element exists, but they were only mentioned once each). We could express the contemporary theology of the movement with respect to the goal of oneness and unity as not even being worshippers but of “doing worship”.

**Figure 90  Contemporary Praxis United with God Grounding**

5.3.2.3.2  Perfect before God
The goal of holiness for the contemporary movement is not dissimilar from the historical position of being “pure”. The goal tends toward personal righteousness and purity and neglects to include loving relational engagement as part of the grounded theory of holiness. With five participants providing responses that could be summarised as obedience or image of Christ focussed and only one response mentioning the corporate or relational side of holiness, the goal of holiness is again to be personally uncompromising in faith and practice, rather than being grounded in an ongoing sanctifying nurture that brings personal, relational and corporate maturity with God and others. As a result we assess the grounded theory of being united with God to be moderate (one element received majority support). We could express the contemporary theology of the community with respect to the goal of holiness as that of “personal obedience,” rather than being fully mature in life and relationships.

**Figure 91  Contemporary Praxis Perfect before God Grounding**

5.3.2.3.3  Loving with God
The goal of openness for the contemporary movement has changed slightly from the historical position of “right community.” There is a greater emphasis on being a loving community. However, with only one participant including a response connected to an outward focussed love, the goal of loving has not extended to the kingdom inclusive love that will ultimately be experienced with God. It would be safe to say that the outward focus was also more connected to
reaching the unsaved than having a posture of openness to all churches and all people. The element of kingdom love which specifically includes other churches is not mentioned. Three participants provided responses that included the goal element of loving community, with only one response that could be connected to the goal element of a loving kingdom. As a result we assess the grounded theory of being loving with God to be minimal (one element received only minority support). We could express the contemporary theology of the community with respect to the goal of openness as that of becoming a “select community,” rather than being fully open to kingdom relationships with all.

![Figure 92](Contemporary Praxis Loving with God Grounding)

5.3.2.3.4 *Reconciled to God*

The goal of sign for the contemporary movement has changed only slightly from the historical position of “saved souls.” There is a greater emphasis on being a sign by presence in the areas of relationship and justice. However, participants with responses connected to the more holistic goal of being a reconciled people were still in the minority whereas those recording responses connected to the proclamation of the message of having a reconciled position in Christ received majority support. Furthermore, all responses related to having salvation here and now, there was no response that included a view of ultimately being reconciled to God’s eschatological community. Three participants provided responses that were connected to presence and the goal element of being a reconciled people now. Five responses and four participants provided responses connected to the goal element of reconciled position. As a result we assess the grounded theory of being reconciled to God to be moderate (one element received majority support). We could summarise the contemporary theology of the community with respect to the goal of sign as that of proclaiming salvation for the individual to have now. We will express this as we did for the historical community as “saved souls”.

![Diagram of Loving Community and Loving Kingdom](Select Community)
5.3.2.3.5 Complete with God

The goal of order for the contemporary movement still suffers from the lack of attention this area has received historically. There are only two responses that refer to the concept of body life at all. Both of these responses do not connect the life of the church to anything larger than the internal workings of the local church. Nor do they mention the importance of the organisation or ordering of such body life for sustaining and guiding the church toward completeness. This does not seem important to the contemporary community. Two participants provided responses that could be marginally connected to the goal element of being a complete body. There was no response that connected with the goal element of the church becoming completely mature. Gift activity rather than body maturity seems to be the goal. As a result we assess the grounded theory of being reconciled to God to be minimal (one element received minority support). We would summarise the contemporary theology of the community with respect to the goal of order as uncoordinated “gift activity”.

5.3.2.4 Summary – Contemporary Experiential Ecclesial Theory

Having completed the grounding analysis of the data received from the Christian Community Churches of Australia participants, it is now possible to provide a summary (see Figure 95) of the grounded theory positions for each ecclesial category.
Figure 95  Contemporary Experiential Grounded Ecclesiology Summary

From this operational ecclesiology summary (see Figure 95) it would be possible to say that the following statement represents the essential characteristics of the contemporary church:

The church is an autonomous gathering of believers given to worship, personal holiness, selective community and witness by word and action.

The chart above (see Figure 95) clearly highlights the theory categories which required contemporary grounding attention. Of the 15 categories of ecclesial theory considered only one category, the essence category of sign, has substantive grounding. Of the remaining categories 6 show a moderate grounding, 6 have only minimal grounding, and the remaining 2 have no identifiable grounded theory. The contemporary experiential praxis much like the historical referential is operating from predominantly a blind praxis position. The goal category of oneness, being united with God, and the essence category of order require critical attention. In the contemporary praxis the theory of oneness has moved from a focus on one faith and one people to the point that the goal is now activity and not essence based. The one remaining factor that unifies the people appears to be gathering to worship. The idea of being united worshippers
together in Christ is absent. The essence, expression and goal of openness, as in historically, is also very poor, having little external focus. The grounded theory for order tends to be undirected and uncoordinated, being activity based rather than leadership for maturity based.

5.3.3 Grounding Summary

What then is the comprehensive grounded theory of the contemporary faith community? Is it a combination of the referential theory and the contemporary experiential theory? This would be the case if it could be shown that the contemporary community gave substantial authority to the referential body of thought. Our research on authority (see Appendix 1 – Authority Questions) for interpretation of Scripture shows that only 22% of responses based their authority for understanding in the referential fields of theological education and church tradition. The remaining 78% of responses fell into the experiential authority categories of experience, worldview, personal study or church community. While five participants (71%) included entries in the interpretation of Scripture referential fields, each only included a single entry, whereas each of these participants, except for one, included multiple entries in the experiential fields. This demonstrates that in reality experiential authority holds sway over referential authority for interpreting Scripture. Our research also shows that for the area of theological formation only 21% of responses (from 3 participants) based their authority within the referential arena, that is history, tradition, and key leaders and writers of the movement. This means that 79% of responses (from 6 participants) located their authority somewhere outside the influence of the referential history and theology of the movement. And the influences are spread so wide that any clear and consistent referential theory being formed from them is impossible. Therefore, we must conclude that the referential theory of the movement plays a very small role as an objective authoritative guide for the contemporary praxis, and therefore a synthesis of the historical referential theory and the contemporary experiential theory would be inappropriate.

At best we can compare the picture of the referential with the picture of the contemporary to see if history and tradition has indeed been ignored or whether it has played an underlying formational role. The following chart (see Figure 96) compares the historical/referential and the contemporary/experiential grounded theory:
Figure 96 Referential and Experiential Grounded Ecclesiology Comparison Summary

From our historical and contemporary research, when we consider the categories that receive a substantive or moderate grading, it is clear that the stronger relational and essence categories are those of God and oneness, other Christians and holiness, and the world and being a sign. This is true of the historical referential findings as well as the contemporary findings. The obvious gaps, both historically and currently, are those of others and openness together with body life and
order. We can also identify the following notable changes from the historical to the contemporary:

- The contemporary category of oneness has drifted away from one faith toward oneness through gathering for worship.
- The category of openness has improved in focus on being a loving community together.
- The category of sign has improved through adding a theory of personal concern and presence.
- The category of order, while still weak on direction, has a greater focus on empowering and employing the gifts of the community.

Generalising, the historical referential theory and the contemporary experiential theory are very similar. And this has occurred despite the lack of authority given to the formational leaders and the tradition of the church through history (see Appendix 1 – Authority Questions). When you compare the contemporary position with the original statement by Darby on the church mentioned earlier, “What is the Church of Christ in its purpose and perfection? It is a congregation of souls redeemed ..., a people purified to Himself by Christ, purified in the heart by faith, knit together, by the bond of this common faith in Him” (Darby 1971a:5). Saved souls, purified people, and gathering because of a common faith, summarises the strong focal points of the movement both then and now. So while the historical referential theory of the church is not formally given much authority in the contemporary church, it is abundantly clear that the contemporary church’s underlying experiential theory has been shaped significantly by its history and tradition, written and unwritten, handed down through the leaders of the movement from generation to generation.

In June 2015, in Rome, I had the opportunity to present at the International Brethren Conference on Mission, where 700 leaders from 105 countries gathered. I presented and explained the, essence, expression, and goal dimensions of the operational ecclesiological model. In a workshop with 40 theologians, educators and leaders from across the globe, I asked them to suggest the essential categories of essence and expression for the church community. Their actual responses can be viewed in Appendix 3. Pleasingly, their combined responses covered more ecclesial elements than both the historical and the contemporary research uncovered. However, in this limited research, it is notable that the essence category of being an open kingdom focussed
community and the expression category of being an embracing invitational community are also completely absent.

If the contemporary church is to move forward, to fill the grounded theory gaps, and to further ground each category of essence, expression, and goal, it needs to find a referential source that will change or add to the underlying influence of tradition as a shaping influence, and provide deep authoritative guidance to underpin the operational ecclesiological theory of the community. This is the very task that the second grounding question presses upon us. “Is the faith community’s ecclesial theory (the essence, expression, and goal theory) theologically grounded: having its faith origin in Christ, its mission of love in the Spirit, and its hope destination with God?”

Having completed the above research, the Christian Community Churches of Australia need to now review its grounded operational ecclesiology to ensure that going forward each element is present and is fully theologically grounded - having its faith origin in Christ, its mission of love in the Spirit, and its hope destination with God. Currently we cannot say that the operational ecclesiology of the movement is fully grounded in this way. We can say that it is largely experiential, praxis driven not theory driven, influenced unknowingly by tradition, and therefore predominantly a blind praxis.

### 5.4 INTEGRATING

In carrying out the ecclesial conversation task of integrating we are answering the following question:

1. Is the faith community’s ecclesial theory (the essence, expression, and goal theory) connected and integrated?

With no substantive link between the historical referential theory and the contemporary experiential theory, the contemporary experiential theory operates as the authority for the theory of the movement. It is therefore this theory that will be examined for integration.

It is possible, as previously mentioned, that an essence theory, an expression theory and a goal theory for any ecclesial category or relationship could be non-existent, could exist in isolation or be substantially disconnected from each other. We will chart the integration relationship between each of the three theory dimensions and discover what connection exists between the essence,
expression and goal theories of the contemporary faith community of the Christian Community Churches of Australia. To be clear, we are not again seeking completeness in theory, this has been considered through grounding and the gaps have been revealed, we are here busy with ensuring that whatever theory does exist is consistent through the dimensions of essence, expression, and goal theory.

The integration analysis is based on the correlation of support for the ecclesial elements present within the data gathered for the essence theory, the expression theory, and the goal theory categories. As noted previously, given the emphasis in this work of grounding the praxis in an operational ecclesiology the essence domain will serve as the benchmark for the integration analysis and grading. Therefore, if there is no substantively grounded essence, a moderate or substantive integration is viewed as not possible.

We will follow the integration analysis process set out previously (4.4.2 Integration Analysis), but reproduced here and in the integration summary for convenience.

To clearly illustrate the research findings with respect to each research element we will utilise the following colour coding:

- None = Element not mentioned or mentioned only once = White
- Minimal = Minority support for element = Yellow
- Substantive = Majority support for element = Green

The extent of integration for each ecclesial element relationship will then be given the following grading:

- Non-Existent – Where the essence element receives less than majority support and the corresponding element in the expression category or the goal category receives only minority support or is either non-existent or mentioned only once. Where the essence element receives majority support and the corresponding element in the expression and goal category receives no support or is only mentioned once.

- Minimal - Where the essence element receives majority support and the corresponding element in the expression category or the goal category receives only minority support. Where the corresponding expression and goal elements may correlate with majority
support but the corresponding essence element is absent or receives less than majority support. Where all corresponding elements receive minority support.

Moderate - Where the essence element receives majority support and the corresponding elements receive majority support in either the expression category or the goal category, but not both.

Substantive - Where the essence element receives majority support and there is also majority support for the corresponding element in the expression and goal categories.

The next step is to combine the integration results for each element within an ecclesial essence relationship. This will be facilitated using the following grading:

- **Non-Existent** – Where only one corresponding essence, expression and goal element is minimally integrated. Where the corresponding essence, expression and goal elements are considered non-existent and unable to be integrated.

- **Minimal** - Where one corresponding essence, expression and goal element is shown to be substantively connected and integrated and the other is non-existent. Where one of the corresponding essence, expression and goal elements are moderately integrated and the other is minimal or non-existent. Where both of the corresponding essence, expression and goal elements are both minimally integrated.

- **Moderate** – Where both of the corresponding essence, expression and goal elements are moderately integrated. Where one corresponding essence, expression and goal element is shown to be substantively connected and integrated and the other is minimally integrated.

- **Substantive** - Where the corresponding essence, expression and goal elements are shown to be substantively connected and integrated.

The integration summary findings for each essence relationship will be colour coded as follows:
No integration possible = White
Minimal integration = Yellow
Moderate integration = Orange
Substantive integration = Green

We now consider the integration of each essence, expression, and goal element within each essence category relationship.

5.4.1 One

This relationship, with God, has as its focus the essence of oneness which is connected to the expression of unified worship and the goal of being united with God. The two elements identified previously within this relationship of oneness are to be connected and integrated as follows:

![Ideal Oneness Element Connection](image)

**Figure 97** Ideal Oneness Element Connection

Our research on the contemporary praxis provides us with the following results:

![Contemporary Praxis Oneness Element Connection](image)

**Figure 98** Contemporary Praxis Oneness Element Connection
The above shows that the corresponding elements of one faith, God focussed, and united faith, did not have consistent minority support, and therefore, no integration exists for this set of corresponding elements. Figure 98 also shows that the corresponding elements of one people, corporate worship, and united people did not have consistent minority support, and therefore no integration exists for this set of corresponding elements. According to our integration grading system, when we combine both elements, we can say that the contemporary praxis integration of essence, expression and goal categories connected with oneness is non-existent (both element relationships show non-existent integration).

Figure 99  Contemporary Praxis Oneness Integration

The contemporary theory for this oneness relationship focussed on God is in essence gathering together to express worship together with the goal of doing worship.

5.4.2 Holy

This relationship, with others in the local church, has as its focus the essence of holiness which is connected to the expression of sanctified nurture and the goal of being perfect before God. The two elements identified previously within this relationship of holiness are to be connected and integrated as follows:

Figure 100  Ideal Holiness Element Connection

Our research on the contemporary praxis provides us with the following results:
Figure 101  Contemporary Praxis Holiness Element Connection

The above shows that the essence element of personal holiness had a majority of participants affirm the element and there was also substantive support in the corresponding expression and goal elements. Therefore, substantive integration exists for this set of corresponding elements. Figure 101 also shows that the corresponding elements of relational holiness, maturing relationships and perfect relationships all have no consistent support, and therefore, no integration exists for this set of corresponding elements. Therefore, while the relational element is absent, according to our integration grading system, when we combine both elements, we can say that the contemporary praxis integration of essence, expression and goal categories connected with holiness, which for the community is focused only on personal holiness, is minimal (one element relationship is substantive, the other is non-existent).

Figure 102  Contemporary Praxis Holiness Integration

The contemporary theory for this holiness relationship focused on other Christians in the local church is in essence personal holiness expressed through disciplines with the goal of personal obedience.

5.4.3  Open

This relationship with others, including other churches, has as its focus the essence of openness which is connected to the expression of embracing community and the goal of being loving with
God. The two elements identified previously within this relationship of openness are to be connected and integrated as follows:

Figure 103  Ideal Openness Element Connection

Our research on the contemporary praxis provides us with the following results:

Figure 104  Contemporary Praxis Openness Element Connection

The above shows that the essence element of communal love had a minority of participants affirm the element and there also exists minority support in the corresponding expression and goal elements. Therefore, minimal integration exists for this set of corresponding elements. Figure 104 also shows that the corresponding elements of inviting kingdom focus, embracing people, and loving kingdom all have no consistent support, and therefore, no integration exists for this set of corresponding elements. According to our integration grading system, when we combine both elements, we can say that the contemporary praxis integration of essence, expression and goal categories connected with openness is non-existent (one element relationship is minimal, the other is non-existent).
The contemporary theory for this openness relationship focussed on other churches is in essence selective fellowship expressed through conditional community with the goal of becoming a select community.

### 5.4.4 Sign

This relationship, with the world, has as its focus the essence of sign which is connected to the expression of signifying witness and the goal of being reconciled to God. The two elements identified previously within this relationship of sign are to be connected and integrated as follows:

**Figure 106  Ideal Sign Element Connection**

Our research on the contemporary praxis provides us with the following results:

**Figure 107  Contemporary Praxis Sign Element Connection**
The above shows that the essence element of confession had a majority of participants affirm the element and there also exists majority support in the corresponding expression and goal elements. Therefore, substantive integration exists for this set of corresponding elements. Figure 107 also shows that the essence element of presence received majority support but the corresponding elements of personal concern and reconciled people only have minority support, and therefore, only minimal integration exists for this set of corresponding elements. According to our integration grading system, when we combine both elements, we can say that the contemporary praxis integration of essence, expression and goal categories connected with sign is moderate (one element relationship is substantive, the other is minimal).

Figure 108  Contemporary Praxis Sign Integration

The contemporary theory for this sign relationship focussed on the world is in essence word based expressed through proclamation with the goal of saved souls.

5.4.5 Ordered

This relationship, within the church body, has as its focus the essence of order which is connected to the expression of sustaining leading and the goal of being complete with God. The two elements identified previously within this relationship of order are to be connected and integrated as follows:

Figure 109  Ideal Ordered Element Connection
Our research on the contemporary praxis provides us with the following results:

![Figure 110](contemporary_praxis_ordered_element_connection.png)

**Figure 110  Contemporary Praxis Ordered Element Connection**

The above shows that the corresponding elements of directed body, governance polity, and completely mature, do not have any support, and therefore, no integration exists for this set of corresponding elements. Figure 110 also shows that the corresponding elements of empowered body, gift strategy, and complete body, do not consistently have minority support, and therefore, no integration exists for this set of corresponding elements. According to our integration grading system, when we combine both elements, we can say that the contemporary praxis integration of essence, expression and goal categories connected with ordered is non-existent (both element relationships have non-existent integration).

![Figure 111](contemporary_praxis_ordered_integration.png)

**Figure 111  Contemporary Praxis Ordered Integration**

The contemporary theory for this ordered relationship, focussed on church body life, is in essence autonomy expressed through spontaneous gift action with gift activity being the goal of the faith community.

### 5.4.6  Summary

To summarise, the integration process utilises the research gathered, compares the grounded theory results for each set of connected essence, expression and goal category elements, and combines the findings for each essence relationship. We can now chart the integration results to
give an overall picture of integration of the contemporary praxis. The summary integration position of the contemporary praxis of the Christian Community Churches of Australia is as follows:

![Integration Summary of Contemporary Praxis]

**Figure 112 Integration Summary of Contemporary Praxis**

This chart (see Figure 112) provides a bleak picture of the integration position of the contemporary praxis. No essence relationship is substantively integrated. Only the sign relationship with the world is moderately integrated, yet it remains predominantly word focussed. The holiness relationship with other Christians is minimally integrated, focussed around personal holiness, excluding relational holiness. The relationships connected to oneness, openness and order are so fragmented in their grounding that they are unable to demonstrate any integration, and require critical attention.

### 5.5 ALIGNING

As stated earlier it is possible that an ecclesial theory for a faith community exists and is grounded, and it is also possible that the ecclesial theory is substantially integrated, and yet the ecclesial praxis may be operating completely separate from the theory or operating with varying degrees of alignment from the ecclesial theory. Where this occurs we will still have locations of blind theory or blind praxis. Therefore, it is essential that alignment between ecclesial theory and ecclesial praxis is sought.

In carrying out the ecclesial conversation task of aligning we are answering the following questions:
1. What are the faith community’s ecclesial praxis expressions?

2. Are the faith community’s ecclesial theory and ecclesial praxis aligned and goal directed?

The answer to the first question is found in the research, specifically in the responses to the questions on areas of action. We now turn to answer the second question.

The action responses (see Appendix 1 – Action Questions) provide us with a broad understanding of “What is going on?” and “Why is this going on?” (Osmer 2008:4) and will allow us to carry out an alignment analysis of the contemporary praxis of the Christian Community Churches of Australia.

The research from the 7 participants returned 66 category responses to the question “What specific regular actions are carried out in your church?” This question provided the freedom to include all actions of the church. The action responses were then connected to the operational ecclesiology model expression categories. A summary of the action responses per expression category is displayed in Figure 113.

![Figure 113](image)

**Figure 113  Action Entries by Expression Category**

This chart (see Figure 113) presents a domination of action entries in the categories of signifying witness, sanctifying nurture, and unifying worship, over those of embracing community and sustaining leading (with 5 possible categories an average response percentage would be 20%). When compared to the results for essence and expression categories, one could suggest that on
the surface there is a broad alignment of praxis action with essence and expression theory. A comparison summary is shown in Figure 114.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Essence Category</th>
<th>One</th>
<th>Holy</th>
<th>Open</th>
<th>Sign</th>
<th>Ordered</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Expression Category</th>
<th>Unifying Worship</th>
<th>Sanctifying Nurture</th>
<th>Embracing Community</th>
<th>Signifying Witness</th>
<th>Sustaining Leading</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Action Responses | 20% | 30% | 14% | 33% | 3% |

**Figure 114  Essence, Expression, and Action Responses by Category**

The three categories of sign, holy, and one, received very similar attention and the same order of support strength, across all three dimensions of essence, expression and action. The remaining two categories, ordered and open, received significantly less attention across the three dimensions. The major changes to be noted between the essence, expression, and action responses is that the action responses for openness and embracing community has grown significantly, and the responses relating to order and sustaining leading has declined in the praxis. This first suggests that there is praxis action connected to some form of open embracing community but there is little or no consistent theory underpinning the action. This could be a significant case of blind praxis. The second suggests that while some theory of order and sustaining leading exists there is very little associated action bringing it to life in the praxis. Therefore, this may be a case of blind theory.

Each person can make as many action entries as they like and associate them with expression categories. To ensure that a few participants have not skewed the data pictured above (see Figure 114), it is necessary to compare the results with the following chart (see Figure 115), which shows the percentage of participants who provided action responses in each category.
The participant chart (see Figure 115) paints a very similar picture to the entry chart (see Figure 114). The participant action responses connected to categories of signifying witness, sanctifying nurture, and unifying worship dominate the scene. Again the participant action responses connected to categories of sustaining leading and embracing community received less attention. Figures 114 and 115 together give a good surface picture of the possible existence of alignment.

These surface pictures have focussed on the alignment of essence theory, expression theory, and praxis action. A similar analysis could include the goal categories. However, the research undertaken did not collect responses for goal categories isolated from their connection with other categories being surveyed. Such independent goal data would be beneficial to provide a deeper alignment analysis.

Our more detailed alignment research will focus on comparing the expression, action and goal dimensions. It would be possible to include the essence dimension in the alignment analysis, however, if there has been substantive grounding and integration of essence, expression, and goal theory, then alignment of the praxis action with the expression theory should also align the action with the essence and guide it toward the goal. In addition, we will also consider whether the action goal responses included any eschatological reference, which was found to be almost entirely absent in the grounding analysis of the goal categories.
The alignment analysis process set out previously (4.5.2 Alignment Analysis), will be followed with a minor variation for this praxis. Because of the poor understanding of eschatological goal categories by this praxis, alignment between expression and action will be presented separately, and then the goal categories will be added.

The alignment analysis will be carried out, for this praxis, in four stages. First, we will note the praxis support for each expression element and the associated actions. Second, we analyse the presence or absence of alignment between expression and action data for each element within an ecclesial expression category. Third, we consider the goal elements, analysing whether the expression and action dimensions are goal directed and aligned. Fourth, we bring the element alignment results together to produce an alignment summary for each connected expression, action, and goal category, which then provides us with an overall alignment chart for the praxis.

It must be noted that if any expression, action, or goal element receives no support or only one participant mentions the element then there can be no alignment for that entire expression, action and goal element relationship. In such a case one should return to grounding and integrating the theory further before proceeding with alignment.

Firstly, in order to clearly illustrate the alignment analysis process we will utilise the following colours to depict the action and expression element support:

- None = Element not mentioned or mentioned only once = White
- Minimal = Minority support for element = Yellow
- Substantive = Majority support for element = Green

Secondly, to grade the expression and action alignment we will compare the number of participants who provided entries supporting each expression element with the number of participants who provided action entries that are connected to those same expression elements. The alignment results will be graded using the following approach:

- Non-Existent – Where either the expression element or the corresponding action element are non-existent.
Minimal – Where either the expression element or the corresponding action element receive majority support and the other receives minority support, or where both receive minority support.

Substantive – Where both the expression element and the corresponding action element receives majority support.

The alignment findings for each element will be illustrated as follows:

- No alignment exists = White
- Minimal alignment exists = Yellow
- Substantive alignment exists = Green

We will now turn to consider each expression category and the associated actions in turn.

### 5.5.1 Unifying Worship

In this expression category we are looking for actions that are connected to the expression elements of being God focussed through corporate worship which builds a growing unity. The research shows that 86% (6) of participants included action entries that fall into this expression category and this category contained 20% (13) of the action entries.

With respect to the unifying worship elements, three participants, a minority, recorded action praxis entries that support the expression element of God focussed worship. Six participants, a majority recorded action praxis entries that support the expression element of unifying corporate worship. This compares with the expression theory results of three participants, a minority, supporting the element of God focussed worship, and six participants, a majority, supporting the element of unifying corporate worship. According to the grading system the alignment results for the unifying worship action and expression elements are:
5.5.2 Sanctifying Nurture

In this expression category we are looking for actions that are connected to the expression elements of maturing life and maturing relationships. The research shows that 100% (7) of participants included action entries that fall into this expression category and this category contained 30% (20) of the action entries.

With respect to the sanctifying nurture elements, all seven participants recorded action praxis entries that support the expression element of maturing life. Three participants, a minority, recorded action praxis entries that support the expression element of maturing relationships. This compares with the expression theory results of all seven participants supporting the element of maturing life, and only one participant recording an entry supporting the element of maturing relationships. According to the grading system the alignment results for the sanctifying nurture action and expression elements are:
Figure 117 Sanctifying Nurture Action and Expression Alignment

For the element of maturing life a strong majority of participants recorded entries in both action and expression dimensions, leading to the conclusion that there exists a substantive alignment for this element. It is not possible to demonstrate alignment for the maturing relationship element due to the lack of responses provided.

5.5.3 Embracing Community

In this expression category we are looking for actions that are connected to the expression elements of loving people and embracing people. The research shows that 71% (5) of participants included action entries that fall into this expression category and this category contained 14% (9) of the action entries.

With respect to the elements of embracing community, four participants, a majority, recorded action praxis entries that support the expression element of loving people. One participant only recorded an action praxis entry that supports the expression element of embracing people. This compares with the expression theory results of three participants supporting the element of loving people, and no participant or entry supporting the element of embracing people. According to the grading system the alignment results for the embracing community action and expression elements are:
Figure 118  Embracing Community Action and Expression Alignment

For the element of loving people a majority of participants recorded action entries and a minority recorded expression entries, leading to the conclusion that there exists a minimal alignment for this element. This shows that loving action is more prevalent in the contemporary praxis than it is in theory. It is not possible to demonstrate alignment for the embracing people element due to the lack of responses provided.

5.5.4 Signifying Witness

In this expression category we are looking for actions that are connected to the expression elements of proclamation and personal concern. The research shows that 100% (7) of participants included action entries that fall into this expression category and this category contained 33% (22) of the action entries.

With respect to the elements of signifying witness, six participants, a majority, recorded action praxis entries that support the expression element of proclamation. Four participants, a majority, recorded action praxis entries that support the expression element of personal concern. This compares with the expression theory results of seven participants supporting the element of proclamation, and only two participants, a minority, supporting the element of personal concern. According to the grading system the alignment results for the signifying witness action and expression elements are:
For the element of proclamation a majority of participants recorded action entries and a majority recorded expression entries, leading to the conclusion that there exists a substantive alignment for this element. For the element of personal concern a majority of participants recorded action entries yet only a minority recorded expression entries leading to the conclusion that there exists only a minimal alignment for this element. It appears that personal concern is active in praxis and largely absent in theory. This would make personal concern a growing area of blind praxis. It is also interesting to note that within the area of signifying witness there are only three entries that refer to overseas mission, the remaining entries refer to local witness activities. This demonstrates a downward focus on mission for a movement that has historically been known for a focus on mission, and especially overseas mission.

5.5.5 Sustaining Leading

In this expression category we are looking for actions that are connected to the expression elements of governance polity and gift strategy. The research shows that 57% (4) of participants included action entries that fall into this expression category and this category contained only 10% (4) of the action entries.

With respect to the elements of sustaining leading, only one participant recorded an action praxis entry that supports the expression element of governance polity, and only one participant recorded an action praxis entry that supports the expression element of gift strategy. This compares with the expression theory results of one participant supporting the element of governance polity, and three participants recording entries supporting the element of gift
strategy. According to the grading system the alignment results for the sustaining leading action and expression elements are:

![Alignment Chart](image)

**Figure 120  Sustaining Leading Action and Expression Alignment**

For the element of governance polity no participants recorded action entries and only one recorded expression entries, leading to the conclusion that it is not possible to demonstrate alignment due to the lack of responses provided. For the element of gift strategy no participants recorded action entries and a minority recorded expression entries, leading to the conclusion that it is again not possible to demonstrate alignment due to the lack of responses provided.

### 5.5.6 Goal Directed

Having considered the alignment of action and expression, the second part of our alignment question requires us to also analyse whether the ecclesial theory and praxis is goal directed. Ensuring the expression theory is goal directed has been attended to under the integration task. Here we seek to ensure the praxis action is also eschatologically aligned and goal directed.

In analysing the research data (see Appendix 1 – Action Questions, only those responses which show movement toward a future goal were counted. Most participants and entries placed the action goal in the present. For example the goal of evangelism action would be stated as “providing the opportunity to witness,” rather than “to see lives reconciled to God.” Where the goal was stated as only action in the present the response was not viewed as forming part of an eschatological goal. The eschatological goal directed results from the research for each action element of the contemporary praxis is presented here using the same alignment charting process:
Figure 121  Goal and Action Alignment by Element
It was clear from the historical research that the Brethren had little eschatological goal directed theory grounding the praxis. Figure 121 provides us with the same picture. There are only two elements that demonstrate any measure of alignment between action and eschatological goal. These are the elements of personal holiness, being goal directed toward becoming the perfect image of God, and the element of loving people, being directed toward becoming a loving community with God. Personal holiness therefore remains not only one of the strongest theory elements but appears also to be the most aligned from expression theory (majority support), to praxis action (majority support) toward eschatological goal (minority support). The loving people and loving community alignment is interesting given the minimal support this element received in the expression and essence dimensions. Therefore, while strong alignment exists for this loving people element in action and goal, it is not significantly grounded in expression and essence theory, being a strong praxis but significantly blind.

5.5.7 Summary

As previously mentioned, due to the serious lack of eschatological goal responses, it is beneficial to present the summary findings for this praxis in two stages. First we summarise the expression theory and action praxis alignment for each expression category and then add the goal alignment results to give a completed summary of alignment.

To combine the two expression elements for each expression category the following alignment grading for each expression category will be used:

Non-Existent – Where both elements are not aligned at all or where one is minimally aligned.

Minimal - Where both elements are minimally or where one is substantively aligned and the other is not aligned.

Moderate - Where one of the elements is substantively aligned and the other is minimally aligned.

Substantive - Where both of the elements are substantively aligned.

The summary findings for each expression category will use the following colour coding:
The following summary picture (see Figure 122) reveals that there are only three categories with a measure of alignment of expression theory and praxis action. The expression categories of unifying worship and sanctifying nurture have minimal alignment and the expression category of signifying witness has moderate alignment. All expression and praxis action categories require attention to improve the alignment operating within the current praxis toward a substantive positon.

**Figure 122  Alignment Summary of Expression and Action of the Contemporary Praxis**

Now by adding the goal alignment results (see Figure 121) to the expression theory and praxis action alignment results (see Figure 122) we can provide a full alignment picture for each expression, action, and goal element:
We now provide an alignment grading for each corresponding expression, action, and goal element. This grading is based on the correlation or overlap of themes within the data gathered for the expression theory, the praxis action, and the associated action goal for each ecclesial expression element. The extent of alignment for each set of corresponding elements will be determined by the following descriptors:
Non-Existent – Where one or more of the corresponding expression, action, and goal elements receives no support or is mentioned only once.

Minimal - Where one of the corresponding expression, action, or goal elements receives majority support and the other two receive minority support, or where all three elements receive minority support.

Moderate - Where two of the corresponding expression, action and goal elements receive majority support and the other receives minority support.

Substantive - Where the corresponding expression, action, and goal elements all receive majority support.

To depict the extent of alignment we will use the following colour coding:

No alignment exists = White

Minimal alignment = Yellow

Moderate alignment = Orange

Substantive alignment = Green

Following the grading process the alignment for each corresponding expression, action and goal element is as follows:
The above (see Figure 124) displays an alignment picture which requires critical attention. Only two elements show any sign of alignment across the three dimensions of expression, action and goal. The result is essentially due to the fact that only the maturing life and loving people expression and action elements had any corresponding eschatological goal responses. Again the whole eschatological goal dimension needs significant attention in the contemporary praxis.

To provide a summary alignment picture for each expression category we must now combine the alignment results for each element within an ecclesial expression category. This will be facilitated using the following grading:
Non-Existential – Where both expression elements are considered non-existent and unable to be aligned, or, where one is minimally aligned and the other non-existent.

Minimal - Where the alignment result for one expression element is substantive and the alignment of the other is non-existent. Where the alignment results for both expression elements is minimal. Where the alignment results for one expression element is moderate and the other is minimal or non-existent.

Moderate - Where the alignment result for one expression element is substantive and the alignment of the other is minimal. Where the alignment results for both expression elements are moderate.

Substantive - Where the alignment results for both expression elements are substantive.

The summary findings for each expression category will use the following colour coding:

- No alignment exists = White
- Minimal alignment = Yellow
- Moderate alignment = Orange
- Substantive alignment = Green

Having completed the alignment analysis of the data for each expression category of the Christian Community Churches of Australia it is now possible to provide a summary of the alignment position of the contemporary praxis of the faith community:

**Figure 125  Alignment Summary of Contemporary Praxis**
The alignment summary picture (see Figure 125) shows that alignment work is required by the contemporary faith community in each ecclesial category, with only sanctifying nurture and embracing community showing minimal alignment.

5.6 THE WAY FORWARD

The case study grounding, integrating, and aligning summary pictures of the Christian Community Churches of Australia are here placed together to provide opportunity for reflection on the way forward for the faith community. Based on these pictures (see Figures 126, 127, 128) we highlight the specific grounding, integrating and aligning work that needs to be done within the contemporary praxis of the Christian Community Churches of Australia.
A CASE STUDY – THE CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY CHURCHES OF AUSTRALIA

Figure 126  Grounding Summary - Historical and Contemporary Comparison
5.6.1 Grounding

The first issue with grounding for the faith community is that there is no significant body of referential theology for the church. The authority reference spread is so wide that the only significant referential guide is the tradition of the past. While this has been rejected by both the historical body and the contemporary body alike, it remains significant in its influence of the espoused and operant, or experiential theory of the community. This is demonstrated by the correlation in the strong and weak aspects of the historical and contemporary grounded ecclesiology. The development of a referential body of theology for the community is critical. The second major grounding issue was the lack of understanding of the concept of the essence of the church. Many of the essence responses were couched in terms of expressions or actions. For example, being one, was largely couched in terms of corporate worship, being a sign, was largely expressed in terms of active witness. This, however, typifies the largely pragmatic and blind praxis
approach of many churches today. Much more work is needed in the praxis to provide a comprehensive essence theology of the church. The third major grounding issue was the absence of eschatological thinking. The goals provided for the church overall and for each ecclesial category were mainly connected to describing the purpose of the church here and now. Having an eye toward the ultimate eschatological goal of the church in God’s kingdom was missing. That said, the specific ecclesial theory elements within the contemporary praxis that requires further grounding work are depicted in the chart following (see Figure 129). The chart presents both the grounding grade of each category and all the elements in each category that do not currently have a substantive theory:

![Figure 129: Contemporary Grounded Theory Gaps](image)

The categories and elements which require further grounding by the contemporary praxis represent the areas of potential blind praxis that exist within the faith community researched. These are places where if activity exists there will be a lack of grounded theory to accompany it. On the whole one would be able to assert that the faith community being studied is a blind praxis community with only 7 of 15 or 47% of the categories having a moderate or substantive
grounding rating. Each ecclesial category which does not have a substantive rating needs significant grounded theory attention.

### 5.6.2 Integrating

The integration summary chart (see Figure 127) shows that each relationship needs integration attention. No essence relationship is substantively integrated. The only essence elements that are integrated with their associated expression and goal elements are those of personal holiness and confession. The remaining eight element combinations need integration attention. This integration picture demonstrates the highly fragmented and unconnected nature of the theory of the contemporary praxis. This situation is a direct result of the poor ecclesial grounding clearly depicted in the grounding summary pictures (Figures 126, 129) of this case study. Immediate attention must be given by the faith community not only to ground the areas highlighted previously, but now to include the integration of all but two elements of the ecclesial categories.

### 5.6.3 Aligning

Most of the ecclesial categories are shown as being completely out of alignment due to the lack of eschatological goal focus that the praxis gives to its ecclesiology. Therefore, as depicted in the summary chart (see Figure 128), every ecclesial category needs critical alignment attention by the faith community. In fact, even if we exclude the goal categories from the alignment results, only three expression elements do not require complete alignment attention. Those are corporate worship, maturing life, and proclamation, the three strengths of the movement. Every other expression element and the associated actions need significant realigning.

### 5.6.4 Summary

Based on the historical and contemporary praxis research undertaken on the Christian Community Churches of Australia, we can now make the following concluding case study recommendations for the movement:
1. The faith community needs to understand the ecclesial concepts of essence and eschatological goal.

2. The contemporary praxis must find or develop an authoritative referential operational ecclesiology.

3. The praxis is pragmatic and largely operates out of a blind praxis. Its grounded theory needs serious attention in all areas except for the essence category of sign.

4. The ecclesial theory is not integrated and all areas with the exception of personal holiness and confession need integration attention.

5. The praxis expression theory and action is not aligned or directed toward its goal. Each ecclesial category needs alignment attention.
6 CONCLUSION

Theology as knowledge for life has moved to theology as knowledge about life. Theology moved from *theologia as habitus*, to a fractured science, to a divided state of theory and praxis. Theory and praxis divided early on and has remained divided for far too long. Ecclesiology, in its abstract and practical branches, has also blazed separate trails. As a result, many faith communities exist in a state of blind theory or blind praxis, or both.

Schleiermacher foresaw this eventuality and describes the result of separating theory and praxis, suggesting:

> If an attempt were made to set forth the self-identical and invariable element in Christianity in complete abstraction from the historical, it would scarcely be distinguishable from the undertaking of people who imagine that they are expounding Christianity when in point of fact what they offer is pure speculation. And if anyone tried to present solely the variable in Christian history in complete abstraction from the self-identical, his aim would apparently be the same as that of people who, penetrating no further than the outer husk of things, permit us to see in the history of the Church nothing but the complex and pernicious play of blinded passion. (Schleiermacher 1989:585)

Practical theology commenced the construction of a bridge to span the theory and praxis divide, and thus avoid the rule of speculation or blind passion, of which Schleiermacher speaks. However, originally seeking an all-encompassing theory of praxis, Schleiermacher and practical theology has predominantly settled for theories of practices or action theories. Practical theology in the main lacks the essence and goal dimensions required to fully unite theory and praxis, leaving the pursuit of a holistic integrated theory of praxis incomplete. There still remains the need to help faith communities assess their particular ways of being the body of Christ “rather than leave them to depleting comparisons only with each other” (Neiman and Haight 2012:28), resulting in the morass of stale tradition or in the frenzy of pragmatic action, which is so prevalent. Without such critical attention churches are and will become “atrophied at theological reflection and risk remaining entrenched in what are literally parochial behaviours” (Neiman and Haight 2012:29). Such critical work understands the church, not in exclusively theological terms, nor in exclusively empirical, historical or worldly terms (Neiman and Haight 2012:14), but rather as an integration of the two. As Schillebeeckx puts it,
CONCLUSION

The saving revelation of God, offered to us through and in the Christian experiential tradition of the church community of faith, is indeed a grace, but a grace mediated through and in the structure of historical experience! Anyone who forgets that begins for example to split up the mystery of the church as it were gnostically and dualistically into a ‘heavenly part’ ... and an earthly part. In other words ... human freedom and divine grace - are indeed thought of as being next to and alongside each other, but in truth they are one and the same thing, a text to be deciphered in different language games. The church community as mystery cannot be found behind or above concrete visible reality. The church community is to be found in this reality which can be pointed at here and now. (Schillebeeckx 2014:210–12)

Through the development of the integrative dynamic discipline of practical theological ecclesiology the languages of theology and praxis, of divine grace and human freedom, are employed and connected. Practical theological ecclesiology successfully identifies a holistic praxis frame, the ecclesial praxis, which incorporates the entire nature and mission of the church. This frame effectively combines the essence, expression, and goal dimensions of the church and provides the essential boundary and dimensions for an integrative operational ecclesiology that can reflect the theological reality of the historical praxis.

The operational ecclesiology model presented, views the church as an incarnational eschatological image of the triune God. The essence of the church, as the body of Christ, is relational and reflective of the Trinity. As such the church is called to be an ordered faith community that is one, holy, open, and a sign of Christ. The expression of the church, as the building of the Spirit, is a dynamic of incarnational love. Thus, the church is called to unifying worship, sustaining nurture, embracing community, signifying witness, and sustaining leading, through the Spirit. The kingdom goal of the church, as the people of God, is eschatologically hope directed. Thus the goal of the church is to become, united, perfect, loving, reconciled, and complete with God. While practical theology is concerned with actions and associated action theory, practical theological ecclesiology, centred around the operational ecclesiology model, is concerned with the church “in the act of being most overtly itself” (Kavanagh 1992:75).

The four tasks of practical theological ecclesiology employ the operational ecclesiology model as a basis for their analysis of the praxis in pursuit of a holistic, grounded, integrated, aligned, and improved ecclesial praxis. The model allows for the analysis of the entire praxis in terms of its essence, expression and goal theory as well as its praxis actions. Importantly, the operational ecclesiology model provides the church with a framework for the ecclesiological elements of a
praxis rather than being prescriptive as most ecclesiologies are. It therefore allows any local faith community to apply the model, the tasks, and the analysis tools of practical theological ecclesiology to its praxis. Practical theological ecclesiology thereby enables a faith community to determine for itself the grounding and integrating of its operational ecclesiology, the aligning of its theory and praxis, and the improvement of its essence, expression and goal dimensions.

For the Christian Community Churches of Australia, having within this thesis carried out some significant research, there exists a clear way forward for the movement which until now had floundered between speculation and blind passion. The bringing together of theory and praxis through practical theological ecclesiology ensures the return of community formation through true *theologia*, a wisdom knowledge, a *habitus*, where the life and practice of the faith community unite.

This thesis has not only ensured that theory and praxis have been integrated into a comprehensive theory of praxis, thus making the avoidance of blind praxis and blind theory possible, an operational ecclesiological model that ensures this has been created, and four tasks have been set in dynamic motion to ensure each and every ecclesial praxis has the opportunity to be grounded, integrated, aligned, and improved in a dynamic ecclesial conversation that provides clear direction for the future. This is practical theological ecclesiology:

The dynamic critical purposeful engagement with the human-divine interactive life of the ecclesial praxis to: ground, integrate, align and improve its essence and expression dimensions as the revelational incarnational sign of God and his purposes in and for the world and directed toward his eschatological kingdom goal.

Practical theological ecclesiology provides new vistas for future research. As an overarching discipline it motivates research that can ensure theory and praxis are kept together ensuring the action focus of practical theology does not drift further away from theory but is informed and grounded in ecclesial theory, providing real possibilities for a theory of praxis. The practical theological ecclesiology model also provides a new pathway for ecclesiological thinking. No longer should ecclesiology be separated into abstract and applied schools, rather an ecclesiology which is truly operational and attends to the essence, expression, and goal dimensions of the ecclesial praxis is now possible. The operational ecclesiology model and approach allows faith communities to not only uncover their own operational ecclesiology but to also build or rebuild their own ecclesiology to ensure that it is grounded and integrated to their praxis. The practical theological
ecclesiology model, tasks, and analysis tools, provides faith communities of all persuasions, perhaps for the first time, to empirically evaluate all dimensions of their own praxis. As a result of such research faith communities can: see clearly their current praxis situation, map grounding, integrating, aligning, and improvement pathways, avoid blind theory and blind praxis situations, and tread confidently into the future. And for the brave theologians, there is a clarion call to heed, to return theology to its rightful place as a pursuit not about life, but for life.
APPENDIX 1 – RESEARCH SUMMARY

The questionnaire (see Appendix 2) was sent to the 14 members of the Christian Community Churches of Australia Board in May 2015. Seven participants agreed to participate in the research and completed the questionnaire. Their responses are collated and summarised below. The participant responses are included verbatim. Anything in [ ] has been added for clarification purposes only. Each participant has been allocated a unique number (1-7) which is included beside their responses. In the case of multiple responses in a category a sub number (i.e. 1.1) has been allocated. The grounding factors we are seeking to identify in each category have been either italicised or italicised and underlined. The summary below follows the same question order as the questionnaire.

ESSENCE QUESTIONS

a. What categories would you use to describe the essential nature of the church? (These essence categories relate to what the church is called to “Be” rather than “Do” – e.g. holy). (7 participants completed this question, resulting in 37 category entries.)

b. Provide your understanding of each of these categories. (7 participants completed this question.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Essence Category (a): ONE in Christ</th>
<th>Essence Description (b):</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 A worshipping community</td>
<td>1 Praising, loving and serving a holy, just, gracious, compassionate God together.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 A gathering of Christians</td>
<td>2 Regular meeting of Christians for encouragement in the Christian faith.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Worship</td>
<td>4 Created to Worship God.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.1 Be united</td>
<td>5.1 Unity as one chosen people in relation to the one true God – fulfilling all the related indications one vine, one church, one body, one faith.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.2 Be believers</td>
<td>5.2 The church consists of those who have accepted Christ as saviour.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.3 Love [of God]</td>
<td>5.3 Active demonstration of love of the believer toward God – including gratefulness and praise.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 Worship</td>
<td>7 To be a place where God is worshipped by his people.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

7 Entries – 19%
5 Participants – 71%

(The percentage is the number of entries for the heading divided by the total entries for the question.)

(The percentage is the number of participants who responded under this heading divide by the total participants who responded to the
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Essence Category (a): HOLY in Christ</th>
<th>Essence Description (b):</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>1</strong> A community of holiness</td>
<td>1 Committed to the highest standards of integrity in our thoughts, behaviour and conversation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2.1</strong> God-honouring</td>
<td>2.1 As the church we need to authentically represent God to the world and to each other. We need to live lives of integrity; the church by its very nature should portray and honour God.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2.2</strong> Humble</td>
<td>2.2 Arrogance and pride were the downfall of humankind; the church is called to be humble and servant-hearted. Our attitude should be that of Christ as portrayed in Philippians 2.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2.3</strong> Honest</td>
<td>2.3 The church needs to be transparent and honest, to be trustworthy. Satan is portrayed as a lair and the father of lies, the church is required to be the opposite of this.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>3</strong> Teaching</td>
<td>3 Regular meeting of Christians for teaching from the Bible.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>4</strong> Christlike Character</td>
<td>4 Be Christ like through exhibiting the fruit of the spirit. Includes being loving, holy, loving each other, being patient. The church community through relationships should exhibit such fruit.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>5.1</strong> Be his holy people</td>
<td>5.1 Originally in Old Testament times to be Holy was to abide by the law. In NT times it was a call to accept salvation according to the Bible and to be filled with the Holy Spirit.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>5.2</strong> Be edifiers</td>
<td>5.2 Christ came to save the world. The church should encourage and edify each other in order to equip and support each other in their demonstration of what God requires of them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>5.3</strong> Be obedient</td>
<td>5.3 Under the authority of the Bible.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>6</strong> Christ centred</td>
<td>6 As worshippers of Christ, glorifying the Father.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**10 Entries – 27%**
**6 Participants – 86%**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Essence Category (a): OPEN under Christ</th>
<th>Essence Description (b):</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>2</strong> Loving</td>
<td>2 The church should be known for their love for each other and love for those outside the church. The church is not called to judge the world (unfortunately this is what the church is predominantly known for) but to love the world. Jesus said all the law and prophets hang on two commands – love God wholly and love others as ourselves.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>6</strong> A community</td>
<td>6 Collectively demonstrating (practising) Christlike character in the...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Characterised by love</td>
<td>relationships within the church community and also towards those outside.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 Love</td>
<td>A place where everyone is loved and expresses (in practical terms) God’s love.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Entries – 8%</td>
<td>Grounding factors:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Participants – 43%</td>
<td>Communal Love – 2, 6, 7 (3 entries, 3 participants)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Inviting Kingdom Focus – 2, 6 (2 entries, 2 participants)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Essence Category (a): SIGN of Christ</th>
<th>Essence Description (b):</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.1 A witnessing community</td>
<td>1.1 Witnessing to the reality of God’s saving forgiveness in our words and actions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2 A community of justice</td>
<td>1.2 Commitment to those who are disempowered by the inequalities of society and to advocacy and action that seeks to redress the balance, and so to help make this world – including the created world around us – a place that reflects the heart of God.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.3 A community of compassion</td>
<td>1.3 Kindness that demonstrates itself in action for those in need within and outside the church – spiritual, physical, emotional, social.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.4 A community of grace</td>
<td>1.4 Seeing and treating others in the way that God does – with love and forgiveness and generosity and without judgmentalism.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.1 Christ-like</td>
<td>2.1 The church should express and portray the essential nature of Christ, when people encounter the church they should encounter Christ.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2 Kingdom-advancing</td>
<td>2.2 The church should be infused with a pioneering spirit – Jesus’ imperative to the church was that we would advance His Kingdom and that all in the world will have a legitimate opportunity to know him. We should be driven by a holy discontent, that while there are people in the world that don’t know or know of Jesus that we cannot rest. Complacency is the enemy of the church.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.1 Evangelism</td>
<td>3.1 Regular meeting of Christians to facilitate evangelism.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2 Service</td>
<td>3.2 Regular meeting of Christians to allow for and encourage service.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Missional</td>
<td>4 Church is to be mission minded to fulfil the great commission.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Be watchful / prepared</td>
<td>5 Aware and responsive to the requirements of the faithful both individually and in community and in order to respond to the needs of the unbelievers who they serve. Also as a considered awareness/anticipation of Christ’s return.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.1 Missional</td>
<td>6.1 Have a deep concern for the lost and seek to be Christ’s ambassadors.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.2 Salt and light in the world</td>
<td>6.2 Proclaiming in word and deed the truth that is personified in Christ and revealed in scripture in support of what is just and right (Kingdom values) in a world that has a different set of values.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 Witness</td>
<td>7 To be a witness of the Lord to the world.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| 13 Entries – 35%                   | Grounding factors:                                                        |
| 7 Participants – 100%              | Confession – 1.1, 2.2, 3.1, 4, 6.1, 6.2, 7 (7 entries, 6 participants)  |
|                                     | Presence – 1.1, 1.2, 1.3, 1.4, 2.1, 3.2, 5, 6.2 (8 entries, 5 participants) |
Essence Category (a): **ORDERED by Christ**

1. **Trustworthy**
2. **Body life**
   - 6.1 **A local body of Christ**
   - 6.2 **Dependent on the Holy Spirit**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>4 Entries – 11%</th>
<th>3 Participants – 43%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Essence Description (b):

2. The church is called to be a good steward of all that it has been given – people, money, time, opportunity, the gospel. Much of what Jesus says about how we will be assessed is to do with trustworthiness and stewardship.

4. All are to use their gifts to **build up the body** of Christ and expand God’s kingdom.

6.1 **A Christ’s representatives, continuing to do what He commenced and commanded His disciples to follow in His steps.**

6.2 **Claiming the authority of Christ and empowered only by the Holy Spirit in carrying out ministry in His Name.**

**Grounding factors:**

- **Directed body** – (0 entries, 0 participants)
- **Empowering body** – 4 (1 entry, 1 participant)

**EXPRESSION QUESTIONS**

a. What are the important broad expression categories that are essential to the life of your church? (expression or function categories are made up of a number of specific actions – e.g. singing, communion and prayer are part of the worship expression). (7 participants completed this question, resulting in 39 category entries.)

b. Describe the purpose of each of these broad expression categories. (7 participants completed this question.)

c. Explain how the broad expression categories connect to the essence categories in your church. (7 participants completed this question.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Expression Category (a): <strong>UNIFYING WORSHIP</strong></th>
<th>Expression Description (b):</th>
<th>Essence Connection (c):</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 <strong>Worship</strong></td>
<td>1 Leading the people into a <strong>corporate</strong> experience of God’s presence.</td>
<td>1 It brings the community together to the extent that it focuses on the ‘heart’ of God: grace, justice and compassion.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.1 <strong>Worship</strong></td>
<td>2.1 This is predominantly understood to be <strong>corporate</strong> event-oriented activity, rather than the life we live through the week.</td>
<td>2.1 <strong>God-honouring.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2 <strong>Prayer</strong></td>
<td>2.2 Organised prayer activities.</td>
<td>2.2 <strong>God-honouring.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.1 <strong>Communion</strong></td>
<td>3.1 The <strong>corporate</strong> sharing of the</td>
<td>3.1 No answer.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Expression Category (a): *SANCTIFYING NURTURE*

| 1.1 Teaching | 1.1 Opening God’s word in ways that reveal God’s story and what it means to [follow him](#). |
| 1.2 Encouragement | 1.2 Supporting and equipping members to be God’s [Kingdom people](#) in their homes, schools and workplaces. |
| 1.3 Discipling | 1.3 Helping people to grow their commitment to [follow Jesus](#), with strategies that build people up in their faith and that help them to express their gifts in ways that are appropriate for their age, experience, etc.. |

| 2.1 Teaching | 2.1 Again, mostly understood to be event-oriented didactic rather than discovery, dialogue and shared |

### Expression Description (b):

| 1.1 Opening God’s word in ways that reveal God’s story and what it means to [follow him](#). |
| 1.2 Supporting and equipping members to be God’s [Kingdom people](#) in their homes, schools and workplaces. |
| 1.3 Helping people to grow their commitment to [follow Jesus](#), with strategies that build people up in their faith and that help them to express their gifts in ways that are appropriate for their age, experience, etc.. |

### Essence Connection (c):

| 1.1 It helps disciples to grow in faith as they understand the character of God and the life he calls us to. |
| 1.2 This gives people the courage to capture the everyday opportunities to witness to God’s love and to uphold his standards that set his followers apart (holiness). |
| 1.3 This is a holistic task: Disciples are those who, as an act of worship to God, demonstrate grace, compassion, justice and integrity. It is these qualities that give power to the disciples’ witness in the community. |

| 2.1 Covers most of the essence categories in that it is providing [knowledge of God’s nature and what He requires of us](#). |
## APPENDIX 1 – RESEARCH SUMMARY

| 2.2 Children/Youth services | 2.2 Activities designed to engage and teach children and youth. | 2.2 Kingdom advancing, enabling God-honouring/Christ-like. |
| 3 Sermon | 3 Short message concerning a bible passage. | 3 Encouragement and challenge to service and belief. |
| 4 Discipleship | 4 Growth of the individual. | 4 Christlikeness. |
| 5.1 Prayer | 5.1 Communication with the source both individually and collectively. | 5.1 Directly related to holiness, edification and obedience. Also means of better preparedness for mission on earth and purpose for creation. |
| 5.2 Teaching/Preaching | 5.2 Investigation of the revelation in the Bible in order to inform the listener of the truth within. | 5.2 To encourage holy, obedient believers founded in the teachings of the Bible. |
| 6 Discipleship | 6 Recognising the interdependence within the local body of Christ, the various gifting of every single member are affirmed and their use facilitated and encouraged in ministry. | 6 As a local body of Christ we are living and growing, both in numbers and in spiritual development of members. |
| 7 Teaching | 7 A place where people get taught the Word of God. | 7 Worship. |

### Expression Category (a):

**EMBRACING COMMUNITY**

| 2 Community | 2 Providing opportunities for connecting people and building community. |
| 4 Fellowship | 4 The building a sense of community in the church. Loving one another. |
| 6 Fellowship | 6 Openness in sharing of life’s experiences within the church so there can be corporate rejoicing, weeping and sharing of one another’s burdens. |

### Expression Description (b):

**Grounding factors:**

*Maturing Life* – all responses (11 entries, 7 participants)

*Maturing Relationships* – 6 (1 entry, 1 participant)

### Essence Connection (c):

1. Loving.


3. Community characterised by love must facilitate openness in sharing life together.
### Appenidix 1 – Research Summary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>3 Entries – 8%</strong></th>
<th><strong>Grounding factors:</strong></th>
<th><strong>Essence Connection (c):</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **3 Participants – 42%** | *Loving People* – 2, 4, 6 (3 entries, 3 participants)  
*Embracing People* – (0 entries, 0 participants) | **1.1** The church bears witness to God in the local community by sharing the forgiveness and hope that comes in a relationship with Jesus Christ. |

**Expression Category (a):** **SIGNIFYING WITNESS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>1.1 Proclaiming God’s Good News</strong></th>
<th><strong>Expression Description (b):</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>1.1 Creating and taking evangelistic opportunities:</strong> through church programs or through encouraging members to engage in Christ-centred conversations.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>1.2 Demonstrating God’s Good News</strong></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>1.2 Taking seriously Jesus’ instructions to love our neighbour as we love ourselves, through serving our community.</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>2.1 Service</strong></th>
<th><strong>2.1</strong> <strong>Community engagement</strong> through acts and works of service.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>2.2 Children/Youth services</strong></td>
<td><strong>2.2</strong> Activities designed to engage and teach children and youth.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2.3 Outreach</strong></td>
<td><strong>2.3</strong> Activities directly targeting unchurched people.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>3.1 Mission</strong></th>
<th><strong>3.1</strong> An interest in the work of those involved in mission mainly overseas and financial support.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>3.2 Evangelism</strong></td>
<td><strong>3.2</strong> Activities aimed at connecting with non-church people as a way to introduce them to Christ.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>4 Mission</strong></th>
<th><strong>4</strong> To be involved in local community evangelism and in overseas mission.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>5.1 Evangelism</strong></td>
<td><strong>5.1</strong> Expectation of preparedness to give an account of your faith individually but also collectively in order to have others accept Christ.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| **5.2 Mission** | **5.2** Reaching out to assist the local community and offering financial support to further afield. Contribution to broader church associations |

<p>| <strong>5.2</strong> | <strong>5.2</strong> Obedience to the commands of Christ - edifies others and indicates expression of His love. |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service</th>
<th>Leadership</th>
<th>Ministry</th>
<th>Service</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>6 Evangelism</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Individuals living Christlike lives in local community such as neighbourhood, work, school. Collectively affirming those who have a particular gifting for evangelism. Corporately voicing support for like minded churches and organisations in outreach ministries.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 Outreach</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>12 Entries – 31%</strong>&lt;br&gt;<strong>7 Participants – 100%</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 Evangelistic events (e.g. men’s dinners, youth group).</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Expression Category (a): SUSTAINING LEADING**

**Expression Description (b):**

| 3 Paid and voluntary roles to allow the church to function. | 4 Sets church vision, approves activities and use of gifts, determines the priorities of any actions the church is involved. | 6 Facilitating the use of the various giftings of every member, the harmony of these leads to corporate ministry with the work of each member contributing to spiritual growth within the body and extension of the Kingdom. | 7 In an “office” (deacon, kid’s church co-ordinator, elder, pastor) and practical ways to each other (e.g. meals in sickness, hospitality, sharing. |

**Essence Connection (c):**

| 3 Opportunity to use skills for God. | 4 Body life. | 6 Connects with all of the essence categories. | 7 Witness, love. |
### Action Questions

a. What specific regular actions are carried out in your church? (e.g. preaching) (7 participants completed this question, resulting in 66 category entries.)

b. Describe the purpose of each of these actions in your church. (7 participants completed this question.)

c. Explain how each action contributes to the broad expression categories of the church. (7 participants completed this question.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Action Category (a):</th>
<th>Purpose Description (b):</th>
<th>Contribution to Expression Category (c): UNIFYING WORSHIP</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Ministry with people with disabilities</td>
<td>1 To worship God together</td>
<td>1 It provides encouragement in every direction. [Worship]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.1 Singing</td>
<td>2.1 To honour and worship God and draw people into purposeful worship.</td>
<td>2.1 Worship.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2 Communion</td>
<td>2.2 To thank Jesus for His sacrifice and as an act of obedience.</td>
<td>2.2 Worship.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3 Prayer meetings</td>
<td>2.3 Communion with God, empowering the work of the church.</td>
<td>2.3 Undergirds all expressions. [God focussed]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Communion</td>
<td>3 Obedience to Jesus encouragement.</td>
<td>3 Encouragement in the Christian faith. [God focussed]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.1 Prayer</td>
<td>4.1 Communicate with God.</td>
<td>4.1 Corporate worship.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2 Fellowship</td>
<td>4.2 Meeting to develop relationship with others.</td>
<td>4.2 Corporate worship.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.3 Communion</td>
<td>4.3 Remember Christ together.</td>
<td>4.3 Corporate worship.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.4 Singing</td>
<td>4.4 Praise God.</td>
<td>4.4 Corporate worship.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.1 Singing</td>
<td>5.1 Regular expression of shared expression of love/ thanks/ praise.</td>
<td>5.1 Act of worship.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.2 Communion</td>
<td>5.2 Sharing in the bread and wine in memory of Christ’s sacrifice.</td>
<td>5.2 Act of worship – total appreciation of what meaning and cost for salvation.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## APPENDIX 1 – RESEARCH SUMMARY

### Eschatological Goal Elements:

**United Faith** – (0 entries, 0 participants)

**United People** – 4.2 (1 entry, 1 participant)

### Expression Elements:

**God Focussed** – 2.3, 3, 6.1 (3 entries, 3 participants)

**Unifying Corporate Worship** – 1, 2.1, 2.2, 3, 4.1, 4.2, 4.3, 5.1, 5.2 (9 entries, 5 participants)

### Action Category (a):

| 1.1 Kid’s church | 1.1 To provide age-appropriate opportunities for worship and teaching Scripture to children; it provides baby-sitting. |
| 1.2 Youth group | 1.2 To provide age-appropriate opportunities for young people to worship together, to wrestle with Scripture and to serve their community. |
| 1.3 Seasonal events (Easter, Mothers Day etc.) | 1.3 It provides an opportunity for unchurched people to connect with church and to proclaim the Good news. |
| 1.4 Home groups | 1.4 To give people opportunities to wrestle with Scripture in relationship, and to ‘bear one another’s burdens. |
| 2.1 Teaching | 2.1 To challenge and equip people to live for Jesus and share Him with others. |
| 2.2 Children’s church/Youth Church program | 2.2 To teach children and youth about Jesus and the Bible. |
| 2.3 Life Groups | 2.3 Small groups study and applying God’s Word and Jesus teaching. |
| 3.1 Sermon | 3.1 A 20 to 30 minute address by Pastor or layperson. |
| 3.2 Children’s | 3.2 Three categories of lessons |

### Purpose Description (b):

| 1.1 To provide age-appropriate opportunities for worship and teaching Scripture to children; it provides baby-sitting. |
| 1.2 To provide age-appropriate opportunities for young people to worship together, to wrestle with Scripture and to serve their community. |
| It provides an opportunity for unchurched people to connect with church and to proclaim the Good news. |
| To give people opportunities to wrestle with Scripture in relationship, and to ‘bear one another’s burdens. |
| To challenge and equip people to live for Jesus and share Him with others. |
| To teach children and youth about Jesus and the Bible. |
| Small groups study and applying God’s Word and Jesus teaching. |
| A 20 to 30 minute address by Pastor or layperson. |
| Three categories of lessons |

### Contribution to Expression Category (c):

**SANCTIFYING NURTURE**

<p>| 1.1 It provides teaching in ways that are relevant to children. |
| 1.2 Teaching, encouragement, providing opportunities for young people to serve their community (love their neighbour). An essential discipling strategy. |
| Proclaiming the Good News usually takes place. |
| To give people opportunities to wrestle with Scripture in relationship, and to ‘bear one another’s burdens. |
| Teaching. |
| Teaching, children/youth services. |
| Teaching. |
| Encouragement and challenge to live the Christian life and be involved in evangelism and service. |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>3.2 Encouragement to Christian faith and action.</th>
<th>3.3 Encouragement to Christian faith and action.</th>
<th>4.1 Corporate worship/discipleship.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3.3 Youth program</td>
<td>3.3 Weekly meetings for activities and encouragement.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.1 Teaching</td>
<td>4.1 To bring worship, to bring Christlikeness, to encourage mission, and to develop gifts of members.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2 Small groups</td>
<td>4.2 To teach and disciple and mentor others and to model the character of Christ.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.1 Bible study groups</td>
<td>5.1 While also for teaching and learning also for relationship development and edification of others.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.2 Kid’s/Youth activities</td>
<td>5.2 General practices of preaching and teaching with direct emphasis for age appropriateness to children and youth.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.1 Teaching and preaching regularly in Sunday AM service.</td>
<td>6.1 At a time when 60-70% of members are together, ensure the whole of scripture is covered in a teaching programme over time and the gospel is regularly explained.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.2 Youth group</td>
<td>6.2 Develop youth within the church in areas of ministry and provide opportunity for their peer evangelism.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.3 Home groups</td>
<td>6.3 Deeper connections within local body of Christ.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.1 Preaching</td>
<td>7.1 Know God through His Word.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.2 Bible study</td>
<td>7.2 Know God, know each other.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.3 Men’s conference</td>
<td>7.3 Networking with other churches to learn God’s word together.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>20 Entries – 30%</strong> <strong>7 Participants – 100%</strong></td>
<td><strong>Eschatological Goal Elements:</strong> Perfect Image – 4.1, 4.2 (2 entries, 1 participant) Perfect Relationships – 5.1 (1 entry, 1 participant)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Action Category (a):</td>
<td>Purpose Description (b):</td>
<td>Contribution to Expression Category (c):</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.1 Eating together</td>
<td>1.1 To relax together, to know</td>
<td>EMBRACING COMMUNITY</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1.1 It is a practical way of loving our</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# APPENDIX 1 – RESEARCH SUMMARY

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Action Category (a):</th>
<th>Purpose Description (b):</th>
<th>Contribution to Expression Category (c):</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.1 Mainly Music</td>
<td>1.1 To provide a service to the young families in the community and to create opportunities for witness.</td>
<td>SIGNIFYING WITNESS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2 Short term overseas mission</td>
<td>1.2 To open our eyes to serve the wider world in need; to bless our brothers and sisters in other countries.</td>
<td>1.1 It is an outreach (evangelistic) activity – a Bible study group has grown out of it. At the same time it provides a service to families – it <em>proclaims</em> and <em>demonstrates</em> the Good News.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1.2 It broadens the scope of who our ‘neighbour’ is and our responsibility to share (<em>proclaim</em> and <em>demonstrate</em>) God’s Good News with all people. A peak experience in a discipling strategy.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Eschatological Goal Elements:

**Loving Community** – 1.1, 2, 4, 6.1 (4 entries, 4 participants)

**Kingdom Community** – (0 entries, 0 participants)

### Expression Elements:

**Loving People** – 1.1, 1.2, 2, 4, 6.1, 6.2, 6.3 (7 entries, 4 participants)

**Embracing People** – 7.2 (1 entry, 1 participant)
| 1.3 Craft group | 1.3 To connect unchurched people to the church by joining them in acts of service | 1.3 It is intentionally evangelistic in a very low-key way. It is also a way of demonstrating God’s Good News in service. It has provided an opportunity for people to express their gifts. |
| 1.4 One extra | 1.4 To provide groceries and household items for people in need in the local community. |
| 2.1 Playgroup | 2.1 To engage families in the community. |
| 2.2 Kids Hope | 2.2 Support and mentor underachieving children in schools. |
| 2.3 Action Team | 2.3 Serves those in need in the community in practical ways. |
| 3.1 Let’s Talk | 3.1 A way of connecting with the community and to introduce them to the Christian faith. |
| 3.2 CRE | 3.2 Teachers attending schools and taking lessons on the Christian faith. |
| 3.3 Playgroup | 3.3 Connection with parents and children in an informal way. |
| 4.1 Outreach events | 4.1 Reach non-Christians, group events and individual friendship actions. Intentional about witnessing for Jesus. Outreach events, Youth Group, Craft Group. |
| 4.2 Mission awareness and support. | 4.2 To communicate and support missionaries. Commission people who are going. |
| 5 Community events | 5 Attendance at various venues and groups e.g. aged care, school occasions. |
| 6.1 Kid’s on Sunday | 6.1 Provide age appropriate bible based teaching and also connect the kids with the wider congregation. |
| 6.2 Youth group | 6.2 Develop youth within the church in areas of ministry and provide opportunity for their peer evangelism. |
| 6.3 Community outreach | 6.3 Engage with the targeted community with aim of sharing Christ on their turf. |
| 6.4 Chuppa | 6.4 Engage with the elderly in the community through informal |
**GOAL QUESTIONS**

a. What is the overall ultimate goal of the church? (7 participants completed this question.)

**Ultimate Church Goal:**

1 To be a community who, as an act of worship to the God who has restored them to himself and others, partners with God in building his Kingdom. As this community, to be salt and light in a needy world and so bring glory to God.
2 To know Christ and make Him known.
3 To enable Christians to meet and to equip and encourage those who attend to communicate their faith with others so that they may become Christians.
4 To display Christ to the world and to fulfil the great commission – which is to reach the world for Christ.
5 To stand united in service to a loving relational God. Responding in obedience to His instruction and example to love others with the intent to lead and welcome them as brothers and sisters into the Kingdom of God for eternity.
6 The church exists to introduce people to Jesus Christ.
7 To be a place where God is honoured.

b. What is the ultimate goal of each of the essence categories named above? (7 participants completed this question.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Essence Category:</th>
<th>Goal:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>ONE in Christ</strong></td>
<td>1  Worship - To glorify, praise and honour God.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4  Worship - Glorify God and Jesus our saviour.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5.1 <strong>Be united</strong> - United service to Christ.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5.2 <strong>Be believers</strong> - Place in the Kingdom.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5.3 Love [of God] - People saved, God honoured, the church grow.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7  Worship – To worship the Lord our God visibly.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Grounding factors:</strong></td>
<td><strong>United Faith</strong> – 5.2 (1 entry, 1 participant)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>United People</strong> – 5.1 (1 entry, 1 participant)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Essence Category:</th>
<th>Goal:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>HOLY in Christ</strong></td>
<td>1  Holiness - To demonstrate - by our difference - that God’s standards have absolute meaning in a world of shifting standards.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2.1 God-honouring - The Church authentically represents God to the world and brings Him honour.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2.2 Humble - The church will be humble and servant-oriented.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2.3 Honest - The church will be known for its transparency, honesty and integrity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4  Christlikeness - For church members to display Godly character.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5.1 Be his <strong>holy people</strong> – Holiness.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5.2 Be edifiers - Demonstration of God’s love.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5.3 Be obedient - People saved.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6  Christ centred - To acknowledge His Lordship and our desire to be conformed to His image.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Grounding factors:</strong></td>
<td><strong>Perfect Image of Christ</strong> – 1, 2.1, 4, 5.1, 5.3, 6 (6 entries, 5 participants)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Perfect Relationships</strong> – 5.1 (1 entry, 1 participant)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Essence Category: OPEN under Christ

**Goal:**

2 Loving - The Church is known for their love for each other and love for those outside the church.

6 A community characterised by love - To demonstrate the love of Christ in contrast to the self-centred values of the world.

7 Love – To be a place where God's love is expressed today to show the reality of Jesus love in dying on the cross.

**Grounding factors:**

Loving Community – 2, 6, 7 (3 entries, 3 participants)

Loving Kingdom – 2 (1 entry, 1 participant)

### Essence Category: SIGN of Christ

**Goal:**

1.1 Grace - To draw people to God because grace underpins a Kingdom community.

1.2 Compassion - To provide support in the name of Christ to those in need.

1.3 Justice - To be part of establishing God’s just rule on earth.

1.4 Witness - To be ambassadors of God in our actions and words.

2.1 Christ-like - When people encounter the church they encounter Christ.

2.2 Kingdom-advancing - That the whole world will have an opportunity to know and follow Jesus.

4 Missional - To share God's grace with others.

5 Be watchful / prepared - Christ’s return to find a unified church.

6.1 Salt and light - To present the truth personified in Jesus in a way that will often prove counter cultural.

6.2 Missional - To present the good news to those who are lost with direct focus on the local community but support for wider fields.

7 Witness - To show the world in a visible form that God is real and to participate with God in His program of redemption.

**Grounding factors:**

Reconciled Position – 1.4, 2.1, 2.2, 4, 6.2 (5 entries, 4 participants)

Reconciled People – 1.4, 6.1, 7 (3 entries, 3 participants)

### Essence Category: ORDERED by Christ

**Goal:**

2 Trustworthy - That the church will multiply itself by being good stewards of the resources and opportunities at its disposal.

4 Body Life - All Need to use gifts for the benefit of the church and the expansion of God’s kingdom.

6.1 A local body of Christ - To be a local expression of the Kingdom.

6.2 Dependent on the Holy Spirit - To humbly acknowledge that living the life (Kingdom values) is not done in our own strength.
Grounding factors:
* Completely mature – (0 entries, 0 participants)
* Complete body – 4, 6.1 (2 entries, 2 participants)

c. What is the ultimate goal of the expression categories named above? (6 participants completed this question.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Expression Category: UNIFYING WORSHIP</th>
<th>Goal:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Worship - To celebrate who God is and what he is doing and to bow before him in wonder.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.1 Worship - To celebrate God and bring Him honour and glory.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2 Prayer - To communion with God, align with His will and empower the church to serve and grow.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.1 Communion - Identifying with Christ and remembering our salvation.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2 Singing - Emotional expression of faith.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Corporate Worship - For all members to bring glory to God together.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Worship - To glorify God.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Worship - To give Christ the central and highest place in any corporate decisions and activities and hence reflect what it is to be Christ’s followers when we are introducing people to Jesus.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Expression Category: SANCTIFYING NURTURE</th>
<th>Goal:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.1 Teaching - To establish people in the faith so that they are sure of the basic tenets of Christianity and their relevance to everyday life, and so live their lives differently.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2 Encouragement - To support one another as we live out our lives as followers of Jesus and as members of a fallen humanity.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.3 Discipling - To help every person to be mature in Christ in their faith and their lifestyle.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.1 Teaching - To equip God’s people to live for Christ and to advance His Kingdom.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2 Children/Youth Services - To teach, equip and empower young people to live for Jesus and advance His Kingdom.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Sermon - Encouragement to faith and action.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Discipleship - To see people become fully committed followers of Christ.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.1 Prayer - Stay in relationship with God.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.2 Teaching Preaching - Greater knowledge and understanding of God’s love and desires for us.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Discipleship - To facilitate the faithful use the gifting we have each received for encouraging and building up all members in their faith journey.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expression Category: EMBRACING COMMUNITY</td>
<td>Goal:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2 Community - To love each other as Christ loved us and create an environment of belongingness.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4 Fellowship - To build a sense of family and community.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6 Fellowship - To witness to the truth about Jesus by living as a loving and caring church family.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Expression Category: SIGNIFYING WITNESS</th>
<th>Goal:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1.1 Proclamation - To draw people to God by sharing that ‘life to the full’ with God is available to all people who accept his forgiveness that is made available to us through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1.2 Demonstration of the Good News - To impact the community with God’s grace as we show with our actions - large and small - what the Kingdom of God is like.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2.1 Service - To love others and let them know that God loves them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2.2 Children/Youth Services - To teach, equip and empower young people to live for Jesus and advance His Kingdom.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2.3 Outreach - To share Jesus with all in our circle of influence and beyond.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3.1 Mission - To help in the task of sharing the Gospel.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3.2 Evangelism - To help in the task of sharing the Gospel.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4 Mission - To be involved in communicating the gospel to the lost.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5.1 Evangelism - Growth in the Kingdom.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5.2 Mission - People in need served, God pleased and glorified.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6 Evangelism – To grow through conversions.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Expression Category: SUSTAINING LEADING</th>
<th>Goal:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3 Service - Opportunity for obedience to Christ.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4 Leadership - To provide discernment, direction, vision for the church.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6 Ministry - To be active partners (as a church) in what God is doing in the community in which the church members live.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**AUTHORITY QUESTIONS**

a. **Scripture:** What major influences guide your understanding and interpretation of Scripture? Please describe how they have influenced your understanding and interpretation. (7 participants completed this question, resulting in 23 category entries.)
## Appendix 1 – Research Summary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Influenced by: EXPERIENCE &amp; WORLDVIEW</th>
<th>Description of influence:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Family and upbringing</td>
<td>1 Though deeply conservative, my parents encouraged me to question (while belonging to a church that discouraged questioning). I think that the legacy of the very strict assembly in which I was brought up is my reaction against its very narrow interpretations and insistence that they be accepted blindly. I have at times swung too far the other way!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 My work with children</td>
<td>1 As most of my life has focussed on children, I have come to the conviction that we must help people to have a faith they can grow up with, not grow out of. Central to this is that we need to help them understand the context of the Bible narratives, and their own place in God’s story today – and how the two link up. I believe it is not a question if making the Bible relevant (it is!) but of making it approachable.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Working in a different country</td>
<td>1 My experiences in Africa forced me to ask the question: how much of my faith and action is shaped by my cultural perspective as a wealthy, white, female Westerner – and how much of it is authentically biblical. That is a lens through which I interpret Scripture.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Non-Christian friends</td>
<td>1 Their refusal to accept the ‘pat answer’ has constantly thrown be back to why I believe what I believe. This has been very challenging because ultimately acceptance of the authority of Scripture is a faith position (and because the Bible is a human as well as a divine document).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 My legal training</td>
<td>3 Treating the text as a statute and using interpretative skills learned as a lawyer to grapple with the text.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Western modernist thinking patterns</td>
<td>3 The text is important and reason is important.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| PERSONAL STUDY                        | |
|---------------------------------------||
| 2 Jesus’ treatment and perspective of Scripture | 2 Jesus is the ultimate authority on the interpretation and understanding of Scripture so studying how Jesus uses and applies Scripture is a key to our hermeneutic. |
| 2 Application of Scripture to life situations. | 2 Scripture comes alive in the crucible of life. Utilising scripture as a guide for life is essential to grasping the true meaning and intent of God’s Word. |
| 2 Daily Bible reading                 | 2 Being constantly in God’s Word, especially the continual reading of the Gospels, deepens my capacity to understand and apply scripture and provides opportunity for the Spirit to speak through the Word. |
| 3 Significant Christian writers of the evangelical strain | 3 A conservative interpretation of the text. |
| 5 Personal reflection                 | 5 Time alone studying the word prayerfully and in faith believing guidance comes from the Holy Spirit. |
| 6 Reading the bible regularly         | 6 Having an open mind and expecting to see revealed truth every |

6 Entries – 26%  
2 Participants – 29%
### Appendix 1 – Research Summary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6 Comparing scripture with scripture</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>71%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Testimonies and autobiographical literature</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>86%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Theological Education</strong></td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>86%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 Entries – 35%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Church Tradition</strong></td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Entries – 13%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Church Teaching &amp; Community</strong></td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Entries – 22%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Theological Education
2 Disciplined and systematic study
5 Formal study
7 Theological training

#### Church Tradition
4 Past elders
6 Tradition and church doctrinal documents

#### Church Teaching & Community
5 Good teaching
5 Good example in fellowship
7 Teaching at church

#### Referential Responses
5 Participants – 71%
5 Entries – 22%

#### Experiential Responses
6 Participants – 86%
18 Entries – 78%

---

6 Knowing the bible does not contradict itself, seek to place the particular passage in the overall revelation of scripture.

6 Key men and women whom God has used greatly to extend the Kingdom and have themselves expressed various (and varying) understandings of doctrinal truths, often influenced by their experience of God at work.

2 My theological and biblical education has equipped me to better understand and interpret God’s Word.

5 In depth training through formalised study and also through conference presentations.

7 Recent studies at Emmaus on “Interpretation and Overview of the OT & NT” and “Intro to NT Greek”. Understanding different approaches to interpretation.

4 Passed down and modelled an understanding of scripture and church life.

6 To a lesser extent over time given opportunity for personal study.

5 The teaching and advice provided by strong believers as friends and mentors and from the pulpit, literature and media.

5 Close friendships with committed loving believers who readily share their faith.

7 Listening to what others in Bible study see as interpretation.

7 Listening to teaching as to interpretation.

Includes entries under headings: Theological Education, Church Tradition.

Includes entries under headings: Experience & Worldview, Personal Study, Church Teaching & Community.
a. **Other:** What other major influences have been formative in shaping your theology (e.g. founders of the movement, key theologians, significant writers etc.). Please name and describe how each of these have influenced the formation of your theology. (7 participants completed this question, resulting in 24 category entries.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Influenced by:</th>
<th>Description of influence:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>FOUNDERS OF THE MOVEMENT</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 Darby</td>
<td>7 Reading him on what to avoid his errors and approaches</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 Groves</td>
<td>7 Reading positively his approach.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>LEADERS/WRITERS OF THE MOVEMENT</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Early Brethren authors such as C H</td>
<td>6 Giving greater relevance to the OT and its connection to the life and death of Jesus.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mackintosh and C A Coates</td>
<td>7 A cassette sermon many years ago on OT passage on “The Rock”.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 Dr David Gooding</td>
<td>7 The “great teachers” (e.g. Ken Harding, Don Stormer, Bill Archbold) - seriously</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>questioning their view of Scripture and wondering why their behaviour and supposed “great</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>teaching” doesn’t match.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 Negative Teachers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>OTHER THEOLOGIANS/WRITERS</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Authors/theologians</td>
<td>1 Authors like Eugene Peterson, N. T. Wright and Chris Wright have opened my eyes to the</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>grand narrative of Scripture and the mission of God in which we participate. I have</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>embraced the move away from propositional theology – though there’s an important place</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>for it. Chris Wright’s ‘lenses’ for biblical interpretation are very useful. (Books like</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>‘How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth’ helped me as a young person to understand the</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>basic hermeneutical principles that helped me to explore Scripture for myself).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 C S Lewis</td>
<td>2 Lewis’ ability to communicate the essence of Christianity and expose the games we play</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>that discredit Christ was second to none and have been transformational for me.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 John Stott</td>
<td>2 Stott’s Basic Christianity and Issues Facing Christians Today provide a framework for</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>me to respond to the many practical challenges of living for Jesus in a complex society.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Philip Yancey</td>
<td>2 Yancey’s ability to cut through the contrived and hypocritical environment of the</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>institutional church, especially in his book What’s So Amazing About Grace, was</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>enormously helpful to me in my journey towards a more authentic and attractive faith.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Hugh Ross</td>
<td>2 Ross, particularly in his books The Fingerprint of God and Beyond the Cosmos helped</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>me resolve the many conflicts I</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Authors</td>
<td>Contributions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Bill Hybels</td>
<td>had between my science education and my understanding of the Bible and also helped me to grasp the implications of the extra-dimensionality of God.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Charles Spurgeon</td>
<td>4 Church leadership and leadership training.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 The Apostle Paul</td>
<td>5 What would appear to be a deep theological well researched understanding of scripture only as a means for a day to day moment by moment dependence on Christ.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 John MacArthur and John Piper</td>
<td>5 An excellent example of a graciously forgiven and purposeful life.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 W E Vine</td>
<td>6 Expository teaching that relates the whole of scripture.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Martin Lloyd Jones and John Stott</td>
<td>6 Some understanding of the original languages.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Bill Hybels</td>
<td>6 Practical theology.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 Spurgeon</td>
<td>6 Contemporary forms of evangelism and tools for spiritual growth (though in USA context).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OTHERS</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Scripture Union</td>
<td>1 Colleagues and I have grappled with Scripture in lively debates. SU’s Statement of Hermeneutical principles to me, captures the heart of good interpretation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 People with disabilities</td>
<td>1 My friendships and work with people with special needs, force me to ask ‘What are THE most important things to grasp?’.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Children’s ministry specialists</td>
<td>1 People like Terry Clutterham and Ivy Beckwith have consolidated my belief that Scripture is not to be trivialised, sanitised, moralised or compartmentalised. Not for children or for anyone else.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Navigators</td>
<td>4 Basic understanding of how to read God’s word.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Workplace – Christian school</td>
<td>4 Christian environment relating to character and how the gospel impacts every area of life.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 Hillsong</td>
<td>7 They have grasped the reality of H.S. but of course have gone too far with prosperity gospel.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Movement Referential Responses**
- 2 Participants – 29%
- 5 Entries – 21%

**External Referential Responses**
- 6 Participants – 85%
- 19 Entries – 79%

Includes entries under headings: Founders of the Movement, Leaders/Writers of the Movement.

Includes entries under headings: Other Theologians/Writers, Others.
APPENDIX 2 – RESEARCH QUESTIONNAIRE

RESEARCH PARTICIPANT INFORMATION AND CONSENT STATEMENT

Thank you for your time. As part of my doctoral thesis entitled “Practical theological ecclesiology: grounding, integrating, aligning and improving ecclesial theory and praxis in the Christian Brethren community in Australia,” I am undertaking a qualitative empirical study of the leaders of the Christian Brethren movement in Australia. As a key leader of the movement in Australia I invite you to be a participant in this research. All information provided remains anonymous and confidential. The following outlines the details of the study:

(1) What is the study about?
The study considers the underlying theological beliefs and the practices of the Christian Brethren movement to ascertain whether they are theologically grounded, integrated, and aligned, in order to assist in improving the witness of the church.

(2) Who is carrying out the study?
The study is being conducted by David Smith (Perth Bible College) and will form the basis for the degree of Doctor of Theology at the University of South Africa under the supervision of Professor Hennie Pieterse.

(3) What does the study involve?
The study involves a structured questionnaire with a follow up personal interview on the theology and practice of your church. See the attached sheet to refer to the questions.

(4) How much time will the study take?
It is anticipated that the questionnaire will take approximately 1-2 hours. A follow up interview may be required for clarification purposes.

(5) Can I withdraw from the study?
Participating in this study is completely voluntary; you are not under any obligation to take part and can withdraw at any time.

(6) Will anyone else know the results?
All aspects of the study, including the results, will be strictly confidential and only the researcher will have access to the information supplied by the participants. A report of the study will be included in the doctoral dissertation, but individual participants will not be identifiable in such a report.

(7) What if I require further information?
When you have read this information, if you have any questions or would like to know more please feel free to contact me (david@pbc.wa.edu.au (08) 9243 2000).

David Smith
PERTH BIBLE COLLEGE - PRINCIPAL

Having read and agreed to the above I consent to being a research participant:

Name:__________________________ Date:___________ Signature:____________________
RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Please ensure you have read and signed the attached information and consent statement prior to answering the following structured questions. If any of the answers provided are not clear to the researcher a follow up conversation may be arranged. Please answer the questions using this Word document and the tables provided below. If more rows are required please add.

1. ESSENCE QUESTIONS
   a. What categories would you use to describe the essential nature of the church? (These essence categories relate to what the church is called to “Be” rather than “Do” – e.g. holy)
   b. Provide your understanding of each of these categories.

2. EXPRESSION QUESTIONS
   a. What are the important broad expression categories that are essential to the life of your church? (expression or function categories are made up of a number of specific actions – e.g. singing, communion and prayer are part of the worship expression)
   b. Describe the purpose of each of these broad expression categories.
   c. Explain how the broad expression categories connect to the essence categories in your church.

3. ACTION QUESTIONS
   a. What specific regular actions are carried out in your church? (e.g. preaching)
   b. Describe the purpose of each of these actions in your church.
   c. Explain how each action contributes to the broad expression categories of the church.

4. GOAL QUESTIONS
   a. What is the overall ultimate goal of the church?
   b. What is the ultimate goal of each of the essence categories named above?
   c. What is the ultimate goal of each of the broad expression categories named above?

5. AUTHORITY QUESTIONS
   a. Scripture: What major influences guide your understanding and interpretation of Scripture? Describe how they have influenced your understanding and interpretation.
   b. Other: What other major influences have been formative in shaping your theology (e.g. founders of the movement, key theologians, significant writers etc.). Name and describe how each of these has influenced the formation of your theology.
1. ESSENCE QUESTIONS

a. What categories would you use to describe the essential nature of the church? (These essence categories relate to what the church is called to “Be” rather than “Do” – e.g. holy)

b. Provide your understanding of each of these categories.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Essence Category (a):</th>
<th>Essence Description (b):</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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</tbody>
</table>
2. EXPRESSION QUESTIONS

a. What are the important broad expression categories that are essential to the life of your church? (expression or function categories are made up of a number of specific actions – e.g. singing, communion and prayer are part of the worship expression)

b. Describe the purpose of each of these broad expression categories.

c. Explain how the broad expression categories connect to the essence categories in your church.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Expression Category (a):</th>
<th>Expression Description (b):</th>
<th>Essence Connection (c):</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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3. ACTION QUESTIONS

a. What specific regular actions are carried out in your church? (e.g. preaching)
b. Describe the purpose of each of these actions in your church.
c. Explain how each action contributes to the broad expression categories of the church.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Action Category (a):</th>
<th>Purpose Description (b):</th>
<th>Contribution to Expression Categories (c):</th>
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## 4. Goal Questions

**a.** What is the overall ultimate goal of the church?

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<th>Ultimate Church Goal:</th>
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**b.** What is the ultimate goal of each of the essence categories named above?

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<th>Essence Category:</th>
<th>Goal:</th>
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c. What is the ultimate goal of the expression categories named above?

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5. AUTHORITY QUESTIONS

a. **Scripture:** What major influences guide your understanding and interpretation of Scripture? Please describe how they have influenced your understanding and interpretation.

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<th>Description of influence:</th>
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b. **Other:** What other major influences have been formative in shaping your theology (e.g. founders of the movement, key theologians, significant writers etc.). Please name and describe how each of these have influenced the formation of your theology.

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<th>Influenced by:</th>
<th>Description of influence:</th>
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APPENDIX 3 – ROME CONFERENCE

In June 2015, in Rome I had the opportunity to present at the International Brethren Conference on Mission, where 700 leaders from 105 countries gathered. I presented and explained the dimensions of the operational ecclesiological model, essence, expression action and goal. In a workshop with 40 theologians, educators and leaders from across the globe, asked them to suggest the essential categories of essence and expression for the church community.

ESSENCE RESPONSES

The entry “Universal” was added by me to illustrate that the essence category of openness and kingdom thinking had been overlooked.
EXPRESSION RESPONSES

The entry “Inclusiveness” (bottom right) was added by me to illustrate that the expression category element of embracing others needs to be added to the element of loving community in order for a full openness to be operating.


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