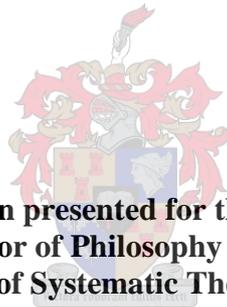# TOWARDS AN EVANGELICAL THEOLOGY
OF THE INDIVIDUAL-IN-COMMUNITY:
A THEOLOGICAL ANALYSIS
AND PROPOSAL

by

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**Dissertation presented for the degree of
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December 2016

ABSTRACT

Within evangelicalism there has and continues to be a growing awareness of the seminal benefit of a theology of community. For some time now, there have been signs within evangelicalism of a growing dissatisfaction with the negative aspects of individualism that are not only evident in the culture in which it was formed, namely, western culture, but also in its theology which has resulted in a neglect of community as an essential aspect of the Christian life. While the importance of the individual as person before God cannot be minimized, this dissertation seeks a greater balance between the individual and community but is heavily weighted in the direction of community because of the perceived weakness described. Therefore, the motif of "the individual-in-community" has been chosen and the proposed research question in this dissertation is as follows: The theology of evangelicalism is being awakened to the concept of community as a significant thrust in scripture, so how can some specific and helpful loci of theology be revisited so that its captivity to individualism is challenged and its theology is more community oriented?

Because the recapturing of this important emphasis on community is a perceived need evidenced by the reading of a number of evangelical theologians and commentators on this movement, this requires revisiting some of the major underlying concepts which have underpinned evangelicalism. This is being done from the standpoint that the body of Christ as a community is of greater theological importance than is generally realized

among evangelicals in the main. While a fully orbed theology of the individual-in-community is beyond the scope of this project, certain key loci and specific aspects of these loci of theology have been chosen because of their perceived importance in strengthening an evangelical theology of the individual-in-community: the authority of scripture, the related doctrines of the Trinity and the *imago Dei*, salvation, and finally, the church. The intended and ultimate purpose of this dissertation is that it will have the effect of revitalizing an evangelical ecclesiology.

The motivation, therefore, behind this dissertation has to do with the present state of evangelicalism as observed by western evangelical theologians primarily but not exclusively where the ethos of evangelicalism seems to be undergirded by a cultural captivity to individualism which blinds it to the enriching aspects of a community orientation in its theologizing and its embodied ecclesiastical life. This cultural captivity, as will become evident, inadvertently diminishes the norms of evangelical theology even in key areas that it purportedly elevates. Hence, in this dissertation the motivation is to pursue a study of certain key areas or strands of thinking within evangelical theology where reductionisms have taken place and a more robust evangelical theology is necessary, and where this added emphasis will bring about a strengthening of evangelical theology as it becomes more "community" conscious.

OPSOMMING

Binne die evangelikale teologiese tradisie was en is daar 'n toenemende bewussyn van die bevrugtende bate van 'n teologie van gemeenskap. Vir 'n geruime tyd is daar reeds tekens binne die evangelikalisme van 'n toenemende ontevredenheid met die negatiewe aspekte van individualisme wat nie net sprekend is binne die kultuur waarin dit gevorm is nie, naamlik die Westerse kultuur, maar ook binne sy teologie, wat gelei het tot 'n verwaarlosing van gemeenskap as 'n essensiële aspek van die Christelike lewe. Terwyl die belang van die indiwidu as persoon voor God nie verkleineer kan word nie, soek hierdie proefskrif na 'n beter balans tussen die individu en gemeenskap, maar dit leun sterk oor na die kant van gemeenskap, weens die vermeende swakheid soos beskryf. Die motief van "die individu-binne-gemeenskap" is om hierdie rede gekies en die voorgestelde vraag vir navorsing in die proefskrif is die volgende: Aangesien die evangelikale teologie begin ontwaak tot die bewussyn van gemeenskap as 'n sleuteltema in die Skrif, hoe kan sommige spesifieke en behulpsame loci in die teologie weer onder oë geneem word sodat hul gevangenskap aan die individualisme uitgedaag kan word en hul teologie meer gemeenskap-georiënteerd kan word?

Omdat die herwinning van hierdie belangrike aksent op gemeenskap gesien word as 'n behoefte wat bevestig is deur die lees van 'n aantal evangelikale teoloë en kommentators van hierdie beweging, vereis dit dat daar weer gekyk sal word na die belangrikste onderliggende konsepte wat die onderbou van evangelikalisme gevorm het. Dit word gedoen vanuit die vertrekpunt dat die liggaam van Christus as gemeenskap van groter

teologiese belang is as wat in die algemeen deur die evangelikale hoofstroom beskou word. Terwyl 'n omvattende teologie van die individu-in-gemeenskap buite die skopus van hierdie projek val, is sekere sleutel loci en spesifieke aspekte van hierdie loci in die teologie gekies, weens hulle waarneembare belang in die versterking van 'n evangelikale teologie van die individu-in-gemeenskap: die gesag van die Skrif, die verwante leerstellings van die Triniteit en die *imago Dei*, verlossing en uiteindelik, die kerk. Die bedoelde en finale doel van hierdie proefskrif is dat dit in werklikheid nuwe lewe sal gee aan 'n evangelikale ekklesiologie.

Die motivering onderliggend aan hierdie proefskrif het te make het met die huidige toestand van evangelikale teologie soos waargeneem deur Westerse teoloë, primêr maar nie uitsluitend nie, waar die etos van evangelikale teologie skynbaar gebou is op 'n kulturele gevangenskap aan individualisme wat dit verblind vir die verrykende aspekte van 'n gemeenskaps-oriëntasie in sy teologisering en sy beliggaming van die gemeentelike lewe. Hierdie kulturele gevangenskap, soos dit sal blyk, doen onbewustelik afbreuk aan die norme van evangelikale teologie selfs in sleutel-areas wat dit na bewering sou onderskraag. Die motivering vir hierdie dissertasie is dus die bestudering van sekere sleutel-areas of gedagte lyne binne die evangelikale teologie waar reduserings plaasgevind het en 'n meer robuuste evangelikale teologie nodig is en waar hierdie addisionele beklemtoning 'n versterking van evangelikale teologie sal meebring na mate dit meer "gemeenskaps-bewus" word.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

In keeping with the thrust of this dissertation, I wish to thank the community of those who have made the completion of this project possible. First, I wish to thank God for the various communities of faith I was brought into from my earliest years which helped form and nurture my faith. With their formation and encouragement, I have come into a deeper appreciation of the importance of God's community.

Next I would like to express gratitude to my wife, Sue, who has encouraged me in this task and sacrificed much so that I could complete this work. Her hours of scanning, photocopying and collating were of great help as this work progressed, and her words of encouragement to keep going helped motivate me. The blessing of a wife who serves as an encourager is great indeed, and our times together in the beautiful area of Stellenbosch when I was not working on this dissertation made possible memories that will always be ours to remember and treasure.

I would also like to thank my mission organization, The Evangelical Alliance Mission (TEAM), and our many supporters for making it possible financially for me to engage in further studies. TEAM's progressive encouragement of life-long learning has made this project possible, and for this I am grateful.

Then there are my colleagues at Harare Theological College who I would like to thank. They have picked up the slack while I have taken time to study and have shown interest in my progress throughout. I have often been prayed for in this task by them, and the comradery of studying and working together is what has spurred me on in this task.

I would also like to thank Chuck Moore, my friend and teacher, for his encouragement to pursue not only the study of Christian community but to live it out. His example, inspiration and prodding have played a big part in me pursuing this topic.

Finally, but not least, I would like to thank my supervisor, Professor Robert Vosloo, for his insightful guidance and directing of this work. He is certainly not responsible for its deficiencies, but his encouragement and expertise have certainly pushed me towards a better completion.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 The Motivation behind this Dissertation

Within evangelicalism there is a growing awareness of the seminal benefit of a theology of community.[1] For some time now, which will become evident as this dissertation progresses, there have been signs both among evangelical theologians and congregants of a growing dissatisfaction with the traditional evangelical ways of doing church with its overemphasis on radical individualism that underlies so much of western culture and its neglect of community as an essential aspect of the Christian life.

Historically, evangelicalism has been committed to biblical doctrine as a follow on to the Reformation and the concomitant emphasis on personal salvation. The emphases on the authority of the Bible and the sole salvific work of Christ leading to salvation by grace through faith alone have been hallmarks of evangelicalism. Puritanism bequeathed to evangelicalism a desire for a vibrant personal dimension to Christian faith, and the evangelical zeal in fulfilment of the Great Commission (Matt 28:19-20) of inviting unbelievers to experience the grace of God in salvation has been a particularly vital aspect

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[1] Stanley Grenz is one evangelical theologian who chooses "community" as the integrating motif for his systematic theology. He does so with the belief that establishing community is central to God's program and that such an "understanding of the divine purpose offers a fruitful point of departure for theological discussion, because it lies at the heart both of the biblical vision and the longing of humankind" (Grenz 1994, pp. ix, x).

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of evangelicalism. The *New Dictionary of Theology* captures well this essence of evangelicalism:

> Evangelical theology has particular ties with the distinctives of the Protestant Reformation. It is deeply committed to the centrality of the Bible (see Scripture), to its power by the Holy Spirit with special reference to preaching, to its final authority in all matters of doctrine and life, and to the necessity of interpreting it as naturally as possible and disseminating it widely in the vernacular. It is equally committed to justification by faith in which acceptance with God is received by trusting his loving self-disclosure and not by any human accomplishment. It also readily confesses that the church is composed of all believers who have thus been incorporated by the Holy Spirit, and who have direct, personal and constant access to their heavenly Father. (1988, p. 239)

While these strengths within evangelicalism have been long observed, they have also resulted in what has been described by some evangelical theologians, who will be referred to later on, as a truncated soteriology that has tended to overshadow the importance of Christian community. This overemphasis on personal salvation has for example disconnected evangelicals from a sense of community in the task of interpreting the Bible and the proper understanding that we all function within a tradition that affects our understanding of the Bible and the Christian life. The strong community motif that seems to run throughout the scriptures has been blurred resulting in an ethos that has largely exchanged the priority of the church for the priority of the individual. What will become evident in this work is that the individual focus of much western thought since the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries that underlies much evangelical thought is in notable contrast with the biblical focus of the world, creation, and community where the individual must be understood within this broader context of what God is doing cosmically and eschatologically (cf. Thiselton 2007, p. 542-43).

Recapturing this important emphasis on community for evangelicalism means we must revisit some of the major underlying concepts which have underpinned it so that an awareness of the body of Christ as a community is of greater importance than is generally

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realized. In doing so, certain unhelpful bifurcations such as the one between personal piety and corporal spirituality will be removed and a renewed emphasis of the saved individual in Christian community will be appreciated. Not only will this hold promise for a revitalized evangelical ecclesiology, but it can also result in an evangelical soteriology that is placed in its proper context which is that we are saved because of the church and that we are saved to be the church.

However, on the positive side, there also needs to be the recognition that there are certain evangelical theologians and those within certain evangelical theological traditions who have understood the importance of a theology of community. Furthermore, there are certain ecumenical documents such as those put together by the Lausanne Movement of recent times with its many evangelical contributors that have demonstrated that an emphasis on individualism with a diminished view of the church is not entirely reflective of evangelical thinking. These positive contributions cannot be minimised and will be brought into focus in particular ways as this dissertation unfolds.

The motivation, therefore, behind this dissertation has to do with the present state of evangelical ecclesiology as also observed by evangelical theologians. As one looks at the norms or "pillars" of evangelical theology, at its best the strengths of evangelical theology are the attention to which it gives the biblical message, followed by the consideration it gives to the theological heritage of the church, and finally the attempts it makes to be relevant to the present context in which the contemporary people of God speak, live and act.

But much of the ethos of evangelicalism seems to be undergirded by a cultural captivity to individualism which blinds it to the enriching aspects of a community orientation in its theologizing and its ecclesiastical life. This cultural captivity

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inadvertently diminishes the norms of evangelical theology as stated above. In order for this cultural captivity to be addressed, this dissertation will put forward for consideration some fundamental theological concepts that need to be revisited, addressed and revised so that evangelical theology reflects more of a community orientation that is cognisant of the overall balance of what is communicated biblically. Hence, in this thesis I am motivated to pursue a study of certain key areas or strands of thinking within evangelical theology where reductionisms have taken place and a broader evangelical theology is necessary, and where this added emphasis will bring about a strengthening of evangelical theology in some key areas. The emphasis in this dissertation, rather than being on a fully orbed theology of community which would be too broad in scope anyway, will be on areas which strongly resonate with evangelicals but need greater development towards the communal. These selected areas will also reflect an emerging current of evangelical thinking that is more "community" oriented. My hope is that this dissertation will ultimately contribute to our evangelical ecclesiastical life being richer because congregants are more in tune with a central thrust of scripture and are more connected as the people of God in the way they think, speak, live and act thereby fostering Christian community.

What also motivates this dissertation is that there is a growing body of literature where the concept of "community" as it relates to ecclesiology is slowly gaining attention as one reads the more recently written literature in this locus of theology particularly within evangelical circles.[2] Some examples of books on the church with more of an

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[2] Later on in this dissertation (Chapter 2) I will define what "evangelical" means in greater detail, as it is a term that covers a broad spectrum of Christian adherents.

emphasis on community rather than just the institutional nature of the church are Kevin Gile's, *What on Earth is the Church? An Exploration in New Testament Theology* (1995); David L. Smith's, *All God's People: A Theology of the Church* (1996); and Tim Chester and Steve Timmis's *Total Church: A Radical Reshaping around Gospel and Community* (2008). However, this trend should not be viewed as simply reflecting an academic interest, but should be seen as a response to the increasing sense of isolation and fragmentation of persons and people, respectively, in modern society in general. Peter Block in his book, *Community: The Structure of Belonging*, builds his book on the premise that in western culture "(t)he absence of belonging is so widespread that we might say we are living in an age of isolation." His diagnosis, in brief, of what gives rise to this is as follows: "Our isolation occurs because western culture, our individualistic narrative, the inward attention of our institutions and our professions, and the messages from our media, all fragment us. We are broken into pieces" (2008, pp. 1-2). This absence of belonging even in the church has not gone unobserved as will become evident as we go along. That this emphasis on community would and should be the case by theologians who care about the state of the church is supported by the fact that historically the development of theology has invariably taken place within a particular context which created the need for a response and the fertile ground for that response to take root and flourish. In short, a lack of community felt by so many particularly within the Church has led to this response by theologians of reflecting on Christian community.

In the broader context of theological refection on the theme of community, one theologian who attempted a significant "theology of community" back in the 1970s is John P. Schanz who wrote that within the church there is a crisis in community which "shows itself as a thrust from below, a kind of grass roots stirring for a new community

awareness." However, he pointed out that "the current concern for community is most visible among an intellectual elite, which has become increasingly articulate" (1977, p. ii).[3] While Schanz was writing as an observer of trends within the Roman Catholic Church, the great wealth of literature that has arisen since he wrote dealing with the topic of ecclesiology and community demonstrates that his observations are not limited to trends within his own religious tradition but are equally true within the broader orbit of evangelicalism.[4]

Probably one of the most articulate evangelical theologians of recent years with a concern for community is the Baptist theologian, Stanley J. Grenz. In his book, *Revisioning Evangelical Theology* (1993), and in his subsequent works, he associates this emphasis on community among thinkers of all theological orientations, not just evangelical theologians, to a larger cultural shift gradually taking place in the West, a shift he likens to "the intellectual and social changes that marked the birth of modernity out of the decay of the Middle Ages" (1993, p. 14) This cultural shift which many

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[3] For an example of an African theologian who is Roman Catholic who wants to develop a strong sense of communality who puts forward the proposal of conceiving of Jesus Christ as Proto-Ancestor as a basis for his ecclesiology, see Benezet Bujo's books, *African Theology in its Social Context (*1992*)*, and *The Ethical Dimension of Community: The African Model and the Dialogue Between North and South* (1998).

[4] Examples of this can be seen in the following books: *A Fellowship of Differents: Showing the World God's Design for Life Together* by the evangelical New Testament scholar, Scot McKnight (2015) and *Living into Community: Cultivating Practices That Sustain Us* by the Christian social ethicist of Asbury Theological Seminary, Christine D. Pohl (2011). Other books where the concept of the church as community looms large are James Bryan Smith's, *The Good and Beautiful Community: Following the Spirit, Extending Grace, Demonstrating Love* (2010); Craig van Gelder's, *The Essence of the Church: A Community Created by the Spirit* (2000); Brian McClaren's, *The Church on the Other Side* (2003); and Richard Keyes, *Chameleon or Tribe? Recovering Authentic Christian Community* (1999). All of these authors bemoan the fact that Christians, influenced by Western culture, have a distorted picture of the church's nature and mission and that we need to recapture the full expression of living as a community under God's reign. Of course, one should never be excused in this context for being unaware and somewhat familiar with Dietrich Bonhoeffer's *Life Together*, which is a classic treatise of what it means to be in Christian community (1954).

theologians and cultural analysts now describe as "postmodernity" is, according to Grenz, a disillusionment with modernity. While modernity had its roots in Enlightenment thinking which was characterised by a belief in the inevitability of progress largely driven by a confidence in the power of human reason to analyse and then conquer all within the realm of our knowledge, it is the resultant fragmentation of life and the radical individualism of modernity that postmodernity has reacted against. Without reservation, Grenz says, "In response to the compartmentalization characteristic of the modern worldview, the watchword of postmodernity is *holism*—the desire to put back together what modernity has torn asunder" (1993, p. 15).

Robert Bellah, a social commentator on American culture, whose observations predate those of Grenz's above, says, "Individualism lies at the very core of American culture. American individualism with its primary emphasis on self-reliance has led to the notion of pure, undetermined choice, free of tradition, obligation, or commitment, as the essence of self" (1996, p. 142). While his comments pertain to American culture in particular, those like Grenz would not think it amiss in extending Bellah's observations to much of western culture.

That this radical individualism has influenced the way evangelicals in the West think about their religious experience and commitments can be seen in a number of ways. For example, Grenz states that evangelicals tend to understand the gospel primarily in terms of the individual. While acknowledging that there is an individual component to the gospel message, Grenz contends that this focus on the individual is "beyond what is biblically warranted" (1993, p. 16). This in turn has resulted in a "truncated soteriology" (1993, p. 184) which has led to the "crass individualization of the gospel and of the

church that characterizes much contemporary church life" (1993, p. 16). This is a concept that will need further exploration in my dissertation.

In view of the above observations and as we continue to explore the literature related to the topic of this dissertation, to what extent has an unwarranted individualism continued to affect evangelicalism and is there a growing awareness that this status quo cannot and must not go on unchallenged? Stated more positively, is there a growing body of thinkers within evangelicalism who have become much more aware of the need for an ecclesiology that reflects a greater community orientation? To what extent is there a better grasp of the biblical motif of community as evangelicals become more attune to it recognizing that individualism as a cultural lens has held too much sway? So, a significant desired outcome of this dissertation is that as we pay attention to those who are seeking to bring a greater balance to the matter of the individual-in-community, our ecclesiology will only be enriched.[5]

1.2 The Rational for this Dissertation

It is, therefore, my intention in what follows to bring into a coherent and developmental manner certain carefully selected theological matters that pertain to a theology of community that will be convincing to evangelicals that the concept of community is essential to our theologizing in general and our ecclesiology in particular. Building on the kind of work done by Stanley Grenz and other evangelical authors who

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[5] I am indebted to C. Norman Kraus for the hyphenated compound noun: individual-in-community. He uses this descriptor in the context of saying that modern anthropology, sociology, and psychology all affirm the biblical notion "that the basic human unity is not the independent, individual before God but the *individual-in-community* before God. We become self-conscious individuals only in the process of community relationships." See his book, *The Community of the Spirit* (1974, p. 23).

have placed a strong emphasis on community in their theologising, I wish to look more closely at certain loci of theology that I believe evangelicals have already embraced but where greater development will lead them to see how the concept of the individual-in-community enriches further our theologizing in general and our ecclesiology in particular. Stated more practically, this dissertation should demonstrate that a greater amplification of the concept of the individual-in-community will lead to a more positive living out of evangelical theology in a world where true community is often diminished or incomplete thereby leaving us with an incomplete understanding and experience of God and God's redemptive plan for human beings.

Therefore, what needs to be probed in this dissertation is the extent to which evangelical theologizing is gradually being awakened to the concept of the individual-in-community as a significant thrust in scripture. Furthermore, in its historical development in a context of western individualism, is there greater awareness that this has blinded evangelicalism to the positive outcomes of a theology of the individual-in-community? To what extent has evangelicalism's cultural captivity to an overemphasis on the personal and individual prevented it from fully embracing the logos, pathos and ethos of scripture which stress the importance of the individual-in-community? When I talk here of logos, pathos and ethos in terms that apply to theologising, I am referring to the exposition of the whole counsel of God (logos), the resultant passion and earnestness that ought to characterize its proclamation (pathos), and the ethical life that evangelicals should

embrace (ethos).[6] Therefore, what key areas do evangelicals need to address and what in their theologizing needs to change so that a theology of the individual-in-community is much more prominent in life and practice?

Thus the proposed research question that I wish to examine in this dissertation is as follows: The theology of evangelicalism is being awakened to the concept of community as a significant thrust in scripture so how can some specific and helpful loci of theology be revisited so that its captivity to individualism is challenged and its theology is more community oriented? That there is an awareness of a greater need to focus on community in evangelical literature has already been indicated above and bears out the first part of my research question where I talk of evangelicalism being awakened to the concept of community. In continuity with this trend, this dissertation will seek to discover and integrate more communal concepts into some major areas of our evangelical theologising so that we escape this captivity to individualism.

1.3 The Theoretical Framework and Premises
that Undergird this Project

The theological roots and reactionary nature of evangelicalism have to a large extent created a pendulum swing within evangelicalism away from the importance of the individual-in-community towards an overemphasis on the individual. This is made

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[66] Kevin J. Vanhoozer applies the language of rhetoric to the scriptures when he says they are "God's communicative work complete with divine ethos, logos and pathos: God-voiced, God-worded, God-breathed. The triune God was active in producing this work and is active again whenever it is read and received with understanding." Therefore, if evangelicals are to be true to this high view of the scriptures, they will want to faithfully transmit the ethos, logos and pathos of God's communication. See Vanhoozer's article "Triune Discourse: Theological Reflections on the Claim that God Speaks" (2009, p. 64).

evident when we see that evangelicals are theoretically committed to ecclesiastical life but in practice their commitment is largely weak as reflected by how easily so many can drop in and out of church life and how little time and energy is devoted to Christian community life.

The purpose evangelicals see for the church is largely to meet personal felt needs as opposed to serving others and seeing the church as missional in focus.[7] This problem is compounded when the structures in place within evangelical church life feed individualism and make the practice of life in community very difficult.

While evangelical theologians talk of the primacy of the local church, just how central the local Christian community is to much of one's spiritual life and development is not always elaborated. The reason for this, as proposed by this dissertation, is that the concept of the individual-in-community being at the very core of our theologizing has not been emphasized enough.

The cultural captivity to individualism is a powerful force within western evangelicalism and as such there needs to be the understanding that as one develops a theology of the individual-in-community, there are significant cultural factors that will need to be considered and challenged if this theology is to take root. One could argue that

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[7] When churches are situated in a cultural context marked by "the triumph of the therapeutic," there is a strong tendency for churches to focus more on the possibility of a new and fulfilled or blessed life that one may appropriate for oneself—and the appropriation is by way of the affections. This focus while not entirely wrong has the tendency to become reductionist and diminishes the place and responsibility of the corporate. For the classic discussion of "the triumph of the therapeutic" as a movement in American culture which has, in my view, had global impact to varying degrees, see Philip Rieff, *The Triumph of the Therapeutic* (New York: Harper and Row, 1966). For a more recent critique of present negative trends within evangelicalism, see David F. Wells's book, *The Courage to be Protestant: Truth-lovers, Marketers, and Emergents in the Postmodern World,* in which he asserts that "(t)he constant cultural bombardment of individualism … meant that faith that had rightly been understood as personal now easily became faith that was individualistic, self-focused, and consumer oriented" (2008, p. 11).

if community does exist in the evangelical church in some forms, it is largely sociologically driven rather than driven by a theology of the nature of the church that describes the church as not only a social organization but also a spiritual community. While there are exceptions, those groups that see the importance of Christian community as a theologically grounded reality and imperative are not "mainstream" within evangelicalism.

What will become evident in what follows is that scripture tends more towards the concept of the individual-in-community as a significant motif if one is willing to be aware of it. There is a wealth of exegetical material that supports this notion. The Bible if read in the light of this motif holds great promise and could be viewed as God speaking afresh to the church of today. While a broad exegetical study of this concept is beyond the scope of this dissertation, exegetical considerations along the way will give support to this observation.

So as not to be reductionist, what will be kept in creative tension as we proceed will be the dual emphasis on the importance of the individual as well as that of community. Diminishing either of these will lead to the diminishing of the one and the over-elaboration of the other; hence the title containing the close knit words, individual-in-community. Therefore, this dissertation must not be viewed as an argument for an over-stated communitarian theology where individuality is dissolved into the communal. However, as the contention here is that it is community that is lacking, the emphasis will be on the latter, but this should not be perceived as a full-fledged argument for some form of communitarianism. Such a consideration would have to be a follow on from this dissertation.

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If we grant that doctrines arise or evolve as a response "to new challenges, . . . or in the context of changing situations" (Thiselton 2007, p. 60), the particular challenge being addressed in this work arises out of the observation made by evangelical theologians in particular and evangelical writers of various disciplines in general that a theology that gives greater prominence to the concept of community is lacking in thought and practice amongst evangelicals which has had adverse effects within this tradition. On the positive side, what is being pursued is the interaction of hermeneutics and doctrine where hermeneutics is the art of listening to and understanding what the living God is saying through "text, community and tradition" (ibid. p. xxi) so that a particular expression of what is relevant for our time is put forward (doctrine). What is being proposed is that the concept of the individual-in-community is a helpful lens through which one can view certain key doctrines that evangelicals give prominence to when greater attention is given to "*communal* understanding and transmitted *wisdom"*—"*sensus communis*" (ibid. p. xviii).

This dissertation is also underpinned by the very practical concern that a sense of belonging and desiring to be a part of a community is to varying degrees a part of our human inclination and longing. Isolation and loneliness are viewed as undesirable human conditions and are seen more as a product of human being's fallenness rather than them being whole and in a state God intended. The evangelical church is not really addressing this issue in a significant way because of a weak theology of the individual-in-community.

Finally, the gospel of Jesus Christ and life in the Spirit should bring about unity (John 17) rather than disunity. A theology of the individual-in-community should ultimately result in greater unity and in some creative way address the disunity that

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pervades much of evangelicalism that so militates against a sense of community. Ecumenism, a word so many evangelicals react against, will more likely be embraced in its most positive forms when the biblical concept of the individual-in-community is more fully understood.

1.4 The Research Methodology, Design and Structure of this Dissertation

This work will primarily consist of a literature study. The literature used will consist of works of various theologians who have a concern for more communal themes in evangelical theologising and to a limited extent that of sociologists and ethicists who are aware of certain trends within evangelicalism. Because evangelicals are found within quite a broad spectrum of traditions, denominations and cultures, relevant discussions will be based on arguments and ideas coming from any source deemed to be in keeping with an evangelical ethos, and where necessary some opposing viewpoints will be interacted with so that stronger understandings and positions are arrived at.

As will become clear as this dissertation develops, the more specific methodology employed will be to consider how within the evangelical tradition, evangelical theologians are using the concept of community as a key hermeneutical principle and are critiquing their own tradition with special attention being paid to how evangelicals have neglected more communal aspects to their theologizing in certain key areas of theology. Then where a growing consensus or "tradition"[8] and the biblical text serve as a helpful corrective to this perceived weakness in some specific loci of theology to which

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[8] The concept of "tradition" will be discussed in greater depth in chapter 3 of this thesis.

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evangelicals give prominence, these will be brought to bear so that more communal aspects of these doctrines are brought to the fore.

The first part of my dissertation (Chapter 2) will deal with the social context giving rise to this call for a greater emphasis on a theology of community. But if we assume that theology must be done in a way that is critical and constructive, the method this dissertation will employ is not only to be critical of a present sociological trend within evangelicalism but to suggest constructive starting points from which a necessary corrective can be achieved. This will require a fuller understanding of what is at the root of evangelicalism and why its logos, pathos and ethos are of a particular nature. As Stanley Grenz has interacted with the relevant theological issues and cultural mileu pertaining to the present state of an evangelical theology of community or lack thereof, his works feature prominently in this chapter, as do those of Robert Bellah, Nathan O. Hatch, and Dennis Hollinger, among others, all keen observers of western sociological trends and the rise of individualism that has so influenced evangelicalism.

Because evangelicals have historically been committed to the primacy and authority of the scriptures, it is important that we understand what exactly we mean by the authority of scripture. Evangelicals have generally tended to view the Bible as best read and interpreted by the individual simply aided by the Spirit, but the inadequacy of such a view has increasingly been called into question within evangelicalism as its outcome has led to "ecclesial atomism (Ephraim Radner)" (McDermott 2013, p. 13). If we recognize that the Bible itself was born out of a particular community and tradition, and that the Bible's own witness as to the value and importance of the Christian community across the ages to its understanding as being imperative, then do we as evangelicals not need to take into account more seriously Christian tradition and community when coming to an

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understanding of how the Bible acts as an authority for us? This will be covered in Chapter 3. While a number of evangelical theologians have given a much more prominent role to Tradition and community when it comes to issues of biblical authority, the works of Clark Pinnock, Daniel Williams, Donald Carson, and Stephen R. Holmes in this matter will be notable.

Because the doctrine of the Trinity and the related doctrine of the *imago Dei* is so fundamental to a development of the concept of the individual-in-community, Chapter 4 will look at how we should conceive of these intertwining doctrines in a way that is formative. As one writer has said, "the doctrine of the Trinity continues to be treated as an awkward guest in the evangelical household" as it is perceived to be "a speculative distraction from the serious business of the gospel" (Sanders 2010, p. 8). But as we shall see, when trinitarianism and the image of God in persons are coaxed out, articulated and their implications explored, not only does the concept of the individual-in-community come to the fore, but is considered foundational to all theologising. Evangelicalism is enriched as it becomes more conscious and reflective of the community of the Trinity. While Stanley Grenz's reflections on the Trinity will loom large in this section because of his significant contribution to evangelical thought on the Trinity and community, the contributions of Cornelius Plantinga and the more recent contributions of Roderick Leupp, John R. Franke, and Veli-Matti Karkkainen will be seen to be excellent guides in this locus of theology. Those reflecting on the Trinity have been chosen because of their emphasis on relationality as a fruitful model for understanding the Trinity and reflect a significant trend within evangelical thought in this domain. This relational emphasis is viewed as a welcomed alternative to the ontology of substance that has so dominated theological reflection on the Trinity throughout much of church history particularly in the

West. Doug Baker's work on the concept of the *imago Dei* that develops this concept more in terms of relationality and coheres well with a more social understanding of the Trinity rounds out this chapter well.

As evangelicals come to grips with this triunity of the one God, the more they are able to explore and understand God's commitment to salvation and the great breadth of the gospel. Increasingly within evangelical scholarship, there is the recognition that evangelicals are soterians in that they have had a reductionist view of salvation. What this means is that evangelicalism has turned the story of God's working through Israel and Jesus Christ that is so universal in scope, the good news of the gospel, into what Scot McKnight describes as "a story about *me and my own personal salvation*" resulting in a shift "from Christ and community to individualism" (2011, p. 62). McKnight is not alone in this regard as he echoes what Stanley Grenz refers to as a truncated soteriology, so the concept of community will be enlarged in our understanding of the gospel and salvation in Chapter 5. This will be done with the help of such luminaries as Grenz, Thomas F. Torrance and Cherith Nordling who have all argued for an enlarged and more communal understanding of salvation.

Chapter 6 will focus attention on God's new community, the church. Evangelical theologians seem to have heeded the strong criticism that evangelicals generally lack a strong ecclesiology.[9] What is being increasingly recognised is that we are not saved to be people living in isolation, but God's *ekklesia*, a people called-out and called-together to be in community, a visible, organic social reality distinct from its surrounding environs.

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[9] For a fuller statement of this perceived weakness within evangelicalism, see *The Oxford Handbook of Evangelical Theology*, p.13.

Exploring how evangelicalism can have an ecclesiology that is more reflective of the individual-in-community will be a significant outcome of this dissertation. As God's new community is not to be an end in itself but is to reflect the redemptive work of the triune God who is missional, this will be elaborated on as a fitting climax to this dissertation. In this chapter, our interaction will be with Darrell Guder, Christopher Wright, and Gerhard Lohfink who all argue for a revisioning of ecclesiology that caters less to individualism and reflects a greater sense of body life with the goal of embodying the good news of Jesus Christ by being in community as a sign of God's reign that will eventually be fully realized.

With this concept of the church being the embodiment of the good news of Jesus Christ serving as a sign of God's future reign, this work will not simply be a contrast between the individual and the communal, but will be motivated by a deeper theological understanding which is ultimately eschatological. The eschatological sees the faithfulness of God through Jesus being a present and future reality revealing the glory of God, and concerns God's intentions for the world and all humankind which are being worked out in the present but moving towards a particular goal—the renewal of all things. In other words, community cannot be viewed as an end in itself. Rather, community guided by the Spirit is the means by which God is being revealed both in the present and in the future. (cf. Thiselton 2007, p. 543)

As is probably obvious by this point and recognizing that no analysis can be value-free, this study will be self-consciously conducted from within an evangelical, western Christian perspective. The tradition within which I was raised in the country of my birth, Zimbabwe, was Baptist (an affiliate church of The Baptist Union of Southern Africa) which eventually led to me getting my formative theological training in baptistic,

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evangelical institutions in the United States. I then returned to Zimbabwe in 1989 and became a lecturer at an evangelical bible college known today as Harare Theological College. Having lived in Zimbabwe through the past 16 turbulent years as Robert Mugabe's populist "land distribution programme" has taken shape, I have witnessed the impoverishment of a nation but also, sadly, an evangelicalism that has not been able to speak with any solidarity and theological acumen to issues of land, injustice, and the importance of being the people of God supporting one another through difficult times. In view of these perceived weaknesses, and as one desiring to see renewal within the tradition in which I was nurtured—evangelicalism—the theological trends within evangelicalism and the formulations of evangelicals is my primary sphere of concern and interaction. But, to take up a position that reflects an evangelical framework does not mean a closing of one's mind to other traditions considered to be outside of evangelicalism as should be evident by some of the conversation partners I have chosen above. On the contrary, where insights can be gleaned from other traditions in this matter of a theology of the individual-in-community that are helpful, such insights will be incorporated.

Because this dissertation is being written on the African continent, what will be observed is an apparent lack of any significant interaction with African theologians. This apparent deficiency must be explained and judged accordingly. First, it is acknowledged that the concept of "community is indeed a critical part of African reality", that in Africa much within its worldview passes through the lens of the social rather than being individualistic, and that the concept of community is a time-honoured principle in African thought and decision making (Kunhiyop 2008, p. 68). Second, it is acknowledgment that there are those seeking to develop an African community ethic which is reflective of the

African existential situation where "community" is regarded as an important contextual reality (ibid., p. 69). Third, it is acknowledged that there are certain African theologians who in taking context and scripture seriously have read scripture more holistically than is typical of western readers where the total well-being of the society in which a person lives is promoted as a biblical emphasis (cf. Abogunrin 2000; Mbiti 1994).

But, while such acknowledgments are made, I have deliberately chosen to focus more on how evangelicals particularly in the west, where this tradition has primarily been developed, have been self-critical of evangelicalism's cultural captivity and deeply rooted propensities that have affected its theologizing and diminished its "community" consciousness. What is more, the very important and complex contextual issues that have given rise to more of a community consciousness in African theology could not be interacted with adequately within the limited space that this dissertation allows. Such a project would be a worthwhile sequel to this one. However, where appropriate in certain chapters, African theologians who are providing helpful perspectives in the direction of community will be referenced.

As a critical and constructive theology, then, this study seeks to analyse the evangelical tradition as it reflects on a theology of the individual-in-community today and to point towards a renewal of the evangelical vision of community that is in keeping with insights drawn primarily from those within evangelicalism. In my view, a significant question that faces evangelicals today is this: *The theology of evangelicalism is being awakened to the concept of community as a significant thrust in scripture, so how can some specific and helpful loci of theology be revisited so that its captivity to individualism is challenged and its theology is more community oriented?* It is to this task that we now turn.

CHAPTER 2

THE NATURE OF EVANGELICALISM NECCESITATING
THE DEVELOPMENT OF AN
INDIVIDUAL-IN-COMMUNITY THEOLOGY

*2.1 A Brief Overview of Evangelicalism in Order to
Understand its Nature, Diversity and
Inherent Propensities*

As this dissertation is concerned with a particular critique of evangelical theology,

it is essential that an attempt be made at defining in greater depth what evangelicalism is

and what has given rise to its characteristic emphases, compelling commitments, and

resultant practice. What will become evident in this chapter is that while evangelicalism

and its theological commitments has had certain strengths in its embracing of certain

praise-worthy essentials, it has also been seen to lack a clear commitment to a theology of

community. The charge of being too individualistic has proved to be an almost

unshakeable critique of evangelicalism, and a call to a greater emphasis on community

has been gaining greater momentum as we have marched into this new millennium.

It is to a definition of evangelicalism that we must give some initial attention

particularly as such an endeavor helps us start down the road towards understanding what

are its nature, diversity and inherent propensities. Paul Freston in his survey of

evangelicals and politics in Asia, Africa, and Latin America notes that "the definition of

'evangelical' is hotly debated in historical and sociological literature," and states that

some South African scholars go so far as to doubt that the descriptive "evangelical" has

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any usefulness (2001, p. 2). While such a view can be understood in view of the broad spectrum of evangelicals that exists,[10] there is value in and a necessity to attempting to give definition to such a widely used term for the vast segment of the church that defines itself as "evangelical."[11] While this dissertation cannot and is not an attempt to resolve the various complex issues relating to the history and nature of evangelicalism, something which has been done in detail elsewhere,[12] nevertheless there does seem to be a consensus among evangelicals and other observers of the movement that a working definition of evangelical Christianity can be attempted which has a fair degree of utility.

But even before we get into the matter of definition, one useful distinction that needs to be made at the outset of this discussion has to do with the usage of the term "evangelical." The World Christian Database (WCD), an online resource based on the *World Christian Encyclopedia* (1982, 2001) and *World Christian Trends* (2001), driven

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[10] Gary Dorrien gives two major reasons as to why Protestant evangelicalism continues to exist, the first being that "it keeps alive a spiritually potent and redemptive form of the gospel message." A second reason is evangelicalism's ability to accommodate a wide variety of "theologies and institutional forms" which can be identified as follows: "the Baptist tradition, the Holiness-Pentecostal tradition, the Anabaptist tradition, and the Reformational-Confessional tradition. In this schematism, the individualistic congregational Baptist tradition is the dominant form of evangelicalism; the second type includes all groups from the Weslyan and other 'Holiness' traditions that emphasize spiritual sanctification, moral perfectionism, and/or ecstatic gifts of the Spirit; the third type, the Anabaptist tradition, includes the communal Anabaptist peace churches, such as the Mennonites, Amish, and Church of the Brethren; and the Confessional type includes the churches of the Reformed and Lutheran (and arguably, Anglican) traditions" (Dorrien 1998, p. 3).

[11] Peter Brierley, senior Lausanne associate for research, projected in 2004 that there would be an estimated 729 million evangelicals in 2010 representing about 32% of all people said to be Christians. See his article, "Evangelicals in the World of the 21st Century".

[12] See for example, Mark Noll's book, *The Rise of Evangelicalism: The Age of Edwards, Whitefield and the Wesleys* (2003) where he chronicles the origin, development and rapid expansion of various evangelical movements in their formative years. Works by John Wolffe (*The Expansion of Evangelicalism: The Age of Wilberforce, More, Chalmers and Finney*, 2007) and David Bebbington (*The Dominance of Evangelicalism: The Age of Spurgeon and Moody*, 2005) continue on from where Mark Noll leaves off by tracing the growth of the movement.

by the full-time staff at the Center for the Study of Global Christianity at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, differentiate between the terms "evangelical" (lower-case "e") and "Evangelical" (capital "E"). This is said to be important because these terms "represent two distinct groups of Christians within what is broadly global Christianity" (Lausanne Global Analysis, 2011). The former term, "evangelical," is said to refer to any church member who holds to the following seven key components:

1. Believers centered on the person of Jesus
2. Believers obedient to Christ's Great Commission
3. Believers committed to the gospel as set forth in the Bible
4. Day-to-day personal witness to Christ
5. Involved in organized methods of evangelism
6. Involved in Christ's mission in the world
7. Working towards Christ's second coming and final Advent (ibid.)

Viewed in this way, the term "evangelical" can apply to just about any Christian tradition (Protestant, Anglican, Roman Catholic, Orthodox, Independent, Marginal).

On the other hand, "Evangelicalism" (capital "E") more specifically applies to "a movement within Protestantism (excluding Anglicanism) consisting of all affiliated church members self-identifying as Evangelicals" (ibid.). Others considered Evangelicals are those "members of an Evangelical church, congregation, or denomination (the WCD is structured around denominational data)" (ibid.). The characteristics of Evangelicals are said to "include personalized religion (being 'born again'), dependence on the Bible as the word of God, and regular preaching and/or evangelism. In addition, both of these sub-groups typically adhere to a degree of conservatism in both values and theology" (ibid.). It is in the broadest sense of "evangelicalism" that I will be referring in this dissertation.

While David Bebbington's definition of evangelicalism has been in circulation for some time ever since he wrote his magisterial overview of the history of evangelicalism in Britain from the 1730s to the 1980s, the discussion concerning definition has

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developed considerably since then. He simply defined evangelicalism in the following way:

> There are the four qualities that have been the special marks of Evangelical religion: *conversionism*, the belief that lives need to be changed; *activism*, the expression of the gospel in effort; *biblicism*, a particular regard for the Bible; and what may be called *crucicentrism*, a stress on the sacrifice of Christ on the cross. Together they form a quadrilateral of priorities that is the basis of Evangelicalism. (1989, pp. 2-3)[13]

However, post Bebbington's definition, Alister McGrath, the evangelical Oxford University scholar, helps us define evangelicalism even further. As one who has written extensively on the evangelical movement, he cautions us that "any theologically rigorous definition of evangelicalism tends to end up excluding an embarrassingly large number of people who regard themselves, and are regarded by others, as evangelical" (1995, p. 54). Therefore, he thinks a more helpful and responsible approach towards defining evangelicalism is to look at the movement historically, from the sixteenth century, and globally, by including Latin American, African and Asian forms, so as "to identify the common features that give the movement its shared sense of identity and purpose" (ibid., p. 55).

Based on his study, McGrath contends that evangelicalism can be understood in terms of six controlling convictions, "each of which is regarded as being true, of vital importance and grounded in Scripture" (ibid.). He qualifies these convictions as being not

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[13] In his 1974 book, *The Young Evangelicals: The Story of the Emergence of a New Generation of Evangelicals*, Richard Quebedeaux stated back then that evangelicalism could be "characterized as a school of Christianity which attests to the truth of three major theological principles: (1) the complete reliability and final authority of Scripture in matters of faith and practice; (2) the necessity of *personal* faith in Jesus Christ as Savior from sin and consequent commitment to Him as Lord; and (3) the urgency of seeking actively the conversion of sinners to Christ." (p.4) Therefore, we see various formulations of what constitutes the essence of evangelicalism but a certain consistency does appear that is discernible.

just "doctrinal," with this term's emphasis on objective truth, but he also states that they reflect the "'existential,' in that they affirm the manner in which the believer is caught up in a redemptive and experiential encounter with the living Christ" (ibid.). Drawing on the work of certain predecessors who have studied evangelicalism, such as Kennith S. Kantzer, Carl F.H Henry, James I. Packer and George Marsden, he lists the six fundamental convictions as being the following:

1. The supreme authority of Scripture as a source of knowledge of God and a guide to Christian living.
2. The majesty of Jesus Christ, both as incarnate God and Lord and as the Savior of sinful humanity.
3. The Lordship of the Holy Spirit
4. The need for personal conversion.
5. The priority of evangelism for both individual Christians and the church as a whole.
6. The importance of the Christian community for spiritual nourishment, fellowship and growth. (Ibid., pp. 55-56)[14]

When it comes to other matters not listed among these six fundamental convictions, McGrath notes that in these "matters of indifference" latitude is given and diversity accepted, "but a diversity that is itself grounded in the New Testament, in that responsible evangelicalism has refused to legislate where Scripture is silent or where it offers a variety of approaches" (ibid., p. 56) Others make the distinction that McGrath does by referring to what are called "essentials" and "non-essentials" as a way of distinguishing between what is at the heart of evangelicalism and what is more complex and open ended. Parrett and Kang make this distinction even more forcefully when they say that for one not to make such a distinction "is to fail in terms of both charity and

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[14] While many who call themselves evangelical would concur with this sixth conviction as being important, it will become clear as this dissertation develops that it is this very conviction that is most often undermined by various ideas and propensities within evangelicalism but are being challenged by some theologians within the evangelical movement.

humility; it is to treat our local assembly or our particular denomination as though we were the *whole* of the Christian community rather than *a part* of the historical and universal body of Christ" (2009, p. 396).

With this said, however, Parrett and Kang make a further distinction that McGrath does not make to the same degree of clarity in this matter of evangelical fundamentals that is helpful and has a bearing on the community orientation of this dissertation. They make a distinction between three levels of doctrine: "Christian consensus, evangelical essentials and denominational (or other) distinctives" (ibid.). By "Christian consensus," they are referring to "those essential doctrines that have bound together Christians, or all orthodox communions, in all ages and cultures" (ibid.). Such a body of beliefs is referred to by many as "the Great Tradition" and is shared by the three historic groupings within Christendom: Orthodox, Catholic and Protestant. So this doctrinal level has to do with those beliefs that are shared by these three historic communions.

The next doctrinal level labeled "evangelical essentials" refers to those truths that typically differentiate historic Protestantism from the Orthodox and Catholic faiths and are seen to be in continuation with the tenets of the evangelical Reformation as best understood in terms of the historic *solas* (ibid.). M. James Sawyer refers to this level as second-level doctrines that are important, maybe sufficiently so to divide over, "but not a part of the fundamental core of the apostolic kerygma and hence not an *explicit* part of the historic faith" (2006, p. 169).

The third and final distinction made by Parrett and Kang is at the level of denominational (or other) distinctives. It is at this level that a particular denomination's settled convictions are laid out on such matters as church polity, the meaning of the sacraments, the practice of spiritual gifts and so on. However, their contention is that a

careful distinction between primary and secondary doctrines should be maintained and at this third level we are talking about secondary doctrines. While such secondary matters should be treated with care and respect, it is still "critical to distinguish between what makes one Christian and what makes one Baptist, Presbyterian or Pentecostal" (ibid., p. 398).

While Parrett and Kang's distinction between the three levels of beliefs is useful and reflects certain realities, and if taken seriously would lead to a greater sense of that which binds us together as orthodox and evangelical believers, the other reality we face is that evangelicalism is characterized by so many rifts and divisions as doctrinal distinctives of a secondary nature invariably rise to the top and community is ruptured as a result. M. James Sawyer concurs with this assessment when he says that among evangelicals "the discussions that engender the most heat and least light are about those doctrines that are historically and exegetically the least well established but have been raised to touchstone level by particular denominations and traditions in a sectarian fashion" (2006, p. 170). Therefore, while it is academic to make a distinction between the commonalities of evangelicalism referred to above as "evangelical fundamentals" vis-à-vis McGrath, or "evangelical essentials" vis-à-vis Parrett and Kang, and that which is secondary, such is not the common practice within evangelicalism and it is here that we see the need to delve into the nature of evangelicalism in order to see why this is so difficult. This is being done based on the premise that our practice is invariably more representative of what we really believe than what we state formally.

2.2 The Cultural Captivity of Evangelicalism

That evangelicalism possesses a distinctive ethos that is reflected in its approach to Christian thinking and living has by no means gone unnoticed and needs to be understood if we are to come to grips with what it is about evangelicalism that gives rise to its perceived lack of communal thinking. Borrowing as a starting point the provocative statement of Nathan O. Hatch in his chapter entitled, "Evangelicalism as a Democratic Movement," where he states, "American Christianity has muddled along in a state of anarchic pluralism, a sort of free-market religious economy" (1986, p. 72), we are brought face to face with an aspect of evangelicalism that is both its strength and its weakness.

2.2.1 The Democratic Orientation and Entrepreneurial
Spirit of Evangelicalism

While Hatch is primarily describing American evangelical Christianity, his comments certainly have broader reach. When he suggests that a central dynamic of American evangelical Christianity has been its "democratic orientation" (ibid.), this seems to be a rather universal trend within evangelicalism. By this descriptive he means that the "principle mediator of God's voice has not been the state, church, council, confession, ethnic group, university, college, or seminary; it has quite simply been the people" (ibid.). Rather than being aloof from the people and an expression of a faith "to be appropriated on someone else's terms," Hatch sees evangelicalism as instead being a movement that over the last two centuries has pursued people wherever they could be found, no matter what their social standing, and has challenged them "to think, interpret Scripture, and organize the church for themselves; and to endow their lives with the ultimate meaning of knowing Christ personally, being filled with the Spirit, and knowing

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with assurance the reality of eternal life" (ibid.). In other words, Hatch's view is that evangelicalism is "characteristically democratic" (ibid.) and is a movement that has reworked Christianity into forms that are "unmistakably popular" resulting in evangelicalism being "a major social force on both sides of the Atlantic" (ibid., p. 73). To this we might add, to regions beyond affected by the evangelicalism nurtured in the mother churches and propagated by the missionaries sent out by them. So an advantage of evangelicalism, according to Hatch, because of its people-centeredness has been its ability to adapt to the task of spreading widely across class and cultural lines. This has enabled evangelicalism "to meet a broad range of ideological, psychological, and social needs" thereby enabling it to attract followers "from the widest possible backgrounds" (ibid., p. 81).

The down side of this democratic appeal and ethos of evangelicalism became apparent even back in the days of Jonathan Edwards and John Wesley. According to Hatch, the new ground rules for theology, by opening it to all,

> meant that the measure of theology would be its acceptability in the marketplace of ideas. This meant that uncomfortable complexity would be flattened out, that issues would be resolved by a simple choice of alternatives, and that, in many cases, the fine distinctions from which truth alone can emerge were lost in the din of ideological battle. In this process, few evangelicals would admit that further reduction to popularity could at times involve downright falsification. (Ibid.)

In other words, theologizing suffered as a result of this democratizing of Christianity and rather than great ideas being generated that strengthened Christianity, American evangelicals in particular became "slaves of slogans" (ibid., p. 76). What this reflected was the propensity for evangelicalism to want to have an appeal to the individual so that the popularity or acceptability of ideas became more important than a commitment to the historical truths of the faith. Somehow amidst the cacophony of voices coming from those calling themselves evangelicals, the essentials of what binds us together with historical

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Christianity was drowned out by sectarianism and what might be called the entrepreneurial spirit of the times.

This entrepreneurial spirit of the age that seems to have been cultivated for some time by evangelicals is quite evident to some. Eugene Peterson, an evangelical who bemoans this phenomenon whereby the prevailing entrepreneurial spirit of the times has exploited "community as commodity" (Crabb 2007, p. IX), gives the following analysis. He says that because many evangelicals are community impoverished, this leads to a situation where Christians can be exploited. How so? Because people have a need for community and are often dissatisfied with the community they are in (or looking over), this provides a great opportunity for those who are selling "community." Peterson sees the growth of the "community as commodity" industry as particularly spectacular (and lucrative) in the North American context (ibid.), and according to David Wells, a development that church marketers have attuned themselves well and a trend which must not be resisted but viewed as "an opportunity to be exploited" (2008, p. 11).

Upon closer inspection, however, what is being purveyed is not community in its true sense. Instead, as Peterson points out, what is being offered are religious clubs and crowds, which are not true communities. True community is formed as a result of "the intricate, patient, painful work of the Holy Spirit. We cannot buy or make community; we can only offer ourselves to become community" (op. cit.).

Another concomitant negative impact of the democratization of Christianity among evangelicals historically has been its lack of organizational coherence. By promoting Christianity to a large degree in terms of the "free will of the individual" which in turn resulted in the inevitable fragmentation of the movement, any semblance of organizational coherence has to a large extent been eroded. The plethora of

"denominations, mission boards, reform agencies, newspapers and journals, revivalists,

and colleges is at best an amorphous collectivity, and organizational smorgasbord," says

Hatch, and any "(p)ower, influence, and authority were radically dispersed, and most

came by way of democratic means: popular appeals to the good will of the audience" (op.

cit.).[15] This pluralism and striking diversity meant that the options available within

evangelical circles "seemed virtually unlimited: one could choose to worship on Saturday,

practice foot washing, ordain women, advocate pacifism, or practice health reform." Or,

as Hatch ominously points out, "one could simply choose a biblical form of Christianity

without the slightest ecclesiastical encumbrance" (ibid.). It is in this last statement of

Hatch that we begin to see the serious disconnect within evangelicalism. That one can

have a "biblical form of Christianity without the slightest ecclesiastical encumbrance"

demonstrates the negative impact this resultant radical pluralism within evangelicalism

has had.

In the light of this radical pluralism and lack of unity, it is no wonder concerned

evangelicals have for some time deplored this aspect of evangelical life and practice. For

example in 1977 the "Chicago Call: An Appeal to Evangelicals" representing the thought

of forty-five evangelicals who came together to call evangelicals back to historic

Christianity stated the following:

> We deplore the scandalous isolation and separation of Christians from one
> another. We believe such division is contrary to Christ's explicit desire for unity

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[15] That the church in Africa has not escaped the problems as described by Hatch is indicated by the Kenyan theologian, Frederick Otieno Amolo, in his essay, "The Church and its Theological Reflection in Light of Reform Agenda in Africa" when he says, "The African church, though established, has had its fair share of severe problems. Among them are secularism, urbanization, disunity among the denominations, political instability, and unending fragmentations resulting from the influx of new sects and ethnic religions. Also, the new order of incarnation of the gospel has brought about a variety of Christianity based on African personalities and individuals' presumed callings and gifts" (2014, p. 1). Later on in his essay, he points to significant communal themes as a remedy to these negative trends in his context. (cf. particularly p. 6)

> among his people and impedes the witness of the church in the world. Evangelicalism is too frequently characterized by an ahistorical, sectarian mentality. We fail to appropriate the catholicity of historic Christianity, as well as the breadth of the biblical revelation. (Weber 1978, p. 16)

That this observation and concern by evangelicals over the lack of unity among evangelicals persists is reflected in the more recent documents where evangelicals have made significant contribution. For example, in the "Cape Town Commitment: A Confession of Faith and Call to Action" of 2010 sponsored by the Lausanne Movement, there is the ongoing call to unity which probably continues to be a clarion call in the light of the many divisions that exist and continue to be of concern (see Part I point 9). What this ongoing concern may well reflect is that while Christian unity as an ideal among evangelicals may be voiced, the underlying and prevailing cultural roots of disunity may be firmly entrenched.

2.2.2 The Pervasiveness of Individualism among Evangelicals Leading to a Diminishing of Christian Community

Having looked at the development of the evangelical movement which has been characterized by a prevailing democratic, entrepreneurial and individual-centered spirit resulting in fragmentation, are there particular tendencies or biases that characterize evangelicals today that require our attention because they continue to imperil community life? In their book, *Community of Faith: Crafting Christian Communities Today*, Evelyn and James Whitehead point us to at least three very apparent biases which imperil peoples' commitment to church life, all of which have their roots in a western oriented ethos. The first bias is that for many, "church life is 'one more thing' to be squeezed into a busy schedule" (1992, p. 7). They contend that people's commitments to all that modern life has to offer and the demands that are associated with multiple commitments

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result in our church or religious life having the perilous status of being "one more thing" (ibid.), a status that may well be attributed to the deeper notion that we as westerners view ourselves as autonomous beings who "exist independently of, and outside of, any tradition or community" (Grenz 1993, p. 15).

A second bias which the Whiteheads point out that detracts from modern believers being a faith community with a shared faith "is the expectation that we are to be fed" (ibid.). While the Whiteheads write as Catholics, their analysis does reflect the general contemporary approach to church life that is not atypical to the approach to church life among evangelicals. Their observation is that western Christians go to church to be "religious consumers." The church provides what is religiously necessary from birth to the grave while much of the laity remain as spectators. "Experiences like this," say the Whiteheads, "do not bode well for an adult community of faith" (1992, pp. 7-8). Peter C. Hodgson corroborates this reductionism of Christianity to a consumerist mentality where the church is simply there for peoples' needs. His contention is that we have in this approach "an uncritical acquiescence to the norms of popular culture" (1988, p. 64). His great disappointment is that in general church life functions "as nothing more than a means of satisfying private therapeutic needs through counseling, ideology, and club like activities" (ibid.). For Hodgson, the questions of truth and redemptive community "have been subordinated to those having to do with the successful adjustment of individuals to the exigencies of life" (ibid.).

That this consumerist, status quo approach to church life may no longer be going on unchallenged is brought out by Michael Horton, an evangelical and Reformed theologian, who says that young people today are attracted more to an understanding of salvation that is "fed up with the consumeristic individualism of salvation-as-personal-

improvement" that is so characteristic of their parents' generation. Rather, Horton says, "they are desperately craving authenticity and genuine transformation that produces true community, exhibiting loving acts that address the wider social and global crises of our day rather than the narrow jeremiads of yesteryear" (2008, p. 18). As to whether or not young people today can follow through on these ideals and move away from the consumerist individualism of the past will require a familiarity with what has captivated evangelicals in the past and a becoming acquainted with what should positively undergird and reflect Christian community so that there is a movement away from a consumerist approach to church life.

A third bias discerned by the Whiteheads has to do with the "romance of community." By this they mean that due to much religious rhetoric, parishioners typically expect a gathering of believers to be harmonious and free of disagreement. They want a community that is conflict free, and demand "not only unity but uniformity" (1992, p. 8). So what on the surface may seem like a genuine hunger for community, ends up being an expression of the self which refuses to accept diversity. That there can be a commitment to that which binds us together as evangelicals for the sake of community while at the same time allowing for diversity so as to allow for freedom of expression and thought has not been an evangelical strength as stated previously.

What the Whiteheads and others do in a preliminary way is reveal that the prevailing ethos of modern western society definitely affects the way evangelical believers influenced by the culture approach the church. A vexing observation is that evangelicals have a diminished ecclesiology because of the unwelcomed encumbrances that church life seems to impose and because many give little thought to communal thinking. When McGrath, quoted above, says that a fundamental of evangelicalism is

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"(t)he importance of the Christian community for spiritual nourishment, fellowship and growth," the contention of this dissertation is that while evangelicals admit to this ideal, so much in our western culture and subsequent ethos actually militates against and erodes a biblical ecclesiology that has a strong community orientation.

That individualism is such a significant influence in the lives of evangelicals when one considers its nature and scope should not surprise us. So much in western culture has a strong individualistic bent to it which can be observed in various aspects of its social philosophy. What the Whiteheads surface in the discussion above about the way people approach church life actually is symptomatic of the individualism that so pervades western culture. Dennis Hollinger in his study entitled, *Individualism and Social Ethics: A Study of Evangelical Syncretism*, observes that there are four aspects of individualism that have been characteristic of evangelicals' social philosophy that reflects the culture in which it has grown up. What will be observed is how all-encompassing these aspects are and how they help us further understand this individualism being talked about.

The first aspect he points to is the primacy evangelicals give to personal morality over social morality. Why is personal morality given primacy? This is so because the individual is viewed "as the primary entity of social reality" leading to the conclusion "that the major moral concerns are personal, not corporate ones" (1983, p. 39). The premise as stated means that the emphasis is on the individual rather than the collective, as the collective is simply the sum of the aggregate parts. Therefore, if individuals have moral virtue as separate entities, this will lead to collectives having moral virtue. Moral concern is not lacking but "finds the locus for concern in the individual rather than in the collective" (ibid., p. 40). An example of how this premise might work itself out is in the matter of racial justice. This approach would seek to address the problem of racism in the

individual but would not be inclined to view racism as a structural or institutional problem. The concept of structural sin is diminished in this viewpoint.[16]

A second aspect of individualism is seen in the related matter of social change. According to Hollinger, evangelicalism has a philosophy of social change as it does entertain the notion of social modification. But its distinguishing feature is in the method it advocates. Again, because "society is viewed as merely the sum of its constituent parts, then social change is seen to be triggered by and implemented through its individual members" (ibid.). In this view social structures "have no life of their own," so initiating change at this level is viewed as pointless. It is by the changing of individuals that society is changed (ibid.). So if, for example, enough individuals are helped to see that treating the environment properly is a worthwhile pursuit, then the ecology benefits (ibid., p. 41).

A third aspect of individualism has to do with economic ethics. Individualism in this matter adheres to laissez faire capitalism. Acknowledging that capitalism underwent much change in the past century meaning that governmental interference and restriction was tolerated and even viewed as necessary in capitalist countries, Hollinger observes that a general temper of individualism was still maintained in this domain. That there are "many idealists who long for a return to a more rugged individualism in the economic arena" is notable (ibid.).

The laissez faire economics of Adam Smith with his emphasis on the unfettered freedom every person should have to better one's self—"in other words, self-interest" is

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[16] According to Tim Suttle in his book, *An Evangelical Social Gospel? Finding God's Story in the Midst of Extremes*, he attributes much of evangelicalism's blindness to issues of social justice to it casting the gospel largely in terms of "individual salvation and self-enhancement." The nexus of the personal and the corporate in thinking about the gospel has robbed the gospel of its power. (2011 p.11) This conception of salvation will be discussed further in chapter 5 of this dissertation.

the best motivator of economic activity (ibid.). A free market has the advantages of driving the market, producing a self-regulating market and removing inefficiency by rewarding those who produce the best goods at the most competitive prices. Self-interest within a framework of law, according to Adam Smith, was the best way by which to drive an economy that would benefit the most people (ibid.).

After analyzing much evangelical thought in the realm of economics, Hollinger comes to the conclusion that "(i)n no other area of social thought are mainstream Evangelicals so decidedly individualistic as in the realm of economics" (ibid., p. 166). His assessment is that evangelicals have essentially aligned laissez-faire capitalism with biblical Christianity resulting in a decidedly hostile attitude towards labor, an articulation of a doctrine of vocation that is reflective of capitalism, and an approach to hunger and poverty that is at best token. These observations all lead Hollinger to conclude all the more strongly that evangelicalism's world view is atomistic. While a few dissenting voices among evangelicals who wish to see a more thorough social application of biblical thought to economics are noted by Hollinger, his conclusion is that in the realm of economics individualism is very much in evidence among evangelicals (ibid.).

The fourth and final area where individualism among evangelicals is observed is in the area of political ethics. Hollinger describes this kind of individualism as one which begins with the idea that individuals are the "sole generators of their own wants and the best judges of their own interests. Political authority is only derived and must be limited" (ibid., p. 43). This restricted view of government stands in contrast to any other political theory that envisions a larger and more active role of government where governance extends beyond the mere "protection of individual rights and allowing maximum scope for the pursuit of personal interests" (ibid.). The hallmarks of an individualistic political

theory that predominate are as follows: "Freedom of the individual, non-intervention by government into personal life, and protection of individual rights."

In the realms of political theory and public policy, Hollinger's observations are that evangelicals typically evidence a conservative, individualistic point of view where the freedom of the individual is most important "while other political values such as justice, peace, and community welfare are minimized" (ibid., p. 206). He is emphatic in his assertion that mainstream evangelicals reveal a greater commitment in the realm of political theory to the autonomous individual than to "all other concerns and values" (ibid.).

While all of the four spheres of social philosophy dealt with by Hollinger open up complex issues that are not easily resolved particularly in matters of individual responsibility versus corporate responsibility, the propensity of evangelicals in recent history has been to tip the balance far more in the direction of the individual almost to the exclusion of communal obligation. David Walker in his work, *Challenging Evangelicalism: Prophetic Witness and Theological Renewal*, quite clearly concurs with Hollinger in his criticism that evangelicals have tended to view society "merely as the aggregate of individuals" (1993., p. 180). The idea that "(p)eople exist essentially as individuals and society tends to become merely an extension of this," according to Walker, removes us too far from the biblical view of community (ibid.). This imbalance has led to an emphasis among evangelicals towards a privatized faith limited merely to the concerns of the individual believer which in turn has led to a diminished view of a social dimension to faith among evangelicals (ibid.). What Hollinger does is reveal just how pervasive individualism is in the social philosophy of evangelicals because of the culture to which it has assimilated. Therefore, it should not surprise us that with such a

heightened view of the individual and a diminished view of social obligation, this in turn has led to an ecclesiology where the parallel can be observed: the individual is paramount and the communal is diminished. The church is merely the aggregate of individual believers whose personal life and freedoms have been so elevated that any social doctrine of the church has little or no priority.

At this juncture, having observed that individualism has deep cultural undercurrents and a long history in evangelicalism, and because we want to maintain balance in our criticism and observations, it is important that we understand the distinction between individualism and individuality. Julie Gorman in her book, *Community that is Christian,* helps us define individualism by contrasting it with "individuality." She says that

> individualism is the self-sufficiency and independent separation of an autonomous person. The person focused on individualism claims rights and self-fulfilment for the individual. Individuality (being a unique person), on the other hand, is self-awareness and personhood that are found in taking personal responsibility within a sense of existing in community. (1993, p. 37)

She goes on to make the important point that "individuality values the uniqueness of God's created person but always with the thought in mind of what this one contributes to and draws from the corporate body. The image-bearer is always *individual-in-community*" (ibid., italics mine). Hence, while this dissertation pays attention to the significant and observed negative impact of individualism within mainstream evangelical life, it also wishes to preserve the importance of the individual as a centre of value that has always been important in Christian thought. As Douglas Hall says, the ontology of the biblical tradition precludes any denial of "the reality, goodness, and beauty of individual

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life" (1986, p. 120). But the right balance is that we are always individuals-in-community.[17]

What is more, at no point in this dissertation will there be an overreaction from individualism that results in any negation of the evangelical commitment to the need for God's work in the individual. As Kennith Collins reminds us, there is need to look at evangelicalism's celebration of "conversional piety" in a balanced way. While there are those outside of evangelicalism who would like to view the evangelical emphasis on personal salvation as "little more than pious indulgence, a species of excessive individualism, or worse yet needless self-preoccupation in the face of a hurting world," there cannot be the neglect of "the precious life of the soul" (2005, p. 53). His reminder is that Christian faith "must ever engage the throne room of our being, the very depths of the human soul" (ibid., p. 91). Collins enjoinder is not to pit the individual over against the social. Evangelicalism in its best sense is not "individualistic" but is rather, personal. As he says,

> if faith in Jesus Christ does not touch believers at their depths, then such a faith—probably largely informed by ideological commitments—may be far too superficial to deliver from the kinds of wrenching evils, dispositionally understood, that enslave sinners and from which they must find deliverance and redemption. (Ibid., pp. 91-92)

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[17] In his essay "Faith and Knowledge: Religion and the Modern University," Douglas Sloan notes the positive potentials of modern Western culture that the French sociologist Jacques Ellul described: "technical reason, an emerging sense of individuality and of individual worth, and the possibility of genuine freedom." Sloan develops this further by noting that "(w)ith the objectivity of controlling (or technical) reason and the sense of an objective world over against the feeling, human subject, there is interwoven an emerging sense of individual identity. Given clear, powerful thinking and the sense of individuality, there is also the possibility of free, self-determined action; in H. Richard Niebuhr's terms, there is the possibility of the responsible self." But it is Sloan's concluding comment that is most apropos when he says, "Nor should it be overlooked that individual worth and freedom are the prerequisites for genuine love and community among persons" (2002, p. 5).

However, with this being said, when evangelicalism reduces the life of faith merely to personal salvation and piety, and reflects more the individualistic bent of culture and mainstream evangelicalism of recent times, even what is positive within evangelicalism becomes tarnished and easily interpreted as simply a reflection of "excessive individualism."

Adding to the discussion above on individualism and how it is can be understood, sociologists, Robert Bellah and his colleagues in, *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life*, see four different strains of individualism: biblical, republican or civic, utilitarian, and expressive. But as the word is used in various and sometimes contradictory senses, they make a distinction much along the lines made by Gorman above. They use it in two ways: First, "a belief in the inherent dignity and, indeed, sacredness of the human person" and as such is part of all the strains of individualism listed above; second, "a belief that the individual has a primary reality whereas society is a second-order, derived or artificial construct," a view they call "ontological individualism" (1996, p. 334). This second view is said to be shared by utilitarian and expressive individualists and "is opposed to the view that society is as real as individuals," a view they call "social realism" which is common to the biblical and republican or civic traditions (ibid.).

It is with utilitarian and expressive individualism, however, that Bellah's book is most concerned, for as the authors see it, individualism in times past was one in which personal responsibility played a significant role but always worked itself out within community. Whereas today utilitarian and expressive individualism are more inclined to seek the emancipation from values, from community, and from the past in order to be oneself and find freedom. The assessment of Bellah and his colleagues is that this

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"ontological individualism finds it hard to comprehend the social realism of the church—the idea that the church is prior to individuals and not just the product of them" (ibid., p. 244).

Having considered the various discussions of individualism above, what becomes quite evident is that various commentators on our times have come to the conclusion that a major cultural force in the west is individualism and this social philosophy has impacted the church and evangelicalism in a significant way. While the value of the individual is not in question, ontological individualism with its negative impact on community has deep roots in western culture and will not be easily dismissed. How evangelicals will make the shift from negative forms of individualism that diminish community which in turn impact evangelical ecclesiology is no easy matter. A few rhetorical disapprovals of individualism in various forms and forums will not in my mind turn the tide. A new consciousness will need to arise where evangelicals committed to community will be radically counter-cultural in this regard having taken on biblical categories that maintain the balance of the individual-in-community. The importance and imperative of this task comes through in Bellah and his colleagues paragraph which helps provide a fitting and apropos conclusion to what has been developed above:

> The question is whether an individualism in which the self has become the main form of reality can really be sustained. What is at issue is not simply whether self-contained individuals might withdraw from the public sphere to pursue purely private ends, but whether such individuals are capable of sustaining either a public *or* a private life. If this is the danger, perhaps only the civic and biblical forms of individualism—forms that see the individual in relation to a larger whole, a community and a tradition—are capable of sustaining genuine individuality and nurturing both public and private life. (1996, p.143)

2.2.3 The Concern of Evangelical Theologians over this Ongoing Trend of Individualism and its Impact on Evangelicalism

As said earlier, probably one of the most articulate evangelical theologians of recent years with a concern for community as a counter to the individualism so apparent within culture and evangelicalism is Stanley J. Grenz. In his book, *Revisioning Evangelical Theology* (1993), he associates this emphasis on community among thinkers of all theological orientations, not just evangelical theologians, to a larger cultural shift gradually taking place in the West, a shift he likens to "the intellectual and social changes that marked the birth of modernity out of the decay of the Middle Ages" (1993, p. 14). This cultural shift which many theologians and cultural analysts now describe as "postmodernity" is, according to Grenz, a disillusionment with modernity. While modernity had its roots in Enlightenment thinking which was characterised by a belief in the inevitability of progress largely driven by a confidence in the power of human reason to analyse and then conquer all within the realm of our knowledge, it is the resultant fragmentation of life and the radical individualism of modernity that postmodernity has reacted against. Without reservation, Grenz says, "In response to the compartmentalization characteristic of the modern worldview, the watchword of postmodernity is *holism*—the desire to put back together what modernity has torn asunder" (1993, p. 15).

But has postmodernism addressed adequately the problem of modernity with its attendant individualism and has it brought about the holism that Grenz so optimistically speaks of? The now late Stanley Grenz made his observations back in the early nineteen nineties and his optimism needs to be evaluated in the light of the passing of time and present trends. David Wells in his book, *Losing Our Virtue: Why the Church Must*

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Recover its Moral Vision (1998), is of the opinion that trends within postmodernism do not validate such optimism. His contention is that postmodernism is still being shaped by the expectations of modern culture with all of its "pressures, demands, and expectations" which "combine to deliver the message that we must belong to it, not simply in the sense that we must live in it, but rather we must live by it" (1998, p. 31). The result of these expectations is that the emerging forms of evangelical spirituality are the product of both scripture and this prevailing culture with the net result being that both truth and morality have been significantly eroded and a Christianity reflected in evangelicalism that is more able to reflect the prevailing culture than to change it (ibid., p. 30).

What is particularly noteworthy in Wells' study is the emerging postmodern spirituality that is surfacing. Basing his understandings on the writings of sociologist Donald Miller, postmodern spirituality is clearly embodied in what are called "new paradigm churches" that are making headway particularly in America where religion is subject to "market forces." These emerging new paradigm churches are growing because they are "doing a better job of 'responding to the needs of their clientele'" (ibid., p. 31).[18] Miller further notes that they are succeeding in meeting the needs of their clientele because they have responded to three prevailing themes: "the therapeutic, the individualistic, and the mood of antiestablishment." Therefore, Wells concludes, the new paradigm churches are succeeding, "not because they are offering an alternative to our modern culture, but because they are speaking with its voice, mimicking its moves" (ibid., p. 32).

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[18] Wells' use of the writings of Donald E. Miller can be more fully pursued by reading Miller's, *Reinventing American Protestantism: Christianity in the New Millennium* (1997).

Another more recent writer who would concur that postmodernism is unlikely to change anything in this regard is Gerald W. Schlabach who says, "Postmodernism … seems to thrive on the problem of instability rather than confronting it—if there is such a thing as postmodernism" (2010, p. 89). Schlabach observes that he has yet to come across "a convincing case that the phenomena bearing the name 'postmodern' are distinct enough from modernity to deserve the name." His assertion is that "the difference between late modernity and postmodernity often seems to be more a matter of pace and presumption than of kind" (ibid.).

So while we and certain modern commentators on evangelical Christianity like David Wells and Gerald Schlabach may not agree with Grenz that in postmodernism we will find greater holism and a significant addressing of the present existential apartness that so many in modern western society feel, it is difficult to disagree with him that a radical individualism is a hallmark of modern western culture and that this ethos prevails. Michael Horton writing in 2008 is still of the opinion that many evangelicals still go to church to express "individual piety, experience and commitment" rather than on God and his redemptive work among us as His people who are called to build into one another's lives (2008, pp. 18-19).

Elsewhere, Grenz says that this idea of the unencumbered self which so imbues western culture "comes more from modern philosophy, especially the legacy of Descartes, Locke and Hume, than from the Bible" (1993, p. 148). One writer who concurs with Grenz that we are products of Enlightenment thinking is M. Kolbenschlag who says, "We are the children of the Enlightenment: our world is circumscribed by our notions of

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ego, personal consciousness, and autonomy" (1988, p. 180).[19] Indeed, the assertion that the ethos of modern life rooted in Enlightenment thinking is one which "elevates and celebrates the idea of the unencumbered individual" (ibid.) is difficult to dismiss and still pertains in our "postmodern" age. We find ourselves resonating with Grenz when he says of modern westerners,

> Our inclination is to see ourselves as individual, self-determining subjects, as is noticeable in the common practice of defining ourselves primarily in terms of the choices we make. We suppose that as autonomous selves we exist independently of, and outside of, any tradition or community. (Ibid.)

Robert Bellah, a social commentator on American culture, whose observations support that of Grenz's and others above, says, "Individualism lies at the very core of American culture" (1996, p. 142). This individualism with its "primary emphasis on self-reliance has led to the notion of pure, undetermined choice, free of tradition, obligation, or commitment, as the essence of the self" (1996, p. 152). While his comments pertain to American culture in particular, those like Grenz would not think it amiss in extending Bellah's observations to much of western culture.

That this radical individualism has influenced the way we think about our religious experience and commitments as western evangelicals can be seen in a number of ways. For example, Grenz states that evangelicals tend to understand the gospel primarily in terms of the individual. While acknowledging that there is an individual component to the gospel message, Grenz contends that this focus on the individual is "beyond what is biblically warranted" (1993, p. 16). This in turn has resulted in a "truncated soteriology"

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[19] Probably the best known theologian whose thoughtful analysis of the impact of the Enlightenment upon churchly thought and practice in the West, who would support Grenz's assertion, is Lesslie Newbigin in his *Foolishness to the Greeks: The Gospel and Western Culture* (1986). His understandings still seem to apply in our "postmodern" age.

(1993, p. 184) which has led to the "crass individualization of the gospel and of the church that characterizes much contemporary church life" (1993, p. 16). Providing us with a brief but very pointed definition of this "crass individualism" that pervades our culture, Rod Wilson says,

> Individualism is the process of prizing the individual over the group. What matters to *me* is more important than what happens to *us*. My self-concern has higher value than our common benefit. With the idea of self-reliance and independence fed to us in large doses, we have developed into people who seek our own good before that of another. (1995, p. 24)

Grenz elsewhere asserts that the piety of evangelicals has tended to be highly individualistic. He says, "'Bible reading' means private Bible reading; 'prayer' means private prayer; 'salvation' means being saved as an individual; 'being in Christ' means having a personal relationship[20] with Jesus; 'the empowerment of the Spirit' means being capable as an individual to act." Grenz concurs with Daniel Stevick's characterisation of evangelical piety when Stevick says, "The Christian pilgrimage is made alone. God's salvation is individually directed. His help is in an individual companionship. The way is the lonely route of personal sanctification, personally attained. And the goal is a mansion built for one" (Grenz 1993, p. 50; cf. Stevick 1964, p. 127). Grenz does, however, concede that "at its best the evangelical approach to the life of faith emphasizes the individual believer not in isolation but within the corporate church fellowship, thereby

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[20] Derek Flood's observation that the much used slogan among evangelicals of "personal relationship," if it is not to become little more than a cliché or good public relations, "needs to be brought out of the world of unreflected slogan, and examined with intelligence and depth, so that it consequently effects how we as Evangelicals think and act." That this dissertation will attempt to meet this need at least partially is as an aspect of its purpose. See Flood's "An Evangelical Relational Theology: A Personal Relationship with God as Theological Leitmotif" (p. 1).

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balancing the two dimensions of the spiritual life" (ibid.).[21] Just how balanced these two

dimensions are within evangelical thought, in particular within evangelical ecclesiology,

will need further examination.[22]

Grenz does not stand alone in his assertion that in evangelicalism the gospel is

primarily understood in individualistic terms. Darrell Guder in his book entitled, *The*

Continuing Conversion of the Church, develops the thesis that the individualising of the

gospel is the result of a "reductionism" that has throughout church history been the

accompanying danger of Christians translating the gospel across cultural boundaries.

Guder's thesis is complex and developed at length in his book, but what he is essentially

driving at is that while it has always been necessary for the church to reduce the gospel to

understandable and relevant language, the danger of "reductionism" occurs when we

tailor the gospel to a cultural setting but in the process end up serving an alien purpose

and then assigning "a supreme authority or rightness or a finality to our formulations"

(2000, p. 101).

What is relevant here is that Guder, following in the footsteps of Karl Barth, takes

issue with the way in which western Christianity has absolutised a gospel that has been

reduced to a message focused on the individual's salvation whereby the benefits of

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[21]That evangelicals have not been the only ones who have inculcated such a form of pietism in its thought and ethos is brought out in Sydney Greidanus's book, *Sola Scriptura: Problems and Principles in Preaching Historical Texts* (1970).

[22]For a particular study of the privatization of the faith by evangelicals, see Louise Kretzschmar's, *Privatization of the Christian Faith—Mission, Social Ethics and the South African Baptists* (1998). Her work laments the privatization and secularization of theology impacting faith and practice among South African Baptists particularly evident during the apartheid era. By "privatization" she means the way in which the Christian Gospel is limited to the private, spiritual concerns of the individual, and by "secularization" she is referring to the disengagement of the church from the social aspects of life resulting from a dualistic approach to personal and social ethics.

salvation are elevated at the expense of understanding "the very reason for which we receive God's grace in Christ: to empower us as God's people to become Christ's witnesses" (2000, p. 120). Couching salvation in such a way, according to Guder, is more an expression of Enlightenment thinking which pervades modern thinking with its stress on human reason and moralistic progress than on the "gospel of God's mission in Jesus Christ, forming a missional community as its witness, and moving out to the ends of the earth to demonstrate the truth of the inbreaking kingdom" (2000, p. 118).

This is not to diminish the personal and individual expressions of faith, but in emphasising the individual side of the experience of faith, this activity can become far too individualistic, "as though the entire purpose of the suffering of Christ were a person's 'cozy happiness.'" Guder's conclusion is that this is a reductionism which ends up redefining the gospel as "a kind of sacred egocentricity in which," according to Barth, "the human person '—in this case, the experience and the struggle of the Christian— should be the measure of all things'" (2000, p. 127). Louise Kretzschmar similarly comments and states the problem at hand when she says,

> A critique of privatised religion is neither a criticism nor a rejection of personal salvation. (But it is a rejection of an individualistic understanding of the Christian faith.) It is not the value and importance of the personal appropriation of the message of salvation that is at issue here. What is at issue is the fact that for so many Christians, this is where their faith ends. … An essential aspect of the problem is that the very doctrines of sin, salvation, the church and mission are privatised. Consequently, the social aspects of these doctrines are virtually unknown. (1998, p. 26)

Now what no one is asserting is that all sense of personal identity and uniqueness should be obliterated or even diminished by the corporate identity of the community. Rather, the contention of the various theologians referred to above is that the individualism of western culture has obliterated or, at very least, generally diminished the purpose of the gospel and the importance of the church as a community of believers, and

any attempt to develop a relevant ecclesiology with a strong emphasis on community without taking this factor into account does so oblivious to philosophical and social trends.[23]

Therefore, the contention here is that which has given rise to a greater emphasis on community in theological circles is the present reaction to the pervasive individualistic mindset which Stanley Grenz has pointed out is now being questioned and reacted against. His observation may well be that "the fascination with individualism that has characterised the modern Western era is waning" (1993, p. 150). The social commentator, M. Kolbenschlag, makes this point even more emphatically when he says in his book, *Lost in the Land of Oz: The Search for Identity and Community in American Life*, "A perception of our radical inseparability and connectedness is emerging as the next threshold of social revolution." Why does he say this? It is because "the depth of our interdependence with the whole earth-cosmic system is now becoming a much more primary reality than our own autonomy or survival or salvation" (1988, p. 180).

At this juncture, it must also be acknowledged that there are those evangelicals in the Emerging Church movement who are much more inclined towards the development of authentic relationships and a sense of community where church buildings serve more as community centres attracting those "who want relationships, community, and

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[23]Masao Takenaka, a professor of Christian social ethics and sociology of religion made the observation back in the 1960s that one of the decisive trends within Western societies that have made the transition from a traditional to a modern society where the masses were demanding their individual rights and freedoms "is a strong emphasis on individualism. Therefore, an effort was made to safeguard individual dignity as the basic unity of society." But, according to Takenaka, trends within modern society in the opposite direction were later discernible—the stress upon "the fulfillment of individual desires without considering the welfare of the whole community." He concludes his sociological observation by saying, "We recognize here the difficulty encountered in the process of modernization in the West—the trend from a vertical, feudal society to that of an atomized, disintegrated community." See his essay "Between the Old and New Worlds" in *Man in Community* (1966, pp. 40-41).

equipping," an observation made by Donald Carson in his book, *Becoming Conversant with the Emerging Church: Understanding a Movement and its Implications* (2005, p. 39). To what extent these "emerging evangelicals" have an adequate theology of community will surface as time goes along, but what they do indicate is that the call for a greater emphasis on community is a concern that is being given significant priority in a major church movement.

2.3 Conclusion

In conclusion, while it may well be that there is a present reaction to a pervasive individualism at a grassroots level all the way through to the theological academic establishment that is resulting in a greater interest in the concept of community and desire for more of a sense of connectedness by postmoderns, it has been the contention so far that individualism has deep roots within western culture and influences to a great extent how the ordinary parishioner understands the gospel and views the church. Just how much individualism is truly on the wane in the modern western era is a debatable point as has been demonstrated. It could well be that we have a situation where as moderns we understand the cause of our present existential crises of feeling isolated and fragmented, but we are unable to adequately deal with the crises because the worldview of modernity is so pervasive and entrenched. We are here not dealing with a milieu that has its origin primarily in outside forces or dynamics, a kind of imposition from without that is affecting our lives, but has its origin in the hidden rules, the anonymous principles, and the unquestioned presuppositions that provide the perspective, categories, and images through which the modern westerner's experience is interpreted and meaning discovered and expressed.

As we have studied the mindset or worldview of modernity, we have discovered that it has certain characteristics that make it very difficult for modern western Christians to express and live out an ecclesiology that is rich and dynamic and expressive of congregational life that is truly community oriented. As Kevin Vanhoozer of Trinity Evangelical Divinity School says, "One of the most prominent and potent challenges to the evangelical church comes straight off a page of modernity: individualism." Vanhoozer goes on to essentially develop in summary what this chapter sought to highlight: individualism as an ideology elevates "the sacred value of the self: individual freedom, private property and personal wealth, personal fulfilment, self-improvement and the self-made man, the right to pursue one's own happiness." The impact on the evangelical church in particular has been for evangelicals to

> see the church as a voluntary association of individuals who were believers before they were members of the church. On this model, the individual believer is prior to the church: 'Rather than constituting its members, the church is constituted by believers, who are deemed to be in a sense complex "spiritual selves" prior to, and apart from, membership in the church.' One's personal relationship with Jesus is, similarly, prior to one's relation to the church. The problem with this picture is that it reduces the church to something dispensable, to what Robert Bellah calls a lifestyle enclave': a group of persons united by their shared interest in a project that they believe will contribute to their individual good. (2004: pp.57-8) [24]

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[24] The apropos lament in this regard of G. Ernest Wright as voiced in his book, *The Biblical Doctrine of Man In Society,* written back in 1954 has been echoed more recently by Stanley Hauerwas, a theologian deeply committed to the church living out true Christian community in its life and practice, because he sees what Wright observed as still being true: "But no matter how high the doctrine of the church to which a particular confession may adhere in actual practice its congregations are a gathering of individuals who know little of Christian community in the biblical sense and expect little from it. . . . The worship of the Church has been heavily influenced by individualistic pietism, concerned largely, not with the social organism, but with the individual's need of peace, rest and joy in the midst of the storms and billows of life. The self-centeredness of the pietistic search for salvation tends to exclude vigorous concern with community. Hence, the modern Christian searches his Bible in a manner not unlike the pagan's study of his sacred literature, the purpose being to find inspirational, devotional, and moral enlightenment for personal living, and nothing more. The sectarianism of the Churches, and their racial and national cleavages, are further expressions of an individualism which distorts the nature of Christian society and provides excuse for the world's individualism." (1993: p.26)

Hence, there is this ongoing necessity that we understand in a more in-depth manner those aspects of contemporary western thought imbedded in our culture that may well be militating against us as western Christians addressing in significant and concrete ways the imperative of having a greater sense of community in our lives as a people of faith who make up the church of Jesus Christ who adhere to the whole counsel of God as revealed in the scriptures. This is no less a call than to be truly evangelical.

As we consider the psycho-social aspect of human beings influenced by western trends, it might be argued that in our individuality each of us sees ourselves as a free centre and the maker of our own world that has several dimensions to it such as our work, family, church, friendships, and other partial communities. Maybe we have to resign ourselves to the fact that no single community can satisfy us moderns and that the influence of a single community will inevitably wane because of what greater mobility and exposure through technological means to varied activities and relationships that beckon us and are often required of us. To argue that a significant commitment to a single community is essential to modern people's psychological well-being might be viewed as regressive, unnecessary, and as impossible as going back to the days of living one's whole life in one town and traveling limited distances by horse and buggy.

However, to accentuate the inevitability of a waning influence of any single community in the life of the modern westerner might be a true description of things as they are, but is this an adequate response to the existential crisis of estrangement and aloneness felt by so many caught up in the web of modernity with all of its technological advances and more importantly to a significant aspect of scripture that calls us to be individuals-in-community reflecting a particular kind of community? It is to this aspect of

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community that we now turn based on the premise that what is revealed in scripture leads us to greater wholeness.

CHAPTER 3

AN EVANGELICAL THEOLOGY OF THE
INDIVIDUAL-IN-COMMUNITY—
THE AUTHORITY OF SCRIPTURE RECONSIDERED

3.1 Introduction

Because evangelicals have a high view of scripture and view it as functioning as the significant authority in its theologizing, for the purpose of this dissertation, it is important that we look at how the Bible can function as an authority in evangelical theologizing in a carefully nuanced way that contributes to a theology of the individual-in-community. What has been stated so far is that while evangelicals have expressed a deep commitment to the Bible as foundational to what they believe, it has also been observed that as individuals within this tradition have become the sole arbiter of what the Bible means, this has led to fragmentation and a diminishing of community. The variegations among evangelicals all claiming the Bible as the authority and the source of what they believe necessitates a revisiting of this important concept because in a paradoxical way this perceived strength has also resulted in an observed weakness among evangelicals. By revisiting exactly how the Bible functions as an authority will enable us to explore how a greater unity among evangelicals can be achieved which becomes the basis and method for working towards an evangelical theology of the individual-in-community. Not to address this important factor at this juncture will be to neglect what is so often at the root of what fragments evangelicals and what certain evangelical

theologians with a heart for greater cohesion among evangelicals are wrestling with and advocating for.

When reading a number of evangelical theologians who are wrestling with this important issue of how scripture functions as an authority, we discover that various considerations quickly come into view. This may take the form of listing certain possible sources of authority which need to be taken into account for theological reflection with an explanation of how these sources might function as authorities. It is not uncommon for the following four sources of authority to be considered and placed into some sort of hierarchy: scripture, tradition, reason and experience. These are asserted to varying degrees depending on the authoritativeness accorded each one to establish a theological point. Those who say that theology appeals to all four of these sources in one way or another, have an approach that is often termed "the Wesleyan quadrilateral" because it purports to find its origin in John Wesley (Grenz 1993, p. 91). This theological method is said by Barry Callen to feature Scripture as the "preeminent norm." How Scripture necessarily interfaces with the other sources of authority is described by Callen when he says, "Accordingly, God's revelation includes a written witness (the Scriptures), a remembering community (the traditions), a process of existential appropriation (experience), and a way to test for internal consistency (reason)" (1999, p. 113). Randy Maddox describes Wesley's "quadrilateral" of theological authorities as a "unilateral rule of Scripture within a trilateral hermeneutic of reason, tradition, and experience" (Maddox 1994, p. 46).

Why this is important to consider when developing a theology of the individual-in-community will become clear particularly when one considers the ongoing discussion among evangelical theologians of the role of scripture and tradition, tradition being that

understanding of a community of faith who have gone before us who have in one way or another informed us and influence us in matters of belief and practice.[25] In evangelical theology the principle of *sola scriptura* has historically been formulated in such a way as to diminish the role of tradition and is the ongoing legacy of the Reformation battle against the perceived excesses of Roman Catholic teaching resulting from scripture and tradition being given equal status. In other words, *sola scriptura* has been largely a "polemical doctrine" (Beeke and Lanning 1995, p. 222).[26] But what we discover as we explore these loci of theology is that various issues related to developing a theology of the individual-in-community come into view.

3.2 The Principle of Sola Scriptura Revisited

What is becoming more and more apparent is that the principle of *sola scriptura* is being revisited by a number of evangelical theologians primarily because this principle has led to a pendulum swing in the direction of perpetuating and reinforcing individualism in matters of faith and practice whereby the role of the body of Christ both historical and present in these matters has been relegated to being inconsequential

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[25]It is accepted that "tradition" can be understood as not only the narrow selection of creedal and confessional statements that formally define and divide particular groups within the church, but can also refer to the wider living body of beliefs and practices of which such statements are abstract and partial crystallizations. For further discussion on this, see Trevor Hart's *Faith Thinking: The Dynamics of Christian Theology* (1996, p. 9).

[26]It was Luther who laid down the foundational premise of the Reformation, the principle of *sola scriptura*. As a corollary, Luther also affirmed the principle that Scripture itself is its own best interpreter. As a result, one no longer needed patristic commentary to understand the Bible. Luther also stressed that proper interpretation also had a subjective element. By this he meant that the illumination of the Holy Spirit guides Christians in applying their personal experience to biblical interpretation. It enables the Bible reader to understand accurately what a given passage teaches about Christ. The resulting interpretation is, thus, a truly "spiritual interpretation." See Grant and Tracy's, *A Short History of the Interpretation of the Bible*, where they also point out that Calvin was in general agreement with Luther here (1984, pp. 94-95).

(implicitly or explicitly) and unnecessary. For example, Stanley Hauerwas, the influential theological ethicist, is one of those who have reacted against what the principle of *sola scriptura* has resulted in when he begins his book, *Unleashing the Scripture: Freeing the Bible from Captivity to America*, with this provocative statement:

> (Christians, particularly in North America) read the Bible not as Christians, not as a people set apart, but as democratic citizens who think their "common sense" is sufficient for "understanding" the Scripture. They feel no need to stand under the authority of a truthful community to be told how to read. Instead they assume that they have all the "religious experience" necessary to know what the Bible is about. As a result the Bible inherently becomes the ideology for a politics quite different from the politics of the church. (1993, p. 16)

What Hauerwas is reacting against is not why the Reformers elevated the importance of the authority of scripture. As he says, "The Reformers were rightly concerned that the Scripture act as a judge on the Church" (1993, p. 27). He goes on to add that *sola scriptura* was "an important form of protest against many of the normal readings that had so captured the imagination of the Church at the time of the Reformation" (ibid.). Rather, what Hauerwas is reacting against is how this doctrine "is used by us" (ibid.). By "us" he is referring to those who subscribe to a strong distinction between text and interpretation, that the text can make sense apart from a Church that gives it sense. Those who maintain this distinction have forgotten that the Church in one way or another enabled for centuries Christians who could not read, understand and interpret the Bible for themselves but who were enabled to live no less faithful Christian lives. In fact, according to Hauerwas, there is every indication from history that "the text of the Scripture is not meant to be 'preserved intact' separate from the Church" (1993, p. 28). Both are inseparably linked. As he says, "God certainly uses Scripture to call the Church to faithfulness, but such a call always comes in the form of some in the Church

reminding others in the Church how to live as Christians—no "text can be substituted for the people of God" (ibid.).

Other voices along with that of Hauerwas particularly in evangelical circles are calling for more careful thought on how a Christian's allegiance to scripture as supreme authority for theological reflection must be balanced by a more considered approach of how our understanding of the Bible must be tempered and reflective of the broader Christian tradition that has come down to us through the centuries. The idea that every Christian can live and read one's Bible in isolation from a community of faith is not only out of keeping with the intent of the Reformers, but is also a failure to appreciate and understand the part God has ordained for the Church to play as a norm for theologizing.[27] This is a matter which will be discussed further shortly.

What then have other evangelical theologians been saying about the typical approach of evangelicals to this matter of reading the Bible in isolation? As we will see, there is a broad spectrum of those who have registered a concern. For example, Sydney Greidanus, writing as one in the Christian Reformed Church quotes approvingly the late S.G. De Graaf who wrote as far back as 1925, "We must refrain from interpreting God's Word as if every word in the Bible immediately concerns the individual." Greidanus goes on to point out that De Graaf "called this custom a 'misuse of God's Word' which contributes greatly to the rise of individualism within the church. … (I)n the covenant God always approaches His entire people, never merely individual persons" (Greidanus

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[27] Walter Brueggemann notes in this regard, "Not even the principal Reformers thought that Scripture could be held apart from an ongoing interpretive community with already declared interpretive assumptions. In the midst of the sixteenth-century polemics, however, such a common acknowledgment would have been unthinkable. Rapprochement on this crucial point is only now an available option in ecumenical conversation." See *Theology of the Old Testament: Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy* (1997, p. 4).

1970, pp. 26-27). The contention of Greidanus echoing De Graaf is that the concept of covenant and community are inextricably intertwined with the former elevating the importance of the latter.

The evangelical and Reformed theologian R.C. Sproul when registering his concern about how evangelicals have understood the doctrine of *sola scriptura* as inferring a disregard of the importance of the historical church makes some important points when reflecting on Martin Luther's formulation of the *sola scriptura* principle. He notes that Luther "did not despise church authority nor did he repudiate church councils as having no value. His praise of the Council of Nicea is noteworthy." Rather, says Sproul, "Luther and the Reformers did not mean by *sola Scriptura* that the Bible is the only authority in the church. … (T)hey meant that the Bible is the only *infallible* authority in the church" (2005, p. 17). Michael Horton, makes the point that Calvin and his fellow Reformers in their understanding of *sola Scriptura*, "did not eliminate the need for secondary authorities in the church. The Latin slogan means '*by* Scripture alone,' not 'Scripture alone' (*solo scriptura*)" (2009, p. 19). The ecumenical creeds were considered valid and useful interpretations of scripture among the Reformers (ibid.).

In this regard, the evangelical theologian Clark Pinnock says, "we do not come to Scripture *de novo*. We stand on the shoulders of Christians before our time who reflected long upon God's Word" (1971, p. 118). But it is in what he subsequently says that we find a reinforcement of what has been stated so far:

> The *sola scriptura* principle does not exclude a respectful listening to the wisdom of the past. For we stand in a community of faith and cannot leap over two thousand years of Christian history in disregard of the prodigious labors already done. … There is something audacious about such a leap from the twentieth century back into the first century without even a glance at the ways in which Scripture has hitherto been understood. Indeed, in such a case there is the real danger that the interpreter will bring the Bible under his own control. Every explicit denial of tradition involves a hidden commitment to a personal brand of

tradition. We cannot stand apart from the spirit of our age and time altogether, but we stand in need of the chastening of two millennia of biblical study. The Holy Spirit has been teaching Christians these hundreds of years, and we should listen to what they have learned. (Ibid.)

With the arguments and cautions of these various theologians in mind, an important factor that needs to be brought to the fore is that of the total objectivity of Christians reading their Bible at any given time. What has been increasingly recognised by those in the field of biblical hermeneutics is that people do not read their Bible without interpreting it with some influence in the background.[28] Our interpretations are often derived, for example, through what we have been taught and what we hear preached. The notion that the Bible can be read as though we are coming to it *tabula rasa* and that our understanding as we read is free of extra textual voices, either ecclesial or secular, is naive. A rigorous version of the Reformation principle of *sola Scriptura* which asserts the Bible can be read and studied with total objectivity "fails to take seriously the impact of the historical and social location of every act of interpretation" (Hart 2000:184).

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[28] One disturbing example of this is given by Justo Gonzalez, who says the following when reflecting on the already referred to Wesleyan quadrilateral, "The Bible has traditionally been interpreted in ways that are oppressive to minorities and to powerless groups, and that serve to justify the actions and values of the oppressors" (1992, p. 38). His contention is that this fact requires a broadened understanding of the components of the Wesleyan quadrilateral. For example, "experience" should be more than "religious" experience since the African-American community inevitably brings to the interpretive process the experience of slavery, and other groups bring their various backgrounds of oppression (as did the ancient Israelites who worked from their memory of slavery and divine rescue from Egypt). This inclusion of personal and communal stories need not undermine biblical authority. What it does is expose false and self-serving interpretations, thereby enriching the process of interpretation.

3.3 Hermeneutical Considerations Related to the Authority of Scripture

Before attempting to show more precisely how scripture and tradition can be brought together in a way that is cognisant of the church's thought throughout the ages and still protect much that is intended to be safeguarded by the doctrine of *sola scriptura*, it is instructive to draw on contemporary hermeneutical thought to help view certain major trends and draw on the seminal thought of those who are seeking progress in this area. Even amongst those in the evangelical tradition there is a more nuanced position of how we are to pursue biblical interpretation, and what will become very evident is the concept of individuals interpreting the Bible by themselves is being replaced by a more communal conception of the hermeneutical process.

3.3.1 Hermeneutics as an Individual-in-Community Enterprise

As a point of departure, if we go back to the Reformers like Luther and Calvin, they emphasised the importance of scripture being its own best interpreter and along with this objective principle they spoke of the subjective work of the Holy Spirit as He illumines the heart and mind of the believer so that a truly spiritual interpretation is obtained. While the role of the Holy Spirit in the process of understanding and interpretation has long been an evangelical hallmark, it is often conceded that being indwelt by the Holy Spirit does not guarantee accurate interpretation. As Klein, Blomberg and Hubbard point out, "Though the creative work of the Spirit cannot be diminished, the Spirit does not work apart from hermeneutics and exegesis" (1993, p. 85). What is more, they encourage an "openness to receive what God has revealed and a willingness to learn from others throughout the history of interpretation." This "openness" is seen as a

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necessary corrective to the "trap of individualism" (ibid.). The importance of the Church

in the process of interpretation is brought out when they say,

> The Church throughout the ages, constituted by the Spirit, provides accountability; it offers the arena in which we can formulate our interpretation. Such accountability guards against maverick and individualistic interpretations. It provides a check against selfish and self-serving conclusions by those who lack the perspective to see beyond their own circumstances. (Ibid.)

But it is on this very point where clarity is needed. How exactly does the church

play a part in the interpretive process? It is one matter to concede that the church does and

is needed in the interpretive process, it is another matter to demonstrate precisely how

exactly the church should play a significant if not normative role in the process.

Elaborating further here, what is often difficult to give coherence to, is the dual emphasis

of the individual Christian reading and interpreting the Bible with the help of the Holy

Spirit and the necessary role in interpretation of the Church as God's broader community

constituted and indwelt by the Spirit. What is more, when we consider that there are a

number of rival and conflicting interpretations in many quarters of Christendom all

purportedly derived through careful study not only of the biblical text but documents of

the early church and done under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, we find that not only is

the work of the Spirit called into question, but the authority of scripture is actually eroded

rather than safeguarded. There is little doubt that a factional Christianity and a divided

church does little to enhance the authority of scripture and the reality of One Spirit at

work in the One Body of Christ.

One response in recent times to the difficulty of multiple interpretations has been

to diminish the idea of misinterpretations and to sublimate all meanings of the text under

the response of the reader. Reader-response approaches have sought to elevate the reader

so that it is the reader who gives meaning to the text so that we no longer are constrained

to say that a text has one meaning. More conservative reader-response approaches tend to "acknowledge the role of the reader in the process of making meaning" while still "focusing on the dynamics and direction of the text" and "the various ways in which the rhetorical strategies of the text itself invited the reader to participate in the production of meaning" (VanHoozer 1995, p. 307). But more "radical" reader-response approaches, on the other hand, "privilege the ideology or position of the reader rather than that of the text." For those of this persuasion, the text provides the means "for the reader to pursue his or her own interests and agenda" (ibid.). This approach is justified in part by the assertion that "since nothing is really 'there' in the text, they try to undo traditional interpretations by claiming that they reflect the interests of some institutional authority— A State, a Church, or a School" (ibid.). "The reader, we are told, has long since been 'liberated' from the oppressive, ideologically generated claim that there are correct and incorrect ways of reading texts" (Hart 2000, p. 186).

Hence, what we encounter in the field of hermeneutics are essentially two poles: Those who continue to call for the recognition that our interpretations of scripture must be controlled by the text's meaning arrived at through careful study and under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, and those who are calling for a more "liberated" approach to interpretation where all controls which seek to limit and oppress us need to be shelved. The notable overlap of these two extreme positions is the elevation of the individual to being the sole determiner of meaning. This is the point made by Trevor Hart who goes on to reveal a certain irony when he says, "Here the perfectly proper concerns of those who, at the Reformation, sought to free individual Christian readers of the Bible from the hegemony of ecclesiastical interpreters overlap curiously with contemporary advocacy of the autonomy of both the text and the reader alike" (2000, p. 186).

The problem with both of these poles is that they have both proved to be unworkable. At the one extreme, the position that "the Bible alone" is sufficient, while laudable in its "concern that the Bible should function as the church's primary authority for the shaping of Christian faith and practice at every level, … it does not so much resolve the matter of how the text can and should be approached (whether in itself or in relation to other influences and sources of understanding) as raise it" (Hart 2000, p. 184). The other extreme, those who hold to a reader-response approach to interpretation, where a radical plurality of interpretations are all granted equal validity "could never sustain and act as a resource for a community's life and practice in the way that the Bible has in fact done through the church's history" (ibid., p. 186). The criticism by Stephen E. Fowl of this position with its "systematic anti-determinacy in interpretation" resulting "in paralysis and instability in practice" (1998, p. 56), must be carefully considered especially if one is taking seriously the need of the church to be a community functioning within the bounds of some "authority" as a basis for dialogue and understanding, and subsequent faith and practice.[29]

What has proved more fruitful and deserving of consideration for those with a concern for the bible and its function within Christian community are more recent developments in the field of hermeneutics. While previous hermeneutical models tended

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[29]That what we are confronted with here relates to larger philosophical and more particularly epistemological issues is made clear by Kevin J. VanHoozer in his essay, "The Reader in New Testament Interpretation" (1995, pp. 316-18). What he and others like Donald Carson bring out in their critique of radical reader-response approaches is that such a push too far in this direction results "in the unqualified subjectivity of all knowledge" the inconsistency of which is revealed when one considers that they are trying "to convince us by their writings that they are right." Carson's following question is incisive, "How then may two individuals communicate? How may an interpreter discover 'the meaning' of a text without succumbing to a theory that postulates unqualified polyvalence of meaning—a different meaning for each interpreter." See Donald Carson's essay entitled "Church and Mission: Reflections on Contextualization and the Third Horizon" (1987, p. 217).

to focus on the process whereby the reader being the "subject" interpreted the text as the "object," more recent hermeneutical models posit what has been described as a "hermeneutical circle" or "spiral." Fundamental to this approach is the understanding that when an interpreter in attempting to understand the text studies it, the direction of the study emerges out of the limitations which includes the presuppositions of the interpreter thereby skewing what the interpreter hears from the text "to fit his own grid" (Carson 1987, p. 217).[30] However, Carson goes on to point out that this process "inevitably" shapes the interpreter so that the person responds to the message making the person "marginally different from what he was before he approached the text." Therefore, the next time the interpreter studies the text, the study "emerges from a slightly different matrix" than the first time the text was studied resulting in new responses. "Thus not only is the interpreter interpreting the text, but the text is 'interpreting' the interpreter" (ibid.). As this process between the interpreter and the text can go on and on in a circular manner, a "hermeneutical circle" is the nomenclature chosen.

One advantage of this hermeneutical model is that it not only takes more seriously the fact of the limitations and presuppositions of any interpreter, but also points to a more positive outcome which Carson describes:

> In this model, understanding does not depend in any important way on a grasp of the referent of words, but emerges out of the heart of language itself. Mere words kill; advocates of the new hermeneutic speak of 'language poisoning'. Authentic understanding takes place when a text so 'interprets' the interpreter that a flash of insight occurs, a kind of revelatory experience, a 'language-event' (*Sprachereignis*). (Ibid.)

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[30] For an example of how hermeneutics is being done in the African context that seeks to nuance the interpretative task in a way that seeks to balance both the authority of Scripture and the locatedness of the interpreter who lives in the African social and cultural milieu so that a contextual African theology is developed, see John Parratt's, *Reinventing Christianity: African Theology Today* (1995). See particularly chapter 3, "Scripture and Revelation".

Carson points out that we cannot escape either of these factors, and "both are guaranteed to make the matrix out of which our questions emerge different from the matrix of every human being. There is a 'horizon of understanding' unique to each individual" (ibid.). Hence, the problem with such a circle is that it often becomes a closed one in which one's predispositions, whatever their nature, are not openly acknowledged as influencing one's reading of the text.

The way it is proposed that this difficulty is overcome has been to talk of not just a "hermeneutical circle" but a "hermenutical spiral" (Osborne 1991, pp. 324-325). Generally, this spiral is perceived of as taking place primarily with the individual interpreter in focus. Interpreters begin with their preunderstanding. Before beginning a study of the text, however, Carson says the interpreter "must begin with thoughtful 'distanciation', i.e. a careful distancing of himself and his own 'horizon of understanding' from that of the text" (1987, p. 218). This is done so that there is "as little interference as possible from the knower's own mental baggage" (ibid.). After an initial study of the biblical text, that text performs a work on the interpreter which in turn alters in some way the interpreters preunderstanding so that it is no longer what it was. "Then, as the newly interpreted interpreter proceeds to question the text further, out of this newly formed understanding further—perhaps, different—answers are obtained" (Klein, *et al*. 1993, p. 114). The result stated optimistically is that a "new understanding" emerges. Hence, what we have is not just a solipsistic hermeneutical circle but instead a "progressive spiral of development" (ibid.) where the interpreter approaches "the meaning of the text asymptotically" (Carson 1987, p. 218). By using the term "asymptotically," Carson is using the mathematical model developed by Karl Popper to explain knowledge acquisition in the field of science but also used elsewhere. This model is where a curved

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line (representing epistemological distance from reality, vis-a-vis, our knowledge) gets closer and closer to reality (a straight line) as time goes along but never actually touches the straight line as this would mark perfect knowledge (2005, pp. 119-120).

While the hermeneutical spiral approach goes a long way towards moving away from a reader-centric approach, what is still noticeable is the individualistic cast so far of the rhetoric which reveals little if any clear insistence on the importance of communal efforts in interpretation. Again, what is revealed is that while it is often conceded that the church or tradition needs to play an important role in one's interpretations of the text, how this is done in a way that is instructive and concrete is not always made clear. What is more, the question which must be answered is, does "spiral" language enable one to escape to any significant degree one's "finiteness" or "sinfulness"? Is it not safe to say, as does Devon Wiens, "that the trajectory of the spiral can also be predicted or predetermined because of one's social location, personal predilections and idiosyncrasies, or one's theological tradition" (1995, p. 115). Granted, as one does study the text in the hermeneutical spiral process, a responsible interpreter will interact with others including those of other traditions who will challenge our understandings. Furthermore, it is acknowledged that the Holy Spirit will be working in and through the process helping overcome immense epistemological barriers. But as we will see what is being increasingly recognized by certain evangelicals is the need to explicate a process whereby all of these factors are brought together into a coherent whole that brings together in a synergistic way the Word of God as revealed both personally and propositionally in the text, the individual interpreter with his or her qualities and limitations, the church and tradition through which God has enabled and illumined God's people through the centuries, and the Holy Spirit who continues to superintend and motivate all believers. If

the hermeneutical spiral can be viewed in such a way as to incorporate comprehensively all of these vital elements, its usefulness will be greatly enhanced.

3.3.2 Hermeneutics and the Role of the Holy Spirit Is Both Individually and Communally Oriented

Before turning to the matter of the importance of tradition in the process of Bible reading and interpretation and going further towards elaborating on its place in the hermeneutical spiral, a helpful intermediate step is to take a closer look at the whole matter of the Holy Spirit's role in the process of interpretation. What will become evident is that here too a community dimension will surface.

Up until now, the work of the Holy Spirit in the process of interpretation has been cursory in this chapter. However, here again we find a fruitful area of thought in the development of a theology of the individual-in-community which has largely been neglected particularly in evangelical literature on biblical hermeneutics. One reason why this may be so has been suggested by J.I. Packer who observed as far back as 1983 in his essay, "Infallible Scripture and the Role of Hermeneutics," that because the correct application of scriptural principles is "a strictly rational process, most evangelical textbooks on interpreting Scripture say little or nothing about the Holy Spirit" (1983, p. 347). He goes on to say that this omission has unfortunately resulted in evangelical rationality in interpretation looking like a "viciously self-reliant rationalism" (ibid.). He finds this situation rather ironical in view of the evangelical emphasis on the necessity of

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the teaching ministry of the Holy Spirit because of the spiritually blinding effect of sin on the human mind.[31]

The scarcity of material that is found within evangelical circles may be because it is assumed that the role of the Spirit in hermeneutics is generally understood and little needs to be said. Alternatively, while we may not concur with J.I. Packer's assessment that what we have here is a "viciously self-reliant rationalism" among evangelicals, we may concur that evangelicals see the task of hermeneutics as primarily a rational task and, therefore, there is no more need to talk of the Holy Spirit in this endeavor any more than one does in any theologically related endeavor where the Holy Spirit is always present and at work. To create a dichotomy between the realm of the rational and the working of the Holy Spirit is generally viewed as a misguided concept among evangelicals.

However, what we do find is that because there has been a trend within evangelicalism to focus on issues related to the rationality of Christian faith with the individual primarily in focus, the broader issues related to the working of the Holy Spirit

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[31]J.I. Packer states that, as far as he has been able to ascertain, it has been the conservative Reformed theological tradition, from Calvin through Owen and Kyper to Van Til, that has had the most to say on the subject of the "enlightening work (the 'internal witness') of the Spirit whereby we are enabled to discern the reality of divine things and the divinity of two fully human realities, Holy Scripture and Jesus of Nazareth." See footnote 74 of his essay, "Infallible Scripture and the Role of Hermeneutics" in *Scripture and Truth* (1983, p. 418). Unfortunately, a study of several more recent textbooks dealing with the subject of biblical hermeneutics published since Packer made this assertion and some already referred to in this dissertation reveals a similar trend. For example, Grant Osborne's book, *The Hermeneutical Spiral* (1991); W. Klein, C. Blomberg, and R. Hubbard's book, *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation* (1993); and a book edited by Joel Green, *Hearing the New Testament: Strategies for Interpretation* (1995) give little more than superficial treatment to the Holy Spirit's activity in the hermeneutical process. Two other works not already referred to in this dissertation also reflect this trend: Robert Morgan and John Barton's, *Biblical Interpretation* (1991) and Sidney Greidanus's, *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text* (1988). Not only do these books listed give little space to the role of the Spirit in interpretation, but they also provide no further insight into an understanding the Spirit's role. However, the work of John Goldingay, *Models for Interpretation of Scripture* (1995) and that of Dan McCartney and Charles Clayton entitled, *Let the Reader Understand* (1994) both give evidence of a greater awareness of needing to deal with this subject in greater depth thus somewhat reversing this trend.

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in the understanding and interpretation of the scriptures have lacked clear elaboration. Invariably the working of the Holy Spirit in hermeneutics has been related to the work he does on the will of the unregenerate individual reading the text. A widely held position among evangelicals is stated by Daniel Fuller who says that the object of the Holy Spirit's action is the will of the one reading the biblical text. Using 1 Corinthians 2:14 as his basis, and in particular the Greek word *lambano*, Fuller argues that "apart from the Holy Spirit, a person does not accept what the Bible teaches with pleasure, willingness, and eagerness. In other words, the natural man does not welcome the things of the Spirit of God" (1978, p. 191). That the meaning of the text can be attained through rational approaches becomes evident when he says for example, "the Holy Spirit's role is to change the heart of the interpreter, so that he loves the message that is conveyed by nothing more than the historical-grammatical data" (ibid., p. 192). The problem is not so much with the rationality of the message itself but with the heart of the unregenerate one hearing the message. As Fuller says, "Precisely because its message is so comprehensible and yet collides head-on with people's deep-seated desires to exult in themselves, men reject it and seek to justify this by regarding it as foolishness" (ibid., p. 194).[32]

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[32]Gordon Fee argues that what Paul is stating here is more than just the Holy Spirit needing to produce in the unbeliever a willingness to receive the message. Rather, the message itself cannot be understood apart from the work of the Spirit. The unbeliever remains foolish precisely because rational categories are inadequate for understanding (1987, pp. 115-17). Hence it appears that Fuller and Fee significantly disagree on the meaning of this passage. The problem, however, seems to lie in the fact that they are both talking about different matters. Yes, the Spirit never teaches that which is contrary to the plain meaning of passages interpreted in their original historical and literary contexts. As Craig Blomberg points out, "this meaning is accessible to anyone—believer or unbeliever—willing and able to put in the necessary study time. Many non-Christians, skilled in the biblical languages and in ancient history and literature, can tell us what specific passages of Scripture *mean* every bit as adequately as the best Christian commentators, and often better than some less competent Christian interpreters." But Blomberg's further comments seem to miss the context and point Paul is making when he says, "The 'understanding' these non-Christians do not possess is what the Bible consistently considers to be the fullest kind of understanding: a willingness *to*

John Frame, also writing from an evangelical and a conservative Reformed position, seems to echo what Fuller espouses when he says, "Every warranted confession of scripture … is a rational confession, a sound inference from experience. But then what role remains for the testimony of the Spirit?" (1986, p. 232). He answers this question by saying, "The work of the Spirit is to remove those effects of sin, to overcome that resistance. … He changes us to acknowledge what is rationally warranted" (ibid.). Therefore, for Frame as for Fuller, the work of the Spirit in hermeneutics is not to have us transcend or bypass rational categories as Christianity is a rational faith. As Frame says, "there is no competition between the rationality of the scriptures and the witness of the Spirit" (ibid., p. 234).

While few would deny the rational aspect of the scriptures and the necessity of the Spirit's working on the will of unregenerate persons and on the will of believers to come to the point where they welcome the truth of scripture into their lives, the inadequacy of such a limited role being given to the Holy Spirit is being increasingly questioned among some in the evangelical community. To begin with, this emphasis on the rationality of God's word has unfortunately been driven largely by an overemphasis within evangelicalism on the ability of the individual to grasp the truths of Christianity. One writer who made this point that evangelicals have tended towards a strong soteriology with its emphasis on the responsibility of the individual for his or her own growth in

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act on and obey the word of God (cf. v. 14a)" (1994, p. 67). What Paul is talking about in the context is that the message of the gospel, of Christ crucified, is the wisdom of God which is regarded as foolishness by men apart from the Spirit of God. As Kistemaker says, to the unspiritual person, "(t)he spiritual things related to sin, guilt, forgiveness, redemption, salvation, righteousness, and eternal life … are meaningless, irrelevant, and even foolish. They have no place in a life that is limited to this present world" (1993, p. 92). Such matters make little sense even if they are read using the best exegesis as they are not worldly categories.

understanding and spirituality (which includes personal Bible reading) but has often been accompanied by a weak ecclesiology where the importance of the body of Christ in this process is often neglected and relegated to a secondary place resulting in an unbalanced theological perspective is the late Stanley Grenz. While acknowledging that the best of evangelicalism wants to balance both the individual and corporate dimensions of the Christian faith, his observation was that this has not always been maintained (1993, p. 56).

While the emphasis on the spiritual responsibility of each person before God and the capability of every believer under the impulse of the Holy Spirit to respond to God using rational categories are not ungrounded concepts within evangelicalism, these concepts have largely eclipsed the necessity and importance of the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit mediated through the life and ministry of the church which is for the benefit of all believers.[33] The full extent of this work is what needs to be explicated so as to bring about a balance once again where the work of the Holy Spirit in hermeneutics is understood in both its individual and corporate dimensions.

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[33]The relationship between faith and reason and the necessity of the Holy Spirit's working in the process of understanding is well captured by Donald G. Bloesch when he says, "While rationalism holds to *credo quia intelligo* (I believe because I understand) and fideism to *credo quia absurdum est* (I believe because it is absurd), evangelical theology in the classical tradition subscribes to *credo ut intelligam* (I believe in order to understand). In this last view faith is neither a blind leap into the unknown (Kieregeaard) nor an assent of the will to what reason has already shown to be true (Carl Henry), but a venture of trust based on evidence that faith itself provides. We do not believe without our reason, but we also do not believe on the basis of reason. Faith entails thinking and examining. In order to come to a mature faith we need to search and examine the Scriptures as well as the tradition of the church. … Faith is not an act of the will in which reason is suspended but a rational commitment. It is not against reason but above reason. Reason is involved in faith at the very beginning, but it is not the foundation of faith. Augustine is right that we must understand the words of the gospel before we can commit ourselves to him who is the content of the gospel, but this is not true understanding, only external apprehension. We do not truly understand until our inward eyes are opened by the Spirit of God to discern the depth of meaning contained in the gospel" (1992, p. 58).

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One writer who has tried to address the issues surfaced so far related to the role of the Holy Spirit in hermeneutics is Clark Pinnock. Pinnock, himself an evangelical who professes a high view of the authority of scripture, as we shall see has attempted an approach to biblical interpretation that seeks to elevate the ongoing work of the Spirit and the necessity of interpretation being a corporate and not simply an individual exercise. He too laments the ongoing dearth of discussion regarding the illuminating work of the Spirit in "the standard books on biblical interpretation" (1993, p. 7) and has proposed a solution.

As we come to look at Pinnock's proposal, it is important that we understand what he sees is at the root of this present deficiency. According to Pinnock, while evangelicals have given wide acknowledgment to the original inspiration of scripture and the ongoing work of illumination by the Holy Spirit, the tendency has been to give far greater attention to the former and little to the latter. The reason for this one-sidedness is easily explained, says Pinnock:

> It has to do with the fact that liberal scholars are very interested in illumination and the second horizon. They gravitate toward reader-driven interpretations and celebrate unexpected insights coaxed from the text by the new literary approaches. Evangelicals stay away from them because they sense danger in paying too much attention to illumination and the second horizon, the danger of unbridled subjectivism and reader-driven interpretation. (1993, p. 492)[34]

Pinnock goes on to say that in their attempt to avoid this danger, evangelicals have tended to "emphasize historical exegesis and first-horizon concerns and disregard the role of readers in interpretation" (ibid.). He concurs with Osborne's observation that "traditionalists … attempt to ignore the fact that readers bring interests and

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[34]As Grant Osborne says: "The scene today is controlled by the reader, rather than by text-oriented approaches" (1991, p. 369). Pinnock also suggests that evangelicals are uncomfortable with illumination "lest there be an appeal to the Spirit in defence of charismatic interpretation that circumvents historical exegesis" (1993, p. 494).

presuppositions to the text and settle comfortably into a positivist framework of interpretation, viewing the text as stationary object and the reader as detached examiner" (ibid.; cf. Osborne 1991, p. 386).

However, Pinnock is only too aware of the dangers of a subjectivity associated with various modern approaches to the Bible, and recognises the need to maintain the historicity of the biblical text, the importance of the search for the author's original intent, and "to respect" its meaning and "to enquire into it" (1993, p. 495).[35] But for Pinnock this is only one side of the task of biblical interpretation. The essential and dynamic role that the Spirit has to play in combination with the objective elements has to be preserved otherwise we are left with a lifeless and impotent gospel.[36] For Pinnock the key to the extremes of an uncontrolled subjectivism and an overemphasis on the rational/objective dimension of the biblical content is to hold in tension the past inspiration of the Spirit and the present illuminating work of the Spirit. The Spirit's role is connected to both these

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[35]Pinnock's understanding of the objective dimension of the text is summed up as follows: "The danger (of subjectivity) must be kept in check by holding to the primacy of the originally intended meaning of the Bible. Meaning is not an autonomous world of its own (Derrida and others). The fact is that humans are social beings who use language to communicate with one another. A text like Scripture (or a book by a deconstructionist, for that matter) encodes meaning in written form to be passed on. It is the first duty of interpretation to respect that meaning and to enquire into it. Adherence to the primacy of the original meaning requires that the significance of any text be a possible interpretation of it and not something else altogether. We recognize that the significance of texts changes—but not their meaning" (1993, 494-95).

[36]In some evangelical circles it is observed that in their desire to protect the Bible as the Word of God it is regarded as essential to assert that the Bible is the Word of God not only instrumentally but also intrinsically (see Packer 1990, p. 5). However, while other evangelicals do affirm the Bible's reliable testimony to God's self-revelation in Christ by virtue of its divine inspiration, it is not agreed that the Bible is divine revelation intrinsically. For, as Donald Bloesch points out, the Bible's "revelatory status does not reside in its wording as such but in the Spirit of God, who fills the words with meaning and power. It is the written Word of God because its authors were inspired by God; it becomes the revealed Word of God when God himself speaks through the prophetic and apostolic witness, sealing the truth of this witness in our hearts" (1994, p. 17). Hence for both Pinnock and Bloesch, who interestingly wrote on this matter at much the same time, the objective and subjective elements of the Word of God have to be held together. The one is mere words on a page without the other.

aspects of the hermeneutical process. As he says in his book, *The Scripture Principle*,

"We have to avoid false objectivity in which revelation is independent of God's present

activity and a false subjectivity in which revelation is swallowed up by human experience

and cannot be normative for all" (1985, p. 155).[37] Pinnock's understanding of

illumination gives further insight into how he sees this important tension being

maintained between the objective and subjective aspects of the Bible when he says,

> In the Spirit by faith we enter a world in front of the text where the goal is to get beyond mere reading and to undergo transformation. The classic text projects a world the reader is invited to enter, and in that world the reader is caught up and changed. Better than any novel or film but by analogy with them, the Bible creates a space for us to inhabit and invites readers into that world. It sets up an alternative reality, draws us into it, and then sends us back into everyday life significantly different people. This is the way our inspired classic also works as it issues the call to follow Jesus and walk in the Spirit. The horizon of our reader horizon is fused with the horizon of the Bible as we surrender to it. The analogy would be surrendering to esthetic involvement. Illumination of the Word by the Spirit happens when, in dialogue with the text, we are drawn into its new world by the Spirit and changed. (1993, p. 494)

Therefore, for Pinnock the biblical text is dynamic. It is not intended to be merely

a static repository of truth and information, but instead a word that is capable of bringing

people into a transformational relationship with the living God.[38] "For spiritually

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[37]Stanley Grenz probably states the most widely held evangelical position when it comes to the objective aspect of the Bible when he says that "we must continue to confess with the church that the Bible is objectively divine Scripture. It is Scripture regardless of whether we subjectively acknowledge it." However, what he goes on to say is relevant to the point Pinnock wants to make which is that a "bibliology 'from above' cannot stand on its own, nor can the first thesis we make concerning the Bible focus on its divine nature. Both the historical development of Scripture and the ongoing piety of evangelicalism remind us that the acknowledgment of the divine character of Scripture is bound up with the work of the Spirit in illumination. As the community of faith hears the voice of the Holy Spirit in the pages of the Bible, it confesses that the Scriptures are the product of the inspiration of the same Holy Spirit" (1993, p. 125). Therefore, while inspiration logically precedes illumination, illumination is the essential means by which inspiration is recognised and energised.

[38]In this regard, Donald Bloesch makes the following comments well-deserving of reflection: "Too often in evangelical and conservative circles the Word is viewed as something static and frozen, waiting to be analyzed and dissected. But our ability to know the Word rests on the prior action of the Word. The

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energised biblical truth is the instrument through which God transforms human

personalities" (1985, p. 165). The subjective dimension of scripture cannot be diminished.

Pinnock sides with Calvin when he contends that the Bible has authority not because it

can be proved through human wisdom but because of the inner testimony of the Spirit

that brings assurance. People are "not so much intellectually persuaded as spiritually

converted" (ibid., p. 167). For Pinnock, therefore, *"*To be adequate, a model of Biblical

interpretation has to be dynamic" (1993, p. 497). What he goes on to say helps integrate

what has already been developed so far in this dissertation with what he is trying to

establish here:

> Though we speak of two horizons in order to make a logical distinction between meaning and significance, we should not be fooled into thinking that these two horizons are cleanly differentiated in practice from one another. In the actual work of interpretation the two are hopelessly intertwined. We listen to the text (meaning) and live in front of the text (significance). We do historical exegesis (horizon one) and open ourselves to God (horizon two). But the two actions are interrelated in what Osborne terms a spiral movement. The reader begins interpreting with assumptions and enters an open-ended dialogue with the text, which involves conversion and progress toward truth and transformation. The reader enters into the new world of meaning projected by the text and experiences change. Illumination can be seen in the context of the dynamic and open-ended process in which the Spirit calls us higher up and deeper in. (Ibid.)[39]

But there is more to how Pinnock understands the Spirit's working in the process

of hermeneutics. This further development is revealed when he says that not only is the

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Word himself must take the initiative and break through the barrier of human sin and finitude if we are to know the truth that regenerates and redeems. … I agree with Emil Brunner that the revelation of God 'is not "given" in a static manner; it is not a system of statements for man to take and use.' Rather it is a transforming reality that can be known only through searching the Scriptures in the context of the fellowship of faith. The Spirit of God does not simply enlighten the mind but motivates the will to demonstrate the truth of the gospel in daily obedience (cf. Deut 29:29)" (1994, p. 26).

[39] For a detailed understanding of the development of the "two horizons" concept, *see The Two Horizons: New Testament Hermeneutics and Philosophical Description with Special Reference to Heidegger, Bultmann, Gadamer, and Wittgenstein* by Anthony C. Thiselton (1980). For an example of Gadamar's influential role in the development of this concept, see his *Truth and Method* (1989).

reader under the controls of "original meaning," but the reader is also under the "check of the interpretive tradition already sparked by the text" (ibid., p. 495). He goes on to say, "(T)exts like the Bible … project an effective history of interpretation, in which intended meanings get enriched, sharpened and enlarged. The reader is not reading alone but participates in a community of readers over time" (ibid.). This community of readers are those "living and dead, who weigh what is said by present day interpreters (1 Cor 14:29)" (ibid.). Hence, for Pinnock, the Spirit's illuminating work must not only be viewed as a contemporary activity but must also be seen as occurring in continuity with the Spirit's illuminating work of the past.

Elaborating further on the concept of community in the process of illumination, Pinnock says that while illumination takes place in the life of the individual, "the context is still the Church because, even when we read the Bible alone, what we think about is not in abstraction from the traditions of our community" (ibid.). It is here that he goes on to make the important point made by other evangelical theologians eager to get us back to the importance of the Spirit's working in and through the community of believers in the process of hermeneutics when he says,

> Scripture originally arose from the life of the community and was meant to be interpreted in the ongoing life of that community. The reader seldom approaches the text as an isolated individual cut off from the corporate life of the Church because the expectations of readers are shaped by the community to which they belong.
> The Spirit's goal in the illumination of the Word for the Church is to shed light on her pilgrim way. We have an example of this in the first apostolic letter of Acts 15: "It has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us"(v. 28). Here the Spirit led the community to an important corporate decision, not insight into the faith so much as insight into the mission. The Spirit was guiding the Church to move beyond the confines of Judaism and learn to adapt to a mission among the Gentiles. All through Acts the ministry of the Spirit is to direct believers in what to think and where to go (Ibid.).

As we listen to Pinnock's theological insights, we discover an evangelical attempt to give greater understanding to the Spirit's role in the process of understanding what the Word of God has to say to us both individually and corporately. He makes a strong case for the fact that while we have the Bible as the Word of God in propositional form, the individual interpreter comes to it with his or her background, finiteness and sin, and is, therefore, in need of the Spirit who works concurrently and confluently in the life of the individual and the church with its "tradition" which God has enabled and illumined through the centuries so that the Word of God is enlivened and dynamic in both the individual believer as well as the community of which they are an integral part.

A corroborating evangelical voice to that of Pinnock comes from Donald Bloesch. Following in the footsteps of Karl Barth, Bloesch makes a distinction between the three forms of the Word of God: "(T)he revealed Word or the living Word (Christ), the written Word (Scripture) and the proclaimed Word (the church)" (1992, p. 190). The interrelationship of these three forms of the Word of God as expressed by Barth is summarised in the following way:

> Barth asserted the unity of the one Word of God in these three forms, but the priority of the first over the last two and the priority of the second over the last. There is something like a perichoresis in these three forms of the Word in that the revealed Word never comes to us apart from the written Word and the proclaimed Word, and the latter two are never the living Word unless they are united with the revealed Word. (Ibid.)

In relation to Barth's typology, Bloesch wishes to add a fourth form—"the inner Word (cf. Jn 5:38; 1 Cor 2:16; 2 Cor 11:10; 13:5; Col 1:27; Jas 1:21; 1 Jn 2:14; 5:10)" (ibid.). Bloesch's argument for this fourth form is that the written Word and the proclaimed Word "have no efficacy unless Christ makes His abode within us by his Spirit. It is not only the light that comes to us from the Bible and the church but also the light that shines within us by the indwelling Spirit that convinces us of the truth" (ibid., p. 191). While

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Pinnock does not develop his understanding of the Word of God in this exact same way, there is much that coheres in what Bloesch is saying with what Pinnock is trying to communicate and is an helpful ancillary development as we seek to bring together the scriptures with its Christological focus, the church, and the Spirit of God as normative in our hermeneutics and theologising.

As we attempt with Pinnock and others to bring these ingredients together into the hermeneutical spiral, not only does this analogy become more useful but it also enables evangelicals escape the overly rationalistic and individualistic approach to hermeneutics that so often prevails. Furthermore, the positive dimension of what has been explicated is that it creates more space for the role of the Holy Spirit in the hermeneutical process, a role that will be further developed in what follows.

3.4 The Role of Tradition as it Relates to the Authority of Scripture

It is now to the matter of tradition that we turn in a more concerted way so as to explore this issue which has such a communal orientation. What will become clear as this locus of theology is explored is that within certain quarters of evangelicalism there is a greater awareness of the importance of tradition as a norming influence in our theologising, and some are even willing to concede that it should be given the status of a qualified authority when understood in relationship to the authority of scripture.[40] However, as we have already observed, while it is conceded that tradition in one form or

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[40]See for example, D.H. Williams's *Retrieving the Tradition and Renewing Evangelicalism: A Primer for Suspicious Protestants* (1999); James S. Cutsinger's Reclaiming the Great Tradition: Evangelicals, Catholics and Orthodox in Dialogue (1997); Robert E. Webber's, *Common Roots: A Call to Evangelical Maturity* (1978); and particularly Stephen R Holmes's *Listening to the Past: The Place of Tradition in Theology* (2002).

another does and should play a significant part in our theologising, it is not always clear as to exactly how it should do so. Furthermore, there needs to be a clearer understanding of exactly what is meant when we talk of "tradition."

Drawing upon this renewed emphasis amongst some evangelical theologians on the importance of tradition, we turn initially to one of the major exponents of the enduring nature of the central core of the Christian faith, Thomas Oden, a Methodist theologian at Drew University. As a result of his theological pilgrimage from a position steeped in the theology of Bultmann to a more evangelical position, he discovered patristics which enabled him to see more clearly those foundations and parameters so important to later Christian understanding. Through the writings of the early church fathers he began to discover the rich Christian heritage we have in them, and his conviction regarding the norming influence of these writings became more and more acute. This conviction culminated in him writing a three-volume systematic theology in which his stated goal was to write nothing new. Why he decided to do so is worth repeating at length as we have in Oden's words an expression of how he sees tradition functioning in our theologising.

> I prefer consent-expressing ancient exegetes to those whose thoughts are characterized more by individual creativity, controversial brilliance, stunning rhetoric, or speculative genius. The weighting of references may be compared to a pyramid of sources with canonical Scripture as the firm foundation. The stable center of the pyramid is the consensual Christian writers of the first five centuries. Atop these are the best of the medieval writers followed by the consensual teachers of the Reformation and Counter-Reformation at the narrowing heights, and more recent interpreters at the tapering apex, but only those few who best grasp and express the one mind of the believing historical church of all cultures and times.
>   I am pledged not to try to flip that pyramid upside-down, as have guild theologians, who tend to value only what is most recent. Earlier rather than later sources are cited where pertinent, not because of an antiquarian nostalgia for that which is older, but because antiquity is a criterion of authentic memory in any historical testimony. …

My purpose is to delineate points of substantial agreement between traditions of East and West—Catholic, Protestant, and Orthodox—on the power of grace in spiritual formation. I will be listening intently for the historical ecumenical consensus received by believers of widely varied languages, social locations, and cultures, whether the consensus is of African, pre-European, or European Christian traditions, whether it is expressed by women or men of the second or first Christian millennium, whether it is post or pre-Constantinian. …

Who are the principal consensual exegetes to whom this argument constantly appeals? Above all they are the ecumenical councils and early synods that have come to be so often quoted as representing the mind of the believing church; the four preeminent ecumenical teachers of the eastern Christian tradition (Athanasius, Basil, Gregory of Nazianzus, John Chrysostom), as well as the western (Ambrose, Jerome, Augustine, and Gregory the Great); and others whom the church has perennially valued for accurately stating broad point of ecumenical consensus. (1993, pp. 25-27)

Along with Oden there seems to be a consensus among several evangelical theologians that the historical development of the first four centuries formed a historic benchmark for the church. For example, there is Daniel Williams, professor of religion in patristics and historical theology at Baylor University, who makes the observation that "(a) nerve within contemporary evangelicalism has been hit, and its affects are ushering in enormous potential change" (2005, p. 15). He makes this statement based on the priority being given in various discussions to the place and value of the great tradition among pastors and laity "in denominations that have normally regarded it as irrelevant or as a hindrance to authentic Christian belief and spirituality" (ibid.). Williams is of the view that

this new openness to hearing the tradition represents an extraordinary work of the Spirit in our time. The last half decade or so has seen a readiness among evangelicals and many mainline Protestants to open the door that has been closed to tradition, finding in it potential resources for understanding their own Christian heritage. Likewise, a literature is beginning to develop around the notion of Christian tradition, especially as it concerns the relevance of the legacy of the early church for today's church. (Ibid.)

It is recognised that Christians today of every tradition, whether Roman Catholic, Orthodox, or Protestant, adhere to the doctrinal truths as expressed in the ecumenical

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creeds of the first four centuries, and while some evangelicals may ignore these creeds by making appeals to scripture directly, the content of the creeds is affirmed even though the authority of them is denied (Sawyer 2006, p. 39). As Stanley Grenz reminds us, the church as the present believing community continues in the tradition of those who give assent to the importance of the foundational importance of the basic "Christian teaching that developed in the early church and has been transmitted from one generation of Christians to the next" (1993, p. 95). Grenz approvingly goes along with Robert Weber in his assertion that the content of the classical Christian creeds "is basic to and even prior to theological formulation" (ibid.).

In his book, *Listening to the Past: The Place of Tradition in Theology*, Stephen Holmes is even more emphatic in his development of the importance of tradition. His assertion is that attempting to do theology without noticing the tradition is an attempt to try and escape from our historical locatedness which is impossible to do if we think about what has transpired in the tradition correctly. He elaborates by saying,

> If we imagine trying to ignore all who have gone before, and coming to the testimony of the apostles in an unmediated form, we simply cannot do it, as will become clear if we begin to imagine what would be involved in the attempt. We might first claim to listen only to the Bible—but the Bible we have, if it is a translation, is shaped by a tradition of Bible translation, and by its translator(s). Should we attempt to avoid this problem by recourse to the original languages, then we would have to learn those languages from somebody, and so would be inducted into a tradition of translating certain words and grammatical constructions in one way and not another, and we would almost certainly have recourse to the lexicons and other aids, which are themselves deposits of the accumulated knowledge of earlier scholars. Further, the standard editions of the Greek New Testament bear witness on nearly every page to the textual criticism that has come up with this text, and not another, and so we cannot even find a text of Scripture that has not been 'handed on' to us by those who came before. If we push this imagined quest to the last extreme, we might picture a person who has somehow learnt *koine* Greek only by studying original texts, and who has even examined every extant manuscript of the New Testament and developed her own canons for textual criticism: on these bases she might claim to have unmediated access to the Scriptures. Still, however, the claim must be false: apart from the archaeological and bibliographic work that has produced the manuscripts she has

used, if she speaks English, German or French, or several other languages, her native tongue even has been decisively affected by earlier theological controversies and biblical translations. There is no escape from the mediation of our faith by the tradition." (2002, pp. 6-7)

But the contention at this point might be that ascribing value and importance to hearing the teaching of scripture through the tradition does not of itself ascribe any authority to the voices of tradition. All that is being insisted upon so far is that they are very useful and inescapable guides to enable us to hear the words that are authoritative in the scriptures. As has already been made clear, ascribing to the Reformation principle of *sola scriptura* does not mean ignoring tradition and what was established by the early creeds. But scripture as the final authority sitting in judgement on any and all tradition is the evangelical consensus. So is it possible to go further than this by elevating the role of tradition while at the same time accepting the basic *sola scriptura* principle?

One obvious text worth reflecting on when considering the possibility of ascribing some kind of authority to the Christian tradition is Jesus' account of the revelatory work of the Spirit as found in John 16:13-14: "When he comes, the Spirit of truth, he will guide you into all truth. For he will not speak from himself; but he will speak only what he hears, and he will announce to you all that is coming. He will glorify me by taking from what is mine and announcing it to you" (NIV). As we shall see, the value of considering this passage is that it forces us to consider more precisely the role the Holy Spirit plays in the tradition of the church and what level of importance or authority we can ascribe to tradition.[41]

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[41]I am indebted to the insights of Stephen R. Holmes and his study of this passage and its implications as found in his book, *Listening to the Past: The Place of Tradition in Theology* (2002, pp. 153-164).

John 16:13-14 occurs in the context of Jesus' last discourse with his disciples before his crucifixion, preparing them for the future, when they must carry on without His physical presence, but in the assurance that they will have the power of his Spirit at work in and through them. He is, therefore, speaking directly to his inner circle, the apostles who will in "a little while see me [that is, Jesus] no more" (Jn. 16:16). What also seems to be clear from the context is that this promise made in John 16:13-14 does not primarily refer to further revelation as Jesus claimed to have revealed all things he had learned from the Father to the disciples (Jn. 15:15). What is more, the Spirit will only announce what he has received from Jesus. Herein we see a filling out of a theme that is evident in the earlier part of the Gospel: that Jesus as the full and final revelation of God's truth, reveals all things in his lifetime, but it is only after his death, resurrection and ascension that his disciples will understand all that he has revealed through word and action. "The work of the Spirit, then, is to bring to remembrance and understanding of and insight into, the words and works of Jesus" (Holmes 2002, p. 154; cf. Beasley-Murray 1987 and Brodie 1993, *in loc.*).

However, it is the statement at the end of verse 13 that has attracted much discussion where Jesus says that the Spirit will announce what is to come as this clause seems to reflect that something new is to be revealed. Stephen Holmes, who draws on commentaries on the Gospel of John by Beasley-Murray, Brodie, and Brown, says interpreting this clause to be "referring to predictive prophecy is out of tenor with the thought of the Gospel, whilst acknowledging that John would have been aware of the existence of Spirit-inspired prophecy within the churches" (ibid, p. 155). Holmes brings to our attention two alternative accounts which have been proposed: "first, in keeping with the eschatological flavour of the passage, the things which are to come might well be

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read as end-time events, beginning perhaps with the happenings of Easter and ascension, but also looking forward to the return of Christ" (ibid.). Holmes says, "This accords well with the assertion in verse 14 that this work is a part of the Spirit's glorification of Jesus, since glory is itself an eschatological category" (ibid.). Second, an account which parallels the challenge of Isaiah 41:21-9 is suggested by Beasley-Murray (*in loc*.). "whereby the work of the Spirit is the continued interpretation and application of the once-for-all gospel into new places and situations" (ibid.).

That there are various ways of giving theological content to the process of spiritual illumination which Jesus points to here is noted by Holmes. Roman Catholic theologians see this this is a promise to the institutional church whereby a magisterium or some other structure "is able to make authoritative pronouncements which either determine the interpretation of the Scriptures or actually add to the content of the faith." On the other hand, some Protestant theologians "have sometimes interpreted this text polemically to be no more than a reference to the inspiration given to the apostles for the purposes of writing Scripture, which came to an end with the death of the apostolic generation and the closure of the canon" (ibid.).[42]

However, on the basis of the exegesis sketched above, Holmes contends "that neither of these views are wholly adequate, and that it is better to see this as a promise both to the whole Church, and to each particular believer within the Church" (ibid.). It is through the Spirit who is at work in the hearts of believers and the mind of the Church

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[42]For an example of this understanding, see Dan McCartney and Charles Clayton's, *Let the Reader Understand: A Guide to Interpreting and Applying the Bible*, where they state that in both John 14:25-26 and John 16:13-15 "Jesus teaches that the Spirit authenticates the testimony of the apostles. This testimony is now our NT." They go on to say, "Neither of these passages indicates the role of the Holy Spirit in *our* present-day interpretive processes" (1994, p. 76).

that believers are being led into all truth which centres on Jesus Christ and the gospel. This view coheres well with the overall development within the Johannine literature of the Spirit being called "the Spirit of truth" (Jn 4:17; 15:26; 16:13; I Jn 2:21; 4:6). In John 2:21 we read that the believers of his time that one by-product of having the Spirit of God is knowing the truth. That is, that no teaching from the Spirit will ever diverge from what has been revealed to us in Jesus Christ. In John 14:26 the Spirit will recall what Jesus said in history. In 16:13 the Spirit will not speak on his own but "will speak only what he hears." Therefore, the work of the Spirit must always submit to the revelation we have in Jesus Christ. If anyone comes along with a claim to have the Spirit and contradicts what we know of Jesus in history, that is, as recorded in the Gospels, his or her anointing is fraudulent. This is one meaning of John's repeated phrase to hold on to "what you have heard from the beginning" (v. 24). These "beginning things" are the events and words in Jesus' life, especially as recorded in the Fourth Gospel. "For the Johannine community, they form the bedrock of the church." (Burge 1996, p. 129).

What is more, that the Spirit will guide us into all truth "does not announce an overcoming of all problems or a final solution to every question, but instead an assurance where the truth or the relevance of the gospel is at stake that God will not abandon us but will work providentially … to ensure that the decisions taken are not disastrous" (Holmes 2002, pp. 158-59). God has been and continues to be at work in God's church and a failure to recognise this within its tradition is a failure to trust in this promise of Jesus.[43]

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[43]Stephen Holmes points out that "there are good biblical and theological reasons to side with Calvin against the Anabaptists. … To assume that God had abandoned his Church to such an extent that it needed refounding, rather than reforming or renewing, is to fail to trust in this promise of Jesus" (2002, p. 159).

In view of all of what has been developed above with regard to Jesus promise in John 16:13-14, Holmes concludes that what is established here is "a form of authority that resides in the tradition" (ibid.). However, he qualifies this form of authority by saying that it is "a relative, dependent and partial authority, but authority nonetheless." How then does it function as an authority? His answer is as follows: "Faced with a question of faith or morals, and a consistent witness in the tradition in favor of a particular answer, it is theologically appropriate for a Christian believer or theologian to accept that answer as correct unless and until a stronger argument to the contrary appears" (ibid.).

As we take a closer look at the apostolic tradition and developments within the early church, we find that Holmes' conclusions are not far off the mark. As we consider the traditions that Paul passed on to his congregations, we discover that these included three integrated but distinguishable spheres: The *kerygmatic*, which was the core teaching of Christ (e.g. 1 Cor 15); the *ecclesiastical*, which dealt with matters of practice in the church (e.g. 1 Cor 11); and the *ethical,* which taught people how to live upright lives (e.g. II Thes. 3:6). According to Daniel Williams, all of these together were simply called the Tradition[44] and was an expression of "the core teaching and preaching of the early church which has bequeathed to us the fundamentals of what it is to think and believe Christianly" (Williams 1999, p. 6). This Tradition "expressed in the kerygmatic, ethical, and worshipful life of the churches," which came before the "Christian writings, and

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[44]Daniel H. Williams brings to our attention that the "use of the term 'Tradition,' with a capital 'T,' as distinct from 'tradition(s),' is nothing new. Most scholars accept some variation of these basic categories in order to delineate the one apostolic and patristic foundation which is the common history we have as Christians, one that is longer, larger, and more continuous than any of our separate and divided histories. … All earthly forms of the church, that is, the plethora of existing traditions, purport that they mirror in a substantial way the Tradition" (1999, p. 36).p. For further discussion on this distinction between Tradition, tradition and traditions see, Jeffrey C.K. Goh, *Christian Tradition Today: A Postliberal Vision of Church and World* (2000, p. 99).

functioned as completely authoritative before the advent of the New Testament" (ibid., p. 68) was an "expression of the original apostolic preaching which could be sharply distinguished from human traditions that adorned the local customs of Christian communities" (ibid., p. 97). According to Williams, the Tradition was not "meant to function as an extracanonical source of revelation," but "as a summary of the essential content of faith to which the Scripture, Old and New Testaments, testifies." Therefore, as he points out, the apostolic tradition which was transmitted through "baptismal professions, creedal-like formulas, and hymns" became the "primary means by which Christian teaching and spirituality was conveyed to believers" (ibid., pp. 68-69) and eventually resulted in our New Testament.

What developed and became known as the "Rule of Faith" was a "summary of the main points of Christian teaching." This "Rule of Faith" referred "to the apostolic preaching that served as the norm of Christian faith" (Ferguson 1999, p. 1003). Its importance is brought out by Williams when he says,

> As the name "rule" implies, it functioned as the standard, or canon, for orthodoxy. To be more precise, the Rule did not function as a standard for faith only; it was a distillation of the Tradition in the sense that it was deemed to be synonymous with the apostolic faith itself. … In effect, the rule was a product of, and at the same time represented, the Christian teaching in its totality. To ignore or abandon it for one's own interpretation of the Bible or doctrine … is to depart from the Christian faith. (1999, p. 92)

Although there was no set form for the Rule of Faith, which makes it distinct from creeds, Everett Ferguson points out that "the essential message was fixed by the facts of the gospel and the structure of Christian belief in one God, reception of salvation in Christ, and experience of the Holy Spirit; but each teacher had his own way of stating or elaborating these points" (Ferguson 1999, p. 1004). Therefore, according to William DiPuccio,

> The Rule of Faith served as a canon within a canon enabling the Fathers to ascertain the correct interpretation of the Bible in fundamental matters of faith, and a yardstick for measuring the canonicity of a particular writing. … The Rule was regarded, then, as the lens or reference grid through which the Scriptures were interpreted. Clement of Alexandria makes the distinction when he declares that the first principle of his system is the Scriptures as they are rightly interpreted through the church's Rule of Faith. (1995, p.5)

What this meant is captured as follows: "The person who has a share in the faith (of the church), which is summarised in the 'rule of faith', also has a share in the Spirit, and is therefore qualified for interpretation of the Bible in its fullness of the Spirit" (Williams 1999, p. 98).

Thus we are constrained by the evidence to say that what the evangelical church has so often set in opposition to one another, namely, Scripture and Tradition, were viewed by the early church as essential to each other working together to pass on to us what is so crucial to our Christian beliefs and practice. As Donald Winslow says, "It is not a question of whether Scripture or tradition has the primacy; nor is it even a question of Scripture *and* tradition; rather, it is more properly a question of *scriptural tradition*" (1999, p. 908).[45] That the Holy Spirit was involved in the securing of that tradition as the means by which he has guided the church into the truth not only meant that we received the authoritative canon of the New Testament but that the early church taught the same thing as guided by the Rule of Faith. These three—Scripture, Tradition, and the church—were considered one collective source of the truth of Christ as the Scriptures were to be

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[45]John Howard Yoder insightfully states this matter as follows: "The clash is not tradition versus Scripture but faithful tradition versus irresponsible tradition. Only if we can with Jesus and Paul (and Francis, Savonarola, Milton, and the others) denounce *wrong* traditioning, can we validly affirm the rest. Scripture comes on the scene not as a receptacle of all possible inspired truths, but rather as witness to the historical baseline of the communities' origins and thereby as link to the historicity of their Lord's past presence" (1985, p. 69).

interpreted by the church in keeping with the Tradition (Williams 1999, pp. 97-98).

"Dividing Scripture from the Tradition or from the church" as Williams notes, "creates an

artificial distinction which would have been completely alien to the earliest generations of

Christians" (ibid., p. 14).

Elsewhere, Williams points out in this regard the following which is noteworthy

in view of certain evangelical trends to use *sola scriptura* in a highly privatised and

individualistic way:

> Despite the recent attempts of a few evangelical writers to inculcate a theory of
> *sola scriptura* as the real intent of the early church, there was no question in
> believers' minds that Scripture could or should function in the life of the believer
> apart from the church's Tradition. Were it to do so, there was scarce assurance
> that an orthodox Christian faith would be the result. While many parts of Scripture
> were inherently perspicuous and able to be understood with little outside
> assistance, post-apostolic Christians would have anathematized the principle set
> forth in Buswell's systematic theology, "The rule is then give the Bible an
> opportunity, in your own mind, to interpret itself," as setting the stage for heretical
> aberrations. (ibid, p. 98)[46]

Jeffrey C.K. Goh concurs with the case Williams has made up to this point when

he says, "The very fact that Tradition precedes Scripture points to the significance of

tradition" (2000, p. 105). He goes on in the same vein to say, "We might say that the

Reformation principle of *sola scriptura* is qualified by the awareness that Scripture is part

of Tradition and … embedded in tradition" (ibid.). Goh follows the principle of

"Scripture in tradition," and says, "In that formulation, the emphasis is neither on the old

Roman Catholic 'Two-Source Theory' of 'Scripture and tradition', nor the over-

simplified understanding of the Reformation principle of *sola scriptura*. Scripture

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[46]See J. Buswell, *A Systematic Theology of the Christian Religion* (1962, p. 25).

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becomes a part of the living Tradition insofar as it is rightly interpreted in every new setting" (ibid.).[47]

In conclusion, it seems difficult to escape the understanding that the Church and its Tradition operates as a *de facto* authority in the hermeneutical and theological process. What this Tradition reveals is that at the core of the Christian faith are those truths enshrined in the scriptures that have to do with the good news of redemption inaugurated by Christ who dwelt among us, suffered, died and was raised, and who is now present in the life of the Church through the Spirit. Christian Tradition, as Jeffrey Goh says, "transmits a community-faith which has as its touchstone the foundational encounter of the first believers with their Lord, Jesus Christ" (2000, p. 124). Therefore, as Richard Muller has argued, *sola scriptura*, far from being a call to reject all authority but the Bible is implicitly "as much a mandate to study the church as is the Roman Catholic emphasis on tradition" (1996, p. 602). Muller's encouragement is that "Protestant theology in general needs to be more conscious, in a functional and constructive sense, of the importance of the tradition in mediating both Scripture and fundamental understanding of Scripture to the present" (ibid.). In understanding the authority of the Church and its Tradition, we must recognise that scripture itself points us to the fact of the Holy Spirit

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[47] That it is indeed a living tradition is brought out by Allen Verhey whose insight is that a study of the New Testament reveals that its authors were at once faithful to the Christian tradition but were creatively responsive "to new situations, interpreting tradition and appropriating it with new understanding and power in new situations." Quoting James Mackey, Verhey provides a helpful insight here that "change and continuity are two facets of the same process, the process we call tradition. So much so that continuity can only be maintained by continual development, and development or change is only such (and not simply replacement) because of continuity. Tradition means continuity and change, both together and both equally." Further on he says, the New Testament's diverse ways of developing tradition reveals that it "calls for authorizations that sacrifice neither continuity to change (or 'relevance') nor change to continuity—authorizations that combine faithfulness and creativity in addressing contemporary issues from within the Christian community and tradition" (1984, pp. 171-72).

being active in the Church, teaching all believers, and guiding them into truth. We must listen to the believers who have gone before us, and as brought out in the discussion above, we are looking at an interpretive tradition arising out of scripture, not an independent, equal source of authority which Jeffrey Goh describes as "Scripture-in-Tradition" (2000, pp. 104-08). As M. James Sawyer notes and cautions, "This authority is not absolute, it is relative." Nonetheless, he says, "We must take the consensus of our spiritual ancestors. If we are to depart from their understanding, it ought not be for less than overwhelming and compelling reasons" (2006, pp. 122). It is in the pertinent words of Daniel Williams that we find a fitting conclusion to what has been discussed above:

> It is time for the Protestant evangelicals to reconsider much more seriously the work of the Holy Spirit in the whole history of the church. This means that we will understand the ministry of the Spirit not as a privately emerging force in individuals as much as the primary Actor in the church's *actus tradendi*, the living transmission and acceptance of the apostolic message in the body of Christ. It is through this corporate and "horizontal" process that our individual ("vertical") encounter with the Holy Spirit is shaped and nurtured. Following the way of discipleship cannot function as Christian discipleship in isolation from the guidance which the Spirit has provided through Spirit-led men and women in the church's past. A dizzying array of options are available for anyone who seeks a privatized or small group spirituality, and some of these closely mimic Christianity. But only through Scripture and the consensual Tradition will the believer be enabled to find spiritual living that is within the shelter of the orthodox faith of the church. (1999, pp. 69-70)

3.5 Some Contemporary Evangelical Thought Regarding the Authority of Scripture Leading to a Greater Awareness of the Importance of Community

The contention so far in this dissertation has been that evangelicals give great credence to the authority of scripture in matters of faith and conduct (the rule of faith), but as we understand in a clearer way how important a community of faith both present and past is in the whole hermeneutical process of understanding the Bible, we are drawn towards an understanding of the authority of scripture that promotes a theology of the individual-in-community. The idea that a Christian can read the Bible in isolation from

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other believers is a concept that is only partial and ultimately inadequate, and evangelical theologians of various backgrounds have challenged such a notion. The working of the Spirit across the ages into the present is what has sustained the church, and scriptural tradition is proposed as a much more workable and helpful understanding in this regard. Even the doctrine of *sola scriptura* when more carefully nuanced need not be seen as contradictory to this proposal.

However, what still needs to be revisited is the observed lack of unity which continues to prevail among evangelicals all claiming to hold to the authority of scripture. Rather than a high view of the authority of scripture binding evangelicals together within a commonality of faith, what has been observed is that biblical interpretations and the resultant internecine squabbles have diminished and fractured community. Even though much is said about the essentials that evangelicals subscribe to which should unite them, what continues to divide are what are called secondary or non-essential issues. But the status given to these secondary issues very quickly, as was stated earlier, causes one to realize that these issues are more than just secondary. They have been raised to touchstone level and have resulted in divisions (Sawyer 2006, p. 170). It is, therefore, the contention that calling them secondary or non-essential has not been reflective of the reality among evangelicals. Matters such as the inspiration of scripture, modes of baptism, views concerning eschatology, the sign gifts, leadership in the church, predestination and free will, views on creation, capital punishment, and more issues not listed continue to divide evangelicals (cf. Meiring 2009, p. xiv; McKnight 2008, p. 17).

In view of the endless divisions that continue to characterize evangelicalism, what proposals other than or in continuity with those suggested above can evangelicals consider as a way forward so that there is a recognition that the Bible as a whole is being

taken seriously while at the same time maintaining community among those who hold to evangelical essentials. While it would be disingenuous to dismiss or gloss over those matters that each of the traditions within evangelicalism consider important, it is also undeniable that what divides could in some cases be mitigated if we took seriously other considerations. [48] Above we have considered the hermeneutical spiral as a careful approach to studying the Bible, and it has been argued that giving consideration to how the Holy Spirit has guided the church (the community of God over time) in its understanding of the scriptures may well counter individualistic, privatized approaches to scripture making division less frequent. But are there some other proposals worthy of our consideration as we seek to uphold the authority of scripture while at the same time advancing more of a sense of unity and community among evangelicals.

One school of thought that has loomed large over the past few decades that has attempted to put a greater emphasis on community in the matter of scripture and its authority are those who would consider themselves nonfoundationalists. [49] What is of

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[48] It is understood that some like Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen think it is naive to entertain the idea that unity in the Christian church is likely and suggests that "perhaps it even should not be." Rather, he likens the "richness of Christian theology and witness" to a "symphony", but then goes on to say that all too often it is more like "a cacophony . . . of various legitimate voices . . .." He says what he does here in the context of talking about the doctrine of salvation and continues by saying that in the matter of salvation "no homogenous testimony is to be expected or desired," but for a more "common perspective on salvation" to be a catalyst for a more serious concern for unity. My argument here is that maybe at a more fundamental level, how we read the Bible as an authority may well be a good starting point towards greater union. See Kärkkäinen's remarks in his book, *One with God: Salvation as Deification and Justification* (2004, p. 5).

[49] Rodney Clapp defines foundationalism as " the pervasive Western philosophical doctrine that in a rational noetic structure every non-basic belief must ultimately be accepted on the basis of acultural and universally compelling beliefs or realities, themselves in need of no support." See his chapter, "How Firm a Foundation: Can Evangelicals be Nonfoundationalists?" in *The Nature of Confession: Evangelicals and Postliberals in Conversation* (1996, p. 82).

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interest is the discussion nonfoundationalists have engendered at an epistemological level that has helped address to some degree the rooted dogmatism that has been characteristic of various strands of thought within evangelicalism that has been so divisive.

Those who may be considered representative of this nonfoundationalist approach among evangelicals would be Stanley Grenz and Rodney Clapp,[50] and those who are considered luminaries within the emerging church movement.[51] While it is conceded that there are those in the emerging church movement who would want to distance themselves from much within evangelicalism, particularly in its capitulation to certain western cultural expectations, even describing themselves in some instances as "post-evangelical" (Gibbs and Bolger 2005, p. 35), it is still instructive to see how this significant, contemporary movement has reacted to foundationalism and moved towards an understanding of biblical authority that is more communitarian. All of those mentioned above see themselves as responding to the present postmodern cultural milieu in which the old and overly optimistic modernist worldview has been challenged and is gradually being replaced.

Using as a launching point Stanley Grenz's various works in which he dealt with matters related to the authority of scripture which gained a great deal of traction in the

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[50] Those who would also be considered nonfoundationalist theologians are George Lindbeck, William Placher, Stanley Hauerwas, John Howard Yoder, James McClendon, Nancey Murphy, and others, all of whom have had a significant influence in the writings of these two evangelical theologians.

[51] Names such as Mike Yaconelli, Spencer Burke, Brian McLaren, J. Richard Middleton and Brian Walsh, to name a few. For a more comprehensive history, summary of their thought, and naming of those who are considered part of the emerging church movement on both sides of the Atlantic, see the works, *Emerging Churches: Creating Christian Community in Postmodern Cultures* (Gibbs and Bolger 2005) and *Becoming Conversant with the Emerging Church: Understanding a Movement and its Implications* (Carson 2005).

late 1990s and early 2000s, it becomes clear that he was reacting to the idea that he saw as predominant within evangelicalism where the Bible is approached in a systematic way with the goal of providing a logical and linear presentation of truth that is regarded as a set of doctrines to be believed (1993, p. 62). A major trait of evangelicalism, according to Grenz, has been its commitment to propositional truth as contained in scripture which must be dissected and mastered. But for Grenz such an approach to the authority of scripture is more representative of enlightenment thinking whereby the tools of modernity are at work. The propensity of evangelicals to respond to modernity using an apologetic that appealed to an exalted view of reason and science is what leads him to such a conclusion (ibid., pp. 65-66).[52]

Why such an approach according to Grenz has failed is based on a major factor: Postmodernism has rejected a flawed epistemology where knowledge is viewed as entirely objective and certain, left only to be grasped by the dispassionate and autonomous knower. Instead of truth being the task of the individual knower seeking a timeless, supracultural truth, truth is much more the product of a community of which the individual knower is a part, meaning truth is social and individual. What has replaced the old foundationalist model of discovering truth is the concept that truth must be understood much more in terms of that which is historical, relational, and personal. Grenz says,

> The postmodern worldview operates with a community based understanding of truth. Not only the specific truths we accept, but even our understanding of truth, are a function of the community in which we participate. This, in turn, leads to a

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[52]For a detailed exposition of Grenz's quest for an epistemology that goes beyond foundationalism with its strong "Enlightenment" roots, see Steven Knowles book, *Beyond Evangelicalism: The Theological Methodology of Stanley J. Grenz,* particularly pages 91-110.

new conception of the relativity of truth. Not only is there no absolute truth, more significantly, truth is relative to the community in which we participate. (1995, pp. 81)

It is in this sense that Grenz sees what he is proposing as post or nonfoundationalist and a response to what postmodernism has rightfully called into question (ibid., pp. 94-95).

Those in the emerging church movement have also questioned foundationalism. What they take issue with is that under the influence of modernity, evangelicals have tended to defend "the authority of the Bible primarily by arguing for its inner consistency and for the fact that Jesus upheld the inspiration of the Hebrew Scriptures" (Gibbs and Bolger 2005, p. 69). Accordingly, God as the author of the Bible gave the various books, incidents, and propositional statements contained therein which if fit together correctly would answer all of life's problems. But this did not happen, "no matter how hard one tried" (ibid.).

In the same way, just as Grenz has reacted to the idea of truth being simply a set of abstract ideas conveyed by an authoritative Bible, so too have those within the emerging church movement reacted to such a notion. For them truth cannot "simply be a set of abstract ideas" (ibid, p. 68). Truth is more about "what God is doing concretely in people's lives" and it is in the various narratives of people living out what God is doing that "truth" is discovered. Truth is discovered within the context of community (ibid.).

Nonfoundationalists or postfoundationalists within the emerging church movement "are looking to the Bible afresh without the presuppositions and restricted vision of modernity," says Gibbs and Bolger.[53] For those in the movement, "the Bible

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[53]Roger Olsen says that at its most basic level, postfoundationalism "is any theory of knowledge that rejects the requirement that all valid knowledge be linked logically to indubitable, self-evident facts"

presents a fascinating collection of stories that together make up a big Story that stretches from before creation to beyond the end of time" (ibid, p. 70). The concern with evangelicalism is that it has tended to read "the Bible as a singular book with one voice rather than as a book with many voices and many ways of interpreting" (ibid.). So rather than seeing the Bible as a closed book that has communicated a message to mankind, its story is still unfolding and one in which we can have a part in this point in time (ibid.).

Rodney Clapp, following this theme of narrative theology and inviting others into the Christian story, as opposed to indubitable truths that one must confess, says, "It is the community called 'church' that teaches people the language and culture that enables them to know Jesus as Lord. And it is the church in the fullness of its life—not primarily its arguments—that draws others to consider the Christian faith." He continues in his rejection of foundationalism when he says,

> It is not foundationalism, but in fact the commonly occupied ground of testimony and witness, that allows us to commend and defend the faith to others. So when asked by the non-Christian to provide reasons for the hope within us, we appeal to the (quite contextual) considerations that produced our own judgments. As vividly and persuasively as possible, we show the relevance of our analyses to our interlocutor's experience. And finally we try to point out the desirability of the change we propose (ultimately confession of Jesus Christ as Lord and baptism into his body) in relation to our interlocutor's own (quite contextual) interests and projects. By drawing others into Christian friend-ship, telling Christian stories, and sharing Christian worship, we may alter the way others interpret their experience and introduce a new set of desires into their desires. (1996, p. 90)

So, for those in the emerging church movement as for Stanley Grenz and Rodney Clapp, the idea of the Bible being a static repository of truth is inadequate. As we listen to the culture around us (postmodernism), it offers a significant challenge to modernity and

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(2007, p.128). For a fuller development of "The Postmodern Impulse in Postmodern Evangelical Theology" see chapter 4 of his book, *Reformed and Always Reforming: The Postconservative Approach to Evangelical Theology.*

is offering Christian theologians more than one might initially think (Grenz 1996, pp. 166-67). As we listen to culture, which Grenz regards as a norming influence in our theologizing, it provides a crucial function for theology. "The social community in which the people of God participate contains its own cognitive tools—language, symbols, myths, and outlooks toward the world—that facilitate identity formation and the experience of reality" (1994, pp. 25-26). What must be heeded are those forces in the culture that are shaping identity and in particular we must "listen intently to the ways in which our culture seeks to express the drive toward identity-in-community" (ibid, 26)

Where postmodernism has helped us in this regard is that it is postindividualistic. It has rejected the autonomous individual who was the model for modernism's scholarship. While there is a valid emphasis in scripture on the importance and value of the individual, says Grenz, what postmodernism has called into question is that which has infiltrated the church undergirded by modernism: a radical individualism where the gospel is presented in such a way that it appears God has saved us in isolation (1996, pp. 167-68).

So what Grenz is concerned about at an epistemic level is the notion that knowledge of any kind, even the knowledge of God, is objective. What has been called into question is the idea of the neutral knowing self, the specialist who studies subjects so as to find a universal and timeless set of propositions concerning the object. Postmodernism has debunked the self-determining individual who exists outside of a community or tradition (an impossibility anyway), and evangelicalism listening to the postmodern analysis does well by setting the individual-within-community (ibid., p. 168). Rodney Clapp to a large extent reiterates Grenz and those within the emerging church movement when he says evangelicals must move away from

decontextualized propositions to traditioned, storied truths; from absolute certainty to humble confidence; from mathematical purity to the rich, if less predictable, world of relational trust; from detached objectivist epistemology to engaged participative epistemology; from control of the data to respect of the other in all its created variety; from individualist knowing to communal knowing; and from once-for-all rational justification to the on-going pilgrimage of testimony. (1996, p. 92)

While what has been proposed so far by Grenz, Clapp and those within the emerging church movement in this section is thought-provoking and would fit well with the emphasis in this dissertation on community and a rejection of the radical individualism of western culture that modernity has spawned, further interaction, as we will come to see, is required. The importance of the community of faith, the church, in which the individual must function and derive spiritual nurture and sustenance, and through which the Spirit continues to illumine believers as they struggle with issues that are unique and ever-changing, is no doubt an emphasis that will resonate with evangelicals who wish to restore the church to its rightful place in the life of believers.[54] The reduction of the Christian life to believing in a set of propositions to be believed has been rightfully called into question, and cannot be the sole objective of holding to the authority of scripture. Furthermore, recognizing that all knowledge is greatly influenced by the knower's culture and conditioning is an issue that these postmoderns have rightly

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[54] Kevin Vanhoozer's observation is that the "notion that knowledge is embedded in communal practice is a familiar postmodern theme." He goes on to point to the work of Reinhard Hutter who asserts that tradition "is not a merely human invention but a way of participating in the work of the Spirit. Hutter resists the idea that the Spirit ordinarily works with individuals in a direct and interior fashion. On the contrary, he argues that the way in which God ordinarily forms his people is by the Spirit working in and through the church. Even the knowledge of God, the goal of theology, arises only when Christians participate in the core practices of the church—baptism, the Lord's Supper, reading Scripture, communal prayer, hospitality—practices that are not simply cultural, but pneumatological. The church is therefore the place where we come to know God and grow in the knowledge of God." A notable emphasis that Vanhoozer observes within postmodernism that is worth wrestling with is this assigning to the church "so many important roles—epistemological, ethical, theological." See his, "Evangelicalism and the Church" in Bartholomew, C, Parry, R. & West, A. eds. *The Futures of Evangelicalism: Issues and Prospects* (2004, pp. 66-68).

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brought to the fore when "(s)ome evangelical theologians do not feel the full force of this concern" (Erickson 1998, p. 98).

But even with these positives in mind, the theologizing of Grenz and others who have responded to foundationalism in a postmodern way has been critiqued. The matter of truth as understood relative to scripture which obviously affects how one views the authority of scripture, has led to some helpful discussion. It is in the critiques of this postmodern, antifoundationalist approach that we find fertile interaction leading to greater clarity in the matter of understanding biblical truth in a way that is more carefully nuanced and could lead to less schism, greater cooperation and a more stable basis for community among evangelicals.

In Anthony Thiselton's critique in his *Hermeneutics of Doctrine* (2009) of Grenz and those who closely link foundationalism, epistemology and modernity, we find an appropriate starting point. Thiselton makes the important observation that Grenz and others who make this close connection fail to recognize the variations within foundationalism. Not all foundationalists are of the "hard" foundationalist type who required certain, indubitable truths upon which to ground all other truths in a Descartean "hard" evidentialist sense. Thiselton notes, going back to John Locke who was another major philosopher of the Enlightenment, that he was not a "hard" rationalist but conceded that faith may be "above reason." Locke gave more credence to reasonableness than to the formal deductive, almost mathematical certainty of Descartes who based his rationalism on "inate ideas." Locke's ideas about reason and reasonableness, was more in keeping with the Christian writers concept of "wisdom" than the abstract reasoning of Descartes (2009, pp. 126-28). Therefore, Thiselton finds Grenz and those who align Enlightenment thinking too closely with Descartes and dismiss evangelical

foundationalism based on such an analysis, have not paid enough attention to such finer but vital distinctions (ibid., p. 129). Millard Erickson is even more strident in his critique when he says that Grenz seems be describing more Protestant Scholasticism of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries than twentieth century evangelicalism (1998, p. 99).

What is more, Grenz and others, according to Thiselton, have not taken into sufficient account a major school of thought in the Reformed tradition that also rejects the hard foundationalism depicted. Thiselton notes that one finds in the writings of Alvin Plantinga and Nicholas Woltersdorff a response to the "exaggerated claims of 'classical,' 'narrow,' or 'strong' foundationalism in the tradition of Descarte." For Plantinga and Woltersdorff, there can be no more properly basic belief than theistic belief. So rather than an evidentialist, hard foundationalist approach, they "propose a 'softer' or 'broader' foundationalism that retains criteria of reasonableness but rejects the notion of 'basic' beliefs upon which belief in God is said to rest" (ibid., p. 128).[55]

Not only does Thiselton critique Grenz's lack of attention to such finer but important distinctions with regard to foundationalism, but he also goes on make an important point that postmodern theologians neglect. What Grenz and others who react to a foundationalism of any sort have pursued is an unnecessary dichotomy. On the one hand, as Thiseleton points out, a well thought through hermeneutic of doctrine affirms a great deal of what they commend: "community, narrative, drama, practices, wisdom, community identity, the place of the church as an interactive community; … and the

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[55] See Alvin Plantinga and Nicholas Wolterstorff's, *Faith and Rationality* (1983). For an evangelical apologetic that is more in line with this form of reasoning, see Timothy Keller's, *The Reason for God: Belief in an Age of Skepticism* (2008).

recovery of the importance of doctrine in a wider theory of understanding" (ibid., p. 129). On the other hand, none of what these postmodern theologians propose "could be commended or accepted if it were to entail a retreat from epistemology; a consensus or social theory of truth; and an uncritical appropriation of the postmodern as such" (ibid.). Thiselton's following statement is certainly apropos when he says, "The entire Christian tradition from Irenaeus, Clement, Origen, Augustine, Aquinas, and Calvin supports Pannenberg's axiom: 'Only conviction of the divine truth of the Christian religion can justify the continual existence of the churches'" (ibid., pp. 129-30). Therefore, for Thiselton, a false dichotomy has been developed between the communal and any form of foundationalism, and is one that cannot ultimately sustained Christian belief across the centuries.

So if scriptural authority is not to be undercut by a radical antifoundationalism, is there another way by which we can wrestle at an epistemological level with what has been discussed above that is not overly ambitious and at the same time commend more of a community approach to ones understanding of biblical truth and how the bible can still function as a credible authority among evangelicals.

One who proposes a noteworthy way forward in this matter that coheres well with an individual-in-community approach is Donald Carson, the evangelical New Testament scholar whose earlier work in the matter of the hermeneutical spiral has been referred to. In his articles, "Maintaining Scientific and Christian Truths in a Postmodern World" (2001), "The Dangers and Delights of Postmodernism" (2003), and in his book, *Becoming Conversant with the Emerging Church* (2005), Carson interacts with evangelical postmodern theologians like Grenz, and it is in his critique that we find a valuable contribution.

On the positive side, Carson agrees with the postmodern criticism of modernisms elevation of the autonomous self and the "arrogance" of its claims; postmodernism is much more realistic about human finitude which, correctly understood, is immensely useful. Postmodernism, according to Carson, is also much more sensitive than modernism ever was to issues of culture, race, gender, and so on, and is rightly suspicious of any cultural hegemony. The significant role of presuppositions in our thinking affected by our backgrounds is an enormous contribution of postmodernism. What is more, postmodernism has helped articulate much more clearly the concept that human knowledge is more than "rationality, proofs, evidences, and linear thought," and has raised awareness "of the way that aesthetic, social, intuitive, linguistic, and other factors influence our thinking." That postmoderns put a greater stress on "the authenticity of relationships" rather than "the brilliance of linear argument" certainly has, according to Carson, biblical warrant in such passages as John 13:34-35 where Christians are to be known for their love for one another (2003, p. 16).

But it is the rejection of some form of realism, whereby we can know truly what is in spite of our finiteness and locatedness, that Carson takes issue with Grenz and other postmodern theologians, and it is in his response that we come across a fertile epistemological direction which can be pursued that ultimately relates to how we hold to the authority of scripture. What Carson advocates for is termed "critical realism." This view has many faces but what it has in common among its adherents is "they all claim that we can know something about the real world, but that our claims are modest, owing not least to our finiteness, our capacity for distortion" (2001, p. 14). It is with critical realism that Carson resonates.

Why Carson finds critical realism helpful is because it addresses an antithesis that most postmoderns assume but one which cannot be left unchallenged. It is the antithesis stated as follows: "*Either we can know something absolutely and omnisciently, or we must give up claims to knowledge of objective truth*" (ibid., p. 18; cf. 2005, pp. 104-05). Why this antithesis fails is because it provides us with only two options so that if we concede the first option, that we can know nothing absolutely and omnisciently, then we must give up the claim to any objective truth. Relativism is all that we are left with. "It is far better," says Carson, "to argue that finite and fallen human beings may know some true things partially, even if nothing exhaustively" (ibid.). This is much more in line with people's experience of knowledge acquisition. For example, when a student approaches a new discipline, he or she may initially learn new paradigms or equations which are put to use as time goes along and more difficult information processed and grasped. But at no point does one claim absolute mastery of the discipline or omniscient knowledge of it. "In fact, higher levels of learning within the discipline will disclose how many things are still disputed. But the progress in knowledge acquisition does suggest that some things may be known truly even if nothing is known exhaustively" (ibid.).

In the same way, when it comes to theological matters, Carson seems to make a valid point when he says that any argument which asserts that finite beings cannot truly know anything is not helpful. "That conclusion is true *only if one initially assumes that the only meaningful way of speaking of 'knowledge' and 'objective truth' occurs when the knowledge belongs to Omniscience, when the truth is what God alone knows it to be*" (ibid, p. 20). As Carson says, in some discussions making such a point may be useful.

> But to run from that truism to the commonly assumed antithesis adopted by postmodernists is a leap too far: *Either we can know something absolutely and omnisciently, or we must give up claims to knowledge of objective truth.* For finite human beings (the 'we' in the antithesis) can know some things truly, even if

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partially. To appeal to the standards of omniscience to eliminate the possibility of true but partial knowledge among finite and fallen beings made in his image is to erect a false standard. To argue that either we can know something absolutely and omnisciently, or we must accept the status of all human knowledge as lost in a sea of relativism, is a counsel of despair grounded in an indefensible antithesis. (Ibid.)

So Carson's point is that it is much more useful and consistent with how knowledge is acquired that we can know things truly even if we cannot know things exhaustively. Yes, knowledge can be distorted, as helpful postmodern thought asserts, and it is not always acquired simply through linear, logical thought, but to deny true knowledge even in the case of God and God's ways as revealed in scripture based on the fact that we lack omniscience is "to turn the merest truism (viz. we are not omniscient) into a mere tautology (we cannot enjoy omniscient knowledge). It does not reliably address the question as to how human beings may know some things truly" (ibid.). [56]

In the light of the discussion above, the question to be answered is, how does this relate to an evangelical approach to the authority of scripture? If postmodern theologians have encouraged an approach to knowledge, particularly as it relates to biblical revelation, that is more community oriented and sensitive to our human limitations of perpectivalism and finitude, and if the critical realism of Carson is a useful epistemological direction, then what should our approach be to the Bible's authority? Or

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[56] For another evangelical who endorses critical realism as a helpful way of negotiating "the tension between acknowledging the perspectival nature of our knowing and thus the particularity of any position (contra typical pluralism) and refraining from any attempt to issue truth claims (as in relativism)", see Veli-Matti Karkkainen, *Trinity and Religious Pluralism* (2004, pp.22-25 and 166-168). Karkkainen says that this approach is to follow in the footsteps of Newbigin and Polanyi (p. 167). What then is the starting point of critical realism? "Even though there is no detached, 'neutral' point from which to view the world but only a diverse series of perspectives, according to 'critical realism', reality can be known by locating oneself in the places where reality makes itself known, by viewing it from certain standpoints rather than others. This is no arbitrary subjectivism but (as Polanyi has shown) the approach of even science and philosophy: certain 'plausibility structures' must be posited as the basis for advancing any kind of knowledge. That starting point cannot be posited with any absolute certainty, but it has to be presupposed as a kind of hypothesis." (pp. 167-8)

to address the issue from a different angle, as does Alister McGrath, we ask with him the question, how do evangelicals affirm the supreme authority of scripture when faced with competing interpretations of scripture by not appealing to some "meta-authority by which the correct interpretation can be determined"? (2009, p. x). It is to this matter that we now turn in conclusion.

3.6 Conclusion

It is here that a necessary summary of what has been discussed in this chapter needs to be brought together so as to provide a suggested way forward for evangelicals in this matter of asserting the authority of scripture that incorporates more the individual-in-community and discourages more individualistic and schismatic approaches to the Bible. If we grant that the hermeneutical spiral, as championed by Donald Carson, with its various qualifications is a useful model for approaching scripture, then we discover that there is a way forward that has promise for evangelicals. If this model incorporates the understanding that we come to God's revelation from the standpoint of our finiteness, fallenness, and locatedness, and if we come to the study of scripture with all of the tools at our disposal in a provisional way (not claiming or implying in our approach infallibility), but humbly hearing what God has said through the Christian witness of the past (scriptural Tradition), as encouraged by Pinnock and Williams, which can have a stabilizing influence in our theologizing, are these not helpful proposals towards evangelicalism being more free of schism, more united in what are the essentials, and more open to other perspectives outside of our own limited perspectives and traditions within evangelicalism itself?

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Another consideration as encouraged by Stephen Holmes is to revisit what evangelicals mean when they say God is leading us by His Spirit into all truth. Holmes in his development of John 16 encourages a broader and more eschatological reading of this text—God guiding his church in the past, the present, and the future as the community of faith into all truth. What this stimulates is a reading of scripture where we find ourselves not as the sole arbiter of how the Bible is to be interpreted thereby setting up the individual (or our own limited circle) as the meta-authority in matters of interpretation. Rather, what Holmes and others are encouraging is a listening to those who are in line with the rich understandings of the past allowing them to speak into our understandings and interpretations so that we are more informed, enriched, and sensitive to what God may be saying to His church in the present as we move forward.

By engaging with the ongoing debate regarding foundationalism and those advocating for more postfoundationalist notions, vis-à-vis Grenz and Clapp, a particular understanding begins to emerge: Ontologically speaking, evangelicals can state there is truth (without sinking into relativism) and that the church throughout the centuries has in some way known the truth (even if it is partial and at times fragmentary), but epistemologically it can be stated that we are coming to know God's truth (without subtly claiming omniscience) which is more in line with the more modest claims of critical realism, advocated for by Thiselton and Carson. What this makes possible is an openness to a continued reading of the scriptures as God's people in ever new and changing circumstances with greater understandings but always informed and in continuity with those men and women of faith who have gone before us. What this promises is a theologically enriched, spiritually illumined, and ecclesially informed evangelicalism that

is characterized more by unity than by fragmentation, more by community than by radical

individualism.[57]

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[57] For a fuller epistemological discussion of how we can know truth as finite knowers without falling one way into a hard absolutism or the other way into an unsustainable and inconsistent relativism, see Donald Carson's *Becoming Conversant with the Emerging Church: Understanding a Movement and Its Implications* (2005, particularly pp. 105-26).

CHAPTER 4

AN EVANGELICAL THEOLOGY OF THE INDIVIDUAL-IN-
COMMUNITY: THE TRINITY AND
THE *IMAGO DEI* MADE MORE FOUNDATIONAL

4.1 Introduction

As this dissertation is a proposed analysis and constructive proposal towards

strengthening an evangelical theology of the individual-in-community, it is difficult to

conceive of such a task without revisiting and advancing the doctrine of the Trinity in

some particular aspect. If we grant that all of theology is in some way grounded in the

triune reality, or as Christoph Schwöbel says, is the "gateway through which the

exposition of all that can be said about God in Christian theology must pass" (Leupp

2008, p. 12), the essentialness of this task should be self-evident.[58] Roderick Leupp is

equally convinced that "there is no theological place, however studied or casual, where

the trinitarian perspective is not welcome and indeed necessary (ibid., p. 23). What is

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[58] Karl Barth is viewed as a pioneer in the modern era of this renewed emphasis on the Triune God in that he saw this doctrine functioning as both a prolegomenon and as a structuring motif. He treated this doctrine as primary because he was persuaded that when theology engages in its proper task of enquiring about the God who reveals himself as attested by scripture, the triune God is revealed leading to his famous declaration of the triune God as Revealer, Revelation, and Revealedness. Barth therefore worked from the economic Trinity to the immanent Trinity thereby avoiding any speculative philosophical approaches to this doctrine and thereby demonstrated the centrality of this doctrine for all of theology "as every doctrine must be understood as arising out of a revelation that is triune." See Stanley Grenz's summary of Barth's thought in this regard in *The Social God and the Relational Self: A Trinitarian Theology of the Imago Dei* (2001, pp. 34-36). What will become evident in this dissertation is how certain evangelical theologians in their approach to the doctrine of the Trinity have followed to some extent Barth's lead by moving away from more substantive and philosophical categories towards more revelational and relational categories evident in scripture.

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more, if the theology of evangelicalism is being awakened to the concept of community as a significant thrust in scripture, to what extent is evangelicalism's understanding of the Trinity progressing and contributing to its captivity to individualism being diminished and its theology becoming more community oriented?

That the importance of revisiting and advancing this doctrine in some way as evangelicals is a necessary task is driven home by the observation by some that the doctrine of the Trinity has not been a primary doctrine in the language and practice of evangelicals. As mentioned in the introduction of this dissertation, Fred Sanders is of the opinion that "the doctrine of the Trinity continues to be treated as an awkward guest in the evangelical household" and "a speculative distraction from the serious business of the gospel" (2010, p. 8). Roderick Leupp, drawing on the analysis of Christoph Schwöbel, similarly asserts that the doctrine of the Trinity must be central to today's theological outlook and constructive efforts because of the "perceived irrelevance of the doctrine of the Trinity for practical Christian life" (2008, p. 12). While Karl Rahner was not writing from the standpoint of an evangelical, but as a Roman Catholic, his assessment of how the doctrine of the Trinity is generally held by Christians is worth considering and compels us in the task at hand:

> Despite their orthodox confession of the Trinity, Christians are, in their practical life, almost mere "monotheists." We must be willing to admit that, should the doctrine of the Trinity have to be dropped as false, the major part of religious literature could well remain virtually unchanged. (1997, pp. 10-11)

In view of what Sanders and others have stated above about the lack of attention to this key doctrine, to what extent have evangelical theologians in recent times sought to address this apparent deficit? In what has been described as a "pivotal essay" (Sexton 2011, p. 787) which was entitled "The State of the Doctrine of the Trinity in Evangelical Theology," of 2005, Fred Sanders made the grave assessment that within evangelicalism

the doctrine of the Trinity was not being addressed to any degree of seriousness. His observation was that "(t)here is still a dearth of significant evangelical books that offer worthwhile constructive treatments of the doctrine of the Trinity" (2005, p. 153).[59] He found he could not report on any major monographs written by established evangelical thinkers dealing with the Trinity that had been published within the last decade of him writing. According to Sanders, it was still Barth, Rahner, Moltmann, Pannenberg, von Balthasar, Jenson, and Gunton who dominated in the discussion of the Trinity (ibid.).

However, in a more up-to-date assessment of evangelicals and their treatment of the doctrine of the Trinity, Jason Sexton in his essay entitled, "The State of the Evangelical Trinitarian Resurgence," published in 2011, stated that evangelicals neglect of the doctrine is no longer the case (2011, p. 787). His studied observation was that evangelicals' treatment of the Trinity was now "ubiquitous" and "quite fashionable." (ibid., p. 788). Even as Sanders was making his grave assessment around 2005, the theological scene with regard to evangelicals and the doctrine of the Trinity was changing. Sexton points to several major works by evangelicals that indicated this positive trend.[60]

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[59] While Sanders's essay was published in 2005, he had made public his assessment in November of 2004 when he presented his research at the 56th Annual Meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society.

[60]For example he points to Sanders own significant contribution to the evangelical body of literature entitled, *The Image of the Immanent Trinity: Rahner's Rule and the Theological Interpretation of Scripture* (2005). Then there was Robert Letham's, *The Holy Trinity* (2004), and a number of works put out by British evangelicals around this time: Roger Forster's, *Trinity: Song and Dance God* (2004); Tim Chester's, *Delighting in the Trinity: Why Father, Son and Spirit are Good News* (2005); Tom Smail's, *Like Father, Like Son: The Trinity Imaged in Our Humanity* (2005); and Robin Parry's, *Worshipping Trinity: Coming Back to the Heart of Worship* (2005). Sexton also gives brief mention of Stanley Grenz's works, *The Social God and the Relational Self: A Trinitarian Theology of the Imago Dei* (2001) and *Rediscovering the Trinity in Contemporary Theology: The Triune God* (2004) and the earlier work of Millard Erickson, *God in Three Persons: A Contemporary Interpretation of the Trinity* (1995) as serious treatments of the Trinity by evangelicals. All of these works and the many others he mentions establish the trend that evangelicals have seen the importance and value of elaborating on this important doctrine.

What has been driving this development within evangelical academia, and for the purpose of this dissertation, what is of interest and provocative in terms of a community thrust to this development? In 1998, David Cunningham, Professor of Religion at Hope College, Michigan, in his book, *These Three Are One: The Practice of Trinitarian Theology,* called for a reformulation of the doctrine of the Trinity so as to achieve the following three goals:

> (1) to release the doctrine from the imprisonment within the dusty confines of the history of dogma, translating it into our present context; (2) to render it more intelligible, to both Christians and non-Christians (while recognizing the differences between these two audiences); and (3) *to testify to its profound significance for the shape of the Christian life*. (1998, p. ix; italics mine)

In the intervening period, between Cunningham's call and the present, the trinitarian resurgence within evangelical theology seems to have followed this encouragement towards the reformulation of doctrine of the Trinity so as to be more relevant and significant for the shaping of Christian life.

That this is the case is brought out by again referring to Jason Sexton's assessment made in 2011 of the present evangelical trinitarian resurgence. In his essay, it is noteworthy that some of the resurgent features he observes within evangelical theology have to do with relationship or social trinitarian themes that enrich Christian living. So, for example, where he talks of evangelical theologians becoming more familiar with patristic sources, his observation is that it is often for the purpose of engaging the early church Fathers and early creedal sources for the purpose of showing the "patristic relevance for an understanding of Christian theology that … prioritizes the sharing of a relationship that characterizes the divine life from eternity" (2011, p. 790) He notes that particularly the Eastern tradition possesses a more viable option for evangelicals in this regard (ibid.). Sexton's positive assessment is that the utilization of the patristic tradition

along with scripture has resulted in various forms of social trinitarianism within evangelicalism that are unique and have promise (ibid, pp. 791-93).

So when the evangelical John R. Franke says that "(p)erhaps the single most significant development in twentieth-century trinitarian theology has been the broad consensus among interpreters of the significance of relationality as the most fruitful model for understanding the doctrine of the Trinity" (2009, p. 105), his analysis coheres with that of Sexton's and indicates evangelicals are now mainstream within this development. Franke's further statement that the hegemony of the ontology of substance which dominated much theological reflection on the Trinity throughout so much of church history has now taken a more relational turn where "the primary accent should be placed on the relational aspect of the divine life" (ibid.) is another indication that this positive development is welcomed by at least some evangelicals. For too long, as J.I. Packer once lamented, the truth of the Trinity among evangelicals has been relegated "to the lumber room of the mind, to be put on display only when deniers of it appear, rather than being made the frame and focus of all adoration." (Snyder 2004, p. 55) Or as Peter Toon, the evangelical Anglican says, "if we give the impression that the doctrine of the Holy Trinity is only and solely the doctrine of the immanent or ontological Trinity then we run the risk of its confession being irrelevant to Christian worship, life, and service" (1996, p. 234). Increasingly, as Howard Snyder points out, the Trinity is being viewed

less as an "enigma to be solved" and more as "the model on which all human relations, including the church, should be structured" (op. cit.).[61]

Because an evangelical formulation of the social conception of the Trinity with its relational emphasis has such promise for the development of an evangelical theology of the individual-in-community, it is now worthwhile considering the nature of this development. The intent as we proceed is to see that a valid implication of the divine life within the Trinity is as Theodor Damian says so well is the obligation "to discard any form of egotistic individualism that leads to the destruction of communion and life, but also to make sure we do not fall into depersonalizing collectivism that annihilates the personal characteristics of the human individual" (2011, p. 1). He reminds us that "Three in One is the divine model offered to us. Unity in diversity" (ibid.). So what implications can we validly extrapolate from such an understanding of the Triune God for us as individuals-in-community who are called to glorify God and bear witness of Him in the church and to the world?

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[61] Roderick Leupp speaks of the two great trinitarian analogies, the one being the psychological and the other being the social. He talks positively of Augustine's great insight into how the psychological analogy provided an "undeniable witness to the Trinity." Similarly, he welcomes the social analogy with its greater emphasis on God's threeness and says that each analogy is "powerful. Neither is freestanding. Both are necessary. Yet some historical eras may call forth one more than the other." In the light of present day challenges, he says, "Fractious as today's living can be, the social analogy may have the greater urgency" (2008, p. 26). Robert Letham drawing on the analysis of Colin Gunton takes a far dimmer view of Augustine's contribution to Trinitarian thought in that his "flawed" psychological analogy "was ahistorical and failed to do justice to the persons of the Trinity" See Letham's *The Holy Trinity in Scripture, History, Theology, and Worship* (2004, p. 408). This dissertation will not presume to work towards any resolution to this issue due to its scope but will progress based on the insight that in the light of present day concerns, the social analogy has greater urgency.

4.2 The Promise of a Social Formulation of the Doctrine
of the Trinity for an Evangelical Theology of
the Individual-in-Community

Evangelicals, particularly those who have come to realize the promise of social trinitarianism for Christian thought, life and practice, have as their starting point an elevated view of the Trinity. It is seen to be at the very heart of the Christian faith. "Far from being ancillary or unimportant, it is vitally connected to the most crucial Christian claims. It is what is most distinctive about the Christian doctrine of God" (McCall 2012, p. 31). It is what brings together the Christian faith into a cohesive whole, and without it, the Christian faith is devoid of its central content. As Sanders reminds us,

> Nothing we do as evangelicals makes sense if it is divorced from a strong experiential and doctrinal grasp of the coordinated work of Jesus and the Spirit, worked out against the horizon of the Father's love. Personal evangelism, conversational prayer, devotional Bible study, authoritative preaching, world missions, and assurance of salvation all presuppose that life in the gospel is life in communion with the Trinity. Forget the Trinity and you forget who we are as gospel Christians; you forget how we got to be like we are. (Sanders 2010, p. 9)

If the Trinity is central to the Christian faith and to the gospel, and this elevated view of the Trinity is the starting point of social trinitarianism, to where then do they proceed? Next social trinitarians generally emphasize, says Thomas McCall, "the distinctness of the three persons" of the Trinity. "(M)ethodologically, social Trinity theorists 'start' with God's threeness and then work toward securing claims to monotheism" (McCall 2012, p. 31). According to McCall, Cornelius Plantinga Jr. provides a notable representation of this approach as Plantinga says any "'social theory' will recognize that the three divine persons are 'distinct centers of consciousness' while also holding that the 'Father, Son, and Holy Spirit must be tightly enough related to each other so as to render plausible' the Christian commitment to monotheism" (ibid.; cf.

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Plantinga 1989, p. 22). Plantinga's own summary of his proposal for social trinitarianism is stated in the following way:

> The Holy Trinity is a divine, transcendent society or community of three fully personal and fully divine entities: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit or Paraclete. These three are wonderfully united by their common divinity, that is, by the possession of each of the whole generic divine essence—including, for instance, the properties of everlastingness and of sublimely great knowledge, love and glory. The persons are also unified by their joint redemptive purpose, revelation, and work. Their knowledge and love are directed not only to their creatures, but also primordially and archetypally to each other. The Father loves the Son and the Son loves the Father. …. The Trinity is thus a zestful community of divine light, love, joy, mutuality, and verve. (1989, p. 22)

Even though motivations and strategies among social trinitarians vary, Thomas McCall believes we can still summarize this perspective's basic tenets in the following way: First, rather than placing the emphasis on the language of substance where the members of the Trinity are said to be numerically of the same substance, the emphasis is more on "one essence" in the sense that they "share a common nature (much like Peter, James and John share their human nature)" (2012, p. 32). Second, each person of the Trinity must be "both fully divine and properly related to one another for the view to be a kind of monotheism" (ibid.). While defenders of this understanding of the Trinity will use various strategies to avoid the charge of tritheism, this they have in common: "the divine persons are distinct from one another in a full and robust sense, and they are joined to one another in unbreakable communion" (ibid.).

Another methodological aspect of social trinitarianism is its commitment to the priority of relationality in trinitarian conversation. John Franke in his essay, "God is Love: The Social Trinity and the Mission of God," notes the significant consensus among theologians of various traditions that priority must be given in trinitarian discourse to the matter of relationality. He names several theologians who are doing this which includes, John Zizioulas, Jürgen Moltmann, Wolfhart Pannenberg, Leonardo Boff, Colin Gunton,

Alan Torrance, and the evangelical theologians Millard Erickson and Stanley Grenz (2009, p. 113). Other evangelical theologians, as will become evident, have taken on board this priority of relationality in trinitarian discourse. Being in relationship as modeled by the Trinity is an important concept that a number of theologians have embraced, and that while the language of substance has its place, God as a relational triune being must take priority and as such takes on a primary methodological status.

If we listen to the voice of John Zizioulas as representative of social Trinitarian thinking in this matter of being and relationality, or "being as communion" as he puts it, a major thesis of his is that "the being of God is a relational being: without the concept of communion it would not be possible to speak of the being of God. … (God has) no ontological content, no true being, apart from communion" (1985, p. 17). However, we must read Zizioulas even further for he makes it clear that communion does not engulf or supplant "hypostasis," "nature" or "substance" when we talk of the Trinity. Rather, the inseparable truths which must remain is that while "person cannot exist without communion", so too "every form of communion which denies or suppresses the person, is inadmissible" (ibid., p. 18).[62] Therefore, what Zizioulas is advocating for goes along with the thrust of this dissertation which is the concept that the individual-in-community

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[62] This balance between relations and persons needing to be maintained is brought out by James Houston. He explains that each member of the Trinity is "always particularized. The Father is always the Father, and the Son is always the Son, and the Holy Spirit is neither the Father nor the Son." Being open to "the presence of other in the self" does not mean or require "the obliteration of the self." Jürgen Moltmann on this point "reminds us that persons must not be dissolved into relations. Though persons are inter-dependent and identity is shaped in relationship. There is still need to differentiate between 'person' and 'relation.' We must see them in a reciprocal relationship: 'there are no persons without relations; but there are no relations without persons.'" These summaries are found in "Evangelical Theology and Gender" by Elaine Storkey in *The Cambridge Companion to Evangelical Theology* (2007, p. 170).

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"hypostasizes the person according to God's way of being" (ibid.). But what remains key for Zizioulas is that patristic thought contributed to our understanding that "there is no true being without communion" and as such "communion is an ontological category" (ibid.). So influential has this major thesis of Zizioulas become, being as communion, that in Stanley Grenz's estimation it "has become almost a methodological axiom of the order of Rahner's Rule"[63] (2001, p. 51).

This consensus among contemporary theologians to move towards a greater emphasis on relationality has been furthered, according to the evangelical theologian Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, by a more "dynamic understanding of reality and the human being as human community in late modernity" (2007, p. 387). Concurring with the thinking of David Cunningham, he concludes that among the firsts of postmodern insights for Trinitarian thought is the concept of relationality. As opposed to the "concepts of isolation, individualism, and independence," all children of modernity where the bias has been "to classify and categorize everything into distinct units … , postmodernity speaks of relationality, interdependence, becoming, emerging, and so on." According to Kärkkäinen, "In this changing intellectual atmosphere, the value of communion theology is being appreciated in a new way" (ibid.). Drawing on David S. Cunningham's helpful insights, he elaborates further:

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[63] Rahner's Rule is stated as follows: "The 'economic' Trinity is the 'immanent' Trinity and the 'imminent' Trinity is the 'economic' Trinity" (1970, p. 22). M. John Farrelly offers the following helpful elaboration of Rahner's Rule: "The Trinity in the order of salvation is the Trinity in itself; and the Trinity in itself is the Trinity in the economy of salvation, though the Trinity in itself is not wholly known or comprehended by its presence in the redemptive order. It is indeed the very Word of God who became flesh; it is indeed the very Spirit of the Father and the Son who came upon the disciples of Christ at Pentecost; it is indeed the Father himself who indwells the faithful. What is given us in the economy of salvation is indeed the Trinity in itself, God's self-gift, rather than simply a created participation in God's nature through grace" (2005, p. 131).

> To speak of "Father" or "Son" is not to speak of an individual who is potentially isolated from other individuals; rather, the two terms specify relations that depend absolutely on each other for their meaning. There can be no child without a parent, but neither can there be a parent without a child: the two terms are tied together into a knot of mutual causation and interdependence. (Ibid., p. 388; cf. Cunningham 2003, p. 189)

The great value then of postmodernism's reengaging with the complexities of relationality is that it "has made it easier for theologians to think through the fundamentally relational nature of God that is inscribed in the doctrine of the Trinity." What is more, according to Cunningham, by doing this, "ancient claims about the Trinity's co-equality, co-eternity, and mutual reciprocity are being recovered and reendowed with a fullness of meaning and significance that had largely been lost in the modern era" (2003, p. 190).

As we consider further this concept of relationality in trinitarian discourse as axiomatic among social trinitarians, it is also noteworthy how the concept of personhood has come under more careful scrutiny and lends itself more to the social trinitarian viewpoint. In his essay, "Trinitarian Personhood and Individuality," the Anglican theologian David Brown helps us understand that the term "person" as used of the three persons of the Trinity need not connote the highly individualistic nature of persons that now prevails in western thought. The perspective that he provides is that there are different ways of conceiving the term "person" and there are some that apply better to God than others. He expresses the range of thought that there is as follows: "(T)he existentialist idea of one's selfhood as a personal creation, through the Greek idea of it being given by one's social role, to, at the other end, the Hegelian idea of the perfectly rational society in which the individual amounts simply to one of several modifications of the social whole" (1989, p. 72). In Brown's view, God "is clearly nearer the latter than the former end of the spectrum" (ibid.). Therefore, God as conceived of as triune must be

viewed as a social whole and as such each Person of the Trinity cannot be understood as individuals acting independently from the others for this would be to deny the very bond that unifies them into one being.

Accordingly, Thomas McCall makes the observation that many contemporary trinitarian theologians are working to counter the "modern" notion of personhood particularly where "the modern ideals of individuality and autonomy" are concerned (2010, p. 237). Social Trinitarian theologians are particularly exercised by this task, says McCall. He quotes Cornelius Plantinga, a major proponent of social trinitarianism, as an example of one who wishes to state very clearly that each member of the Trinity "is a person, a distinct person, but scarcely an *individual* or *separate* person" (ibid.). Plantinga further qualifies his position when we says that "if belief in three autonomous or independent persons amounts to tritheism, the social analogy fails to qualify. For its persons are essentially and reciprocally dependent" (ibid.).

Roderick Leupp also helps us consider more carefully this matter of personhood as it relates to the Trinity in his helpful discussion on this important subject which has such significance in the development of any social Trinitarian thought which seeks to give priority to the three persons of the Trinity. He acknowledges that one of the most complex problems facing trinitarian theology is how each member of the Trinity can be "fully vested in the one community" while at the same time distinguishable persons. He, like Plantinga, recognizes that if too much emphasis is placed on distinguishability, "then each person frays off into individualism, and we have tritheism" (2008, pp. 75-76). On the other hand, he cautions that if "all differentiation from Father to Son to Spirit collapses, God is monotheistic and modalistic, which boils down to only 'human ways of looking at God,' which are not after all intrinsic to the very being of God" (ibid., p. 76).

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That this is not a new problem is brought out by Leupp when he points out that even classical trinitarianism found it difficult to "assign specific content or even character traits to each of the divine persons." He elaborates:

> Some ascriptions are fairly obvious, following the course of salvation history, as for example the saving ability of God the Son and the sanctifying power of God the Holy Spirit. But the bigger question remained: What, if any, qualities did God the Father own as his alone? How about God the Son? Or God the Spirit? Would the presence of too many such traits, parceled off one by one to each of the three divine persons, conspire to defeat the unity of God? Is each person merely a foil for the development of the other two? If so, regardless of how ego-emptying or self-effacing Father, Son and Spirit might be, at some point might not any divine person become an "empty divine suit" or "divine doormat"? (Ibid., p. 77)

In order to answer this complex question of how the unity and oneness of the Trinity can be preserved while at the same time speaking of the three Persons of the Trinity that is robust without falling into either a kind of monotheism on the one hand and a tritheism on the other, it is helpful at this juncture to introduce those helpful concepts inaugurated by the early church that play a significant part in the methodology of social trinitarianism today. What will be of particular importance is how the concept of *perichoresis* developed by the Eastern Fathers helps towards resolving this complex problem of personhood and the Trinity.

As was mentioned earlier, social Trinitarians have been engaging the early church Fathers and early creedal sources for the purpose of showing the patristic relevance for an understanding of Christian theology that prioritizes the sharing of relationship which characterizes Trinitarian life. The early proponents who are said to have compelled this understanding of the triune God were the Cappadocian Fathers: St. Gregory of Nyssa, Basil the Great, and St. Gregory of Nazianzus, all church leaders of the fourth century. In terms of methodology, the use of the Cappadocians is ubiquitous in social Trinitarian development because of the long standing precedent they established of first speaking

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apophatically by stating that our "experience of God is not of three personal realities in isolation from each other." Rather, their emphasis was on "persons in relation, always interweaving and interpenetrating each other" (Fiddes 2001, p. 6) Through their use of the concepts encapsulated in "*hypostasis*" which denoted the "'otherness or distinct identity of the Father, Son, and Spirit" and "*ousia*" which denoted "the one divine nature with which each was identified" (ibid., p. 14) they developed fundamentally a trinitarian plurality inextricably linked to a unity in the Godhead. In this way they could articulate their experience of God as that of three distinguishable and identifiable Persons of the Trinity that have one generic Being. Therefore, what was valued was stated by Gregory of Nazianzus as follows:

> Monotheism, with its single governing principle, is what we value—not monotheism defined as the sovereignty of a single person … but the single rule produced by equality of nature, harmony of will, identity of action, and the convergence towards their source of what springs from unity—none of which is possible in the case of created nature. The result is that though there is numerical distinction, there is no division in the substance. (Williams & Wickham 2002, p. 70)

Stanley Grenz concurs with John Zizioulas that the Cappadocians were pivotal in trinitarian theology in that they began a revolution in Greek philosophical thought by inaugurating "an ontology of personhood that struck a balance between the one (i.e., nature) and the many (i.e., persons)" (2005, pp. 300-01). It was the Cappadocians who "transformed 'person' into the constitutive element of being, and the concept of Being itself became relational. As Zizioulas states it, '*To be* and *to be in relation* became identical'" (ibid., p. 301). Therefore, among social Trinitarians, the inseparability of Being and relationality has deep roots in the Christian tradition.

With the concept of relationality as fundamental to one's understanding of the Trinity, a relationality that constantly works itself out in unity, harmony, and

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convergence, we find ourselves drawn into the ubiquitous social trinitarian concept: that of *perichoresis*. While many associated *perichoresis* with the Cappadocian Fathers, particularly St. Gregory of Nazianzus and St. Gregory of Nyssa (Beeley 2008, p. 213), the term is more associated with John of Damascus (eighth century) as a descriptor of the Trinity. (cf. R. Plantinga 2010, p. 125; Leupp 2008, p. 72). What was a term initially used by those like Gregory of Nazianzus to speak of "the interdependence of Christ's deity and humanity" (Grenz 2001, p. 316), later provided a useful and more precise way of describing the relational dynamic of life in the Trinity.[64] *Perichoresis* was a term which took its rise in the East to denote the "sublime oneness or 'in-ness' of Father and Son in John's Gospel (e.g., 10:30)," and "connotes 'mutual indwelling,' 'interpenetration,' 'fellowship,' and functioned to shore up the unity of the Trinity in light of the distinction of persons" (R. Plantinga 2010, pp. 125-26).

So basic to social Trinitarian thought has *perichoresis* become, that Roderick Leupp enjoins devotees of trinitarian theology to come to grips with this term even if it is the only technical term they learn (2008, p. 71). This should be the case, according to Leupp, not only because it goes a long way in helping describe the immanent Trinity, but also because it has significant "implications for personal and social ethics, for family life, for politics and for aesthetics and the theology of worship. " (ibid., pp. 71-72).[65]

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[64] For a fuller and very helpful article on the historical development of the use of the term *perichoresis* that bears out what Grenz is saying, see "Perichoresis and the Early Christian Doctrine of God" (Manastireanu 2007-2008, pp. 61-93).

[65]For an example of how the the triune life of God impacts upon the Christian life, see Robert Vosloo's article, "The gift of participation: On the Triune God and the Christian moral life" (*Scriptura*, 79, 2002, pp.93-103). This paper makes a case for both an "affirmation as well as a qualification of a relational understanding of the Trinity through the notion of participation" that has significant implications for the Christian's moral life made possible by the Spirit. Vosloo argues that this participation is "not a vague 'spiritual' notion, because the participation in the Triune life through the Spirit is a participation in Christ…. It is a participation in life" (p. 93).

This use of *perichoresis* as an important and defining concept is clearly elucidated in the writings of Jurgen Moltmann. According to Grenz, Moltmann, as a significant and recent champion of the concept, used *perichoresis* as a way of distancing himself from the classical understanding of the Trinity which Moltmann considered as placing too much emphasis on the unity within the Godhead to the neglect of the three persons. Instead of using the classical substantive terms which were too impersonal and abstract, Moltmann preferred to draw on the image of *perichoresis* which refers to the "intimate indwelling and complete interpenetration of the persons in one another" (Grenz 2001, p. 44). Elaborating further, Moltmann understood *perichoresis* as denoting "that trinitarian unity which goes out beyond the doctrine of persons and their relations: by virtue of their eternal love, the divine persons exist so intimately with one another, for one another and in one another that they constitute themselves in their unique, incomparable and complete unity" (ibid.). Therefore, for Moltmann, *perichoresis* has a way of honoring and elevating the individual Persons of the Trinity while continuing to preserve the unity that brings them together as one. Furthermore, Moltmann sees in the concept a way of construing God's triune life in a way that is dynamic and organic as it points to "the circulatory character of the eternal divine life" which "takes place in the triune God through the exchange of energies. The father exists in the Son, the Son in the Father, and both of them in the Spirit, just as the Spirit exists in both the Father and the Son" (Leupp 2008, p. 73).

The Roman Catholic liberation theologian Leonardo Boff and the evangelical theologian Millard Erickson help us grasp the concept of *perichoresis* further by pointing out that it has two basic meanings which resulted in two subtly different Latin translations. The first translation, *circuminsessio*, means "being seated, having its seat in, seat" and conveys the idea of "a situation of fact, a static state" (Boff 1988, p. 135). The

second translation, *circumincessio*, means to "permeate, com-penetrate and interpenetrate" which according to Boff carries more the idea of koinonia: "a permanent process of active reciprocity, a clasping of two hands: the Persons interpenetrate one another and this process of communing forms their very nature" (ibid.). Therefore, *perichoresis* speaks of "both permanence of location with respect to another and ongoing interchange or sharing" (Erickson 1995, p. 230).

However, an important question that must be answered which is also methodological and important to evangelicals has to do with whether or not *perichoresis* which contributes towards a more social understanding of the Trinity with its emphasis on relationality and personhood has strong biblical support. This concern is raised by Roderick Leupp when he says that *perichoresis* may be "historically attested" and "theologically sensible," but does it have scriptural support (ibid., p. 73)? Acknowledging that the doctrine of the Trinity has biblical attestation which is more of a church doctrine developed in its complexity over the first four centuries of church history rather than being "lifted straight from the pages of the Bible," does *perichoresis* in the same way derive legitimacy from the scriptures? (ibid., pp. 74-55).[66] Not only is this an important methodological point for evangelicals, but as we will see, this also will give greater content to what is being described.

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[66] The evangelical Lutheran theologian Donald Bloesch, in his *God the Almighty: Power, Wisdom, Holiness, Love*, notes that while "the doctrine of the Trinity is not found as such in the Bible, it is the immediate implication of the fact, form and content of the biblical revelation (Barth). It is the product of a developing understanding of the significance of God's redeeming action in human history and how this action mirrors the inner life of God. One can say that in the New Testament there is 'a fundamental Trinitarian awareness, expressed in many triadic formulas'" (1995, p. 168). The question that can be raised is, to what extent does the concept of *perichoresis* have this kind of support and stature both within the tradition of the church and in its growing understanding of the biblical witness?

As we engage in this task of looking at the biblical support for the concept of *perichoresis,* this is being done in recognition that at any time when we are engaging in theologizing which is a second-order discipline, we are seeking to bring together a faithful construct of what the Bible teaches in a way that is "relevant to the contemporary setting and informed by and in continuity with the historic position of the church" (Franke 2009, p. 106). So far we have discussed to some extent the cultural relevance and historical development of this concept, but the biblical attestation has not been considered.

Another preliminary observation that must be made as we come to look at the biblical revelation of God is that the classical substantialist understanding of God with its emphasis on the absoluteness and immutability of his essential nature has resulted in the eclipsing of God's internal relationality and His loving relationship to creation in general and people in particular as revealed in scripture. The major critique of the classical position on the nature of God, already voiced in this chapter, has not been that we should necessarily abandon the category of substance (Greek: *ousia*; Latin: *substantia*) but that greater emphasis should be placed where the biblical narrative does on "a God who has entered into loving relationship with creation" (ibid., p. 112) which is a continuation of the *perichoretic* life of the triune God.[67]

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[67] David S. Cunningham seems quite content to hold on to the concept of substance without such a concept dissolving into modalism or the diminishing of differentiation. He contends that differentiation was built into the classical conception of Trinitarian theology. He says that "Christians claimed that the divine Three are not mere modalities of God or "masks" that God wears in various historical circumstances. They are of the same being or substance, but they differ sufficiently from one another that we can meaningfully speak of one being "sent" by another (Jesus "breathes" the Holy Spirit upon the apostles in John 20:22), or of any two having a conversation with one another (as the Garden of Gethsemane, Matthew 26 and parallels)" (Cunningham 2003, p. 192).

Elaborating further, and again setting the platform for discussing the concept of *perichoresis* in its broader biblical context, John R. Franke reminds us that what is revealed in the Bible is a God who has not only acted in the history of the world, but whose acting in the history of the Christian community is "a particular event in the continuing story of the divine life that stretches from the eternal past into the eternal future." The important point that Franke wants to make is that not only do the acts of God in history become the basis for constructing a doctrine of the Trinity, but these acts "are also indicative of God's ongoing internal life, and Scripture invites us to think through the implications of this history with respect to the character of God" (ibid., p. 114).

With this emphasis on God's acts in our history being in continuity with God's eternal, divine life, Franke suggests a theological principle: "God is as God acts." He develops this principle as follows:

> The identity of God is known through the actions of God. The self-revelation of God is reflective of the character of God. The character and being of God are made known by the actions of God in history. Following this principle, we can say that God is a being in act. … (T)he actions of Jesus of Nazareth allow us to say that God is as God does and what God does is love. Through the revelation of God in Jesus Christ, we encounter the living embodiment and exposition of God's gracious character in relation to humanity as the One who loves. God is known through what God has done, and what God has done emerges from the person of Jesus Christ and the witness of Scripture. What we see in the life of Jesus and narratives of Scripture is that God is the One who loves. (Ibid., pp. 114-15)[68]

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[68] While we might concur with Franke that God is as God does, this is not the same as saying the economic Trinity is all that God is. J. Scott Horrell makes this helpful point in the context of saying, "Most evangelicals will insist that biblical revelation corresponds to who and what God truly is. While there may be hiddenness, incomprehensibility, and even (in apophatic theology) *darkness*, there are no masks—as the incarnation and the cross powerfully demonstrate. God is honest, true, and genuine in communicating himself. I presuppose that the economic Trinity as revealed in the Bible accurately represents to finite creation who and what God is, but that the economic Trinity is by no means all that is God. As classical theology confesses, language serves as *analogia entis*, inadequate for any exhaustive correspondence to the infinite. An evangelical Trinitarian hermeneutic, therefore, will hold the primacy of revelation together with intellectual humility before God's mystery that has explanation of its own" (2004, p. 400).

Why this is so important for Franke is that not only do we move away from viewing God as "an uninvolved, unmoved, passionless Deity," but we see Him as "actively and passionately involved in the ongoing drama of life in the world … who lavishly pours out this love in Jesus Christ." But even more than this, this expression of God's love made manifest in Jesus Christ "points us to the internal life of God as an eternal Trinitarian fellowship of love shared between Father, Son and Holy Spirit." Therefore, his helpful insight is that the "explication of the triune God in God's self-disclosure in and to creation is at the same time the explication of the triune God in the divine reality" (ibid., p. 115).

Looking at the explication of the triune God in scripture, it is in the Gospel of John and his epistles that we find a rich source for perichoretic theology. In the writings of the apostle John we find God in Christ inviting those who believe into the richness of His internal life. Social Trinitarians for example find in Jesus' high-priestly prayer in John 17 clear biblical justification for this concept of *perichoresis.* Beginning in verse 21, we read, "Just as you, Father, are in me and I in you, that they too might be in us." In the context and in the words of "in-ness," of this verse, Jesus' vision is "of a unified community … encompassing present as well as future believers" whose "'complete' (*teteleiōmenoi*) unity results from being taken into the unity of God" thereby giving "authentic" and "credible" witness to the unity within the Godhead. (Kostenberger 2004, in loc.). Earlier in John 14:10-11 in his farewell discourse, Jesus said, "Don't you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me? The words that I say to you are not just my own. Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work. Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and that the Father is in me." So in both John 14 and 17

we see *perichoresis*, or interpenetration: "as you are in me and I am in you" (Erickson 1995, p. 231).

Furthermore, in John 17:22, as Jesus prays to the Father asking that his followers "may be one, as we are one," the language here is again rich in perichoretic terms. When using the term "one," "John uses the generic word *hen*, which admits of a plurality, not *heis*, which refers to a strict numerical oneness (17:22; cf. 17:20-3)" (R. Plantinga, et al. 2010, pp. 140-41). So in "John's simple, but subtle, syntax he presents the Trinitarian unity here as the model or paradigm for the church's unity" (ibid., p. 141).

Exploring this concept of oneness further, we turn to John 10:30 where Jesus says, "I and the Father are One." Again, we see the word *hen* used rather than the masculine, *heis*, which if used would have implied that Jesus and the Father are one person and the distinction between Jesus and God would have been obliterated. This would also make nonsensical Jesus praying to the Father as well as him "being commissioned by and obedient to his Father" (Carson 1991, p. 394). As we read further in John 10, Jesus explains that the works done by him are intended for the purpose of observers knowing and understanding "that the Father is in me and I am in the Father" (v.38). In order to explain what is being taught here, John R Franke reminds us that thinkers in the early church found in the concept of *perichoresis* the help they needed. While some have tried to explain this oneness of Father and Son as mere sharing of the "same will and task," (cf. ibid., pp. 394-95), a fuller definition of *perichoresis* as given by Franke which has far greater utility for explaining John 10:30:

> (*Perichoresis*) refers to the mutual interdependence, even mutual interpenetration of Father, Son and Holy Spirit in their Trinitarian relation with one another. It seeks to explain the nature of the divine life with the assertion that while the three members of the Trinity remain wholly distinct from each other, they are also bound together, wholly interior to each other in such a way that the Father, Son and Spirit are dependent on each other for their very identities as Father, Son and

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> Spirit. In other words, the Father, Son and Spirit would not be who they are, would not be God, apart from the interdependent relationality they share with each other. (2009, p. 116)

Therefore, in *perichoresis* we find that relationality, function and metaphysical unity are all brought together so that the persons of the Trinity are distinguishable, exhaustively one in terms of will, and reveal an essential unity that all help to make sense of John 10:30 and the larger context of the Christology of John's gospel.

So far we have referred at some length to the oneness and interpenetration spoken of in scripture between Father and Son, but we need to also extend this discussion further to the Holy Spirit thereby completing the perichoretic picture so as to include all three members of the Trinity. While there are numerous places in the gospels where the Holy Spirit and Jesus are intimately connected in terms of Jesus coming and mission (cf. Matt. 1:18, 20; Luke 1:35; John 1:32; Luke 4:1, 18; Matt. 12:28), we will point specifically to two examples in the Gospel of John: In John 20:22 Jesus is said to have breathed out the Holy Spirit upon his followers, and in John 14:16 and its context Jesus indicates that it is the Holy Spirit who will carry on his work once he has ascended who is another counselor of the same (*allos*) kind. Erickson points out that this "accounts for the apparent paradox of the indwelling Holy Spirit (v.17) and of Christ in us (Gal. 2:20; Col. 1:27)." What this indicates is that "they are together, intimately linked and functioning together" (1995, p. 228). Therefore, we can concur with Leupp that the succinct analysis of Thomas F. Torrance captures well the *perichoresis* of Father, Son and Holy Spirit when he says,

> In the mysterious communion of the eternal Persons in the Godhead, Father, Son and Holy Spirit indwell one another as one God, without ceasing to be what each personally and distinctively is in relation to the others, so that the fullness of the

Godhead applies unrestrictedly to each divine Person as well as to all of them together. (Leupp 2008, p. 74; Torrance 1996, pp. 35-36)[69]

As we look further into the internal life of God as explicated by the apostle John, we discover further rich perichoretic overtones that enhance our understanding. Turning to 1 John 4:8 and its context, we come to the scriptural affirmation that "God is love." Again drawing on the development of John R. Franke's concept of the triune God being in relationship eternally pointing us more to the social Trinitarian model, the main point he wishes to make is that "God is love" is not just a statement of God's feelings but is also a statement of "the eternal life of God lived in a set of ongoing and active relationships of love that constitute God's being in and for Godself" (2009, p. 115; cf. Moltman 1992, p. 86).[70] Elaborating further, he says,

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[69] Interestingly, Torrance takes what is called a "dialogical" approach when it comes to the more substantialist language of the Western Church and the more relational approach of the Eastern Church. This can be observed in *Trinitarian Perspectives* where he says the following about the agreed upon statement of the Reformed and Orthodox Churches: "The Agreed Statement is … of considerable ecumenical significance in offering an approach to the doctrine of the Trinity which is neither from the Three Persons to the One Being of God, nor from the One Being of God to the Three Persons. As such, it cuts across the *mistaken views* of the doctrine of the Trinity according to which Western theology moves from the One Being of God to the Three Persons of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, while Eastern Theology moves from the Three Persons of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit to the One Being of God. It is preeminently a statement on the *dynamic Triunity* of God as Trinity in Unity and Unity in Trinity." (2000, pp.113-4) According to Dick Eugenio, the Trinitarian theology of Torrance "transcends all others." What Torrance does is escape "two neatly categorized opposing options," the "essentially substantialist or relationalist. His Trinitarian discourse does not operate either from the Unity detached from the Distinction or from the Distinction detached from the Unity. In Torrance, it is not a matter of choosing between two *wrong* independent approaches, but developing or rediscovering an integrative approach that does justice to both biblical revelation and patristic theology." See Dick Eugenio's published thesis, "*Communion with the Triune God: The Trinitarian Soteriology of T.F. Torrance* (2014, p.165).

[70] As we listen to Franke on this point, we hear echoes of the twelfth-century theologian Richard of St. Victor. According to Stanley Grenz, Richard derived from "the concept of love a social understanding of God as triune." The logic of Victor's argument is traced by Grenz as follows: "Beginning with the idea of goodness, Richard observes that such goodness must involve love. Moreover, because self-love cannot be true charity, supreme love requires another, equal to the lover, who is the recipient of that love, and because supreme love is received as well as given, it must be a shared love, in which each person loves and is loved by the other. Finally, because supreme love must desire that the love it experiences through giving and receiving be one that is shared with another, it is not merely mutual love between two but is a love that is

> These are the active relationships of God's eternal Trinitarian fellowship in which Father, Son and Holy Spirit participate in the giving, receiving, and sharing of love that includes both difference and unity. Technically, we might say that God gives, receives and shares love from all eternity in self-differentiated unity and unified self-differentiation. In other words, this eternal fellowship of divine love is characterized by both unity-in-plurality and plurality-in-unity, in which we affirm that one God exists in three distinct persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit; and we affirm that the three together, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, are the one God. In these active relations, God freely constitutes the divine being in this distinctively trinitarian fashion. (2009, pp. 115-16)

Reading further, Franke points out that love "is an especially fruitful term for comprehending the life of God since it is an inherently relational concept." Logically the concept of love "requires both subject and object." If, as he has already asserted, "God is a triune plurality-in-unity and unity-in-plurality," the Trinity will include "both love's subject and love's object." Therefore, when "God is love" is understood theologically, according to Franke, it "refers primarily to the eternal, relational intertrinitarian fellowship among Father, Son and Holy Spirit, who together are the one God. … In this way, God is love within the divine reality; and on this sense, through all eternity God is the social Trinity, the community of love" (ibid., p. 117).

But not only do we see through the exposition of Franke that "God is love" implies characterizing the triune God as "unity-in-plurality and plurality-in-unity" where each member of the Trinity is giving, receiving and sharing in loving relationship, but we are drawn into why the apostle John made this assertion. The language of *perichoresis* is no mere exercise in careful theological nuancing, but has significant implications for us as

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fully present among three and only three." What Richard did, says Grenz, was to open up a way of seeing "persons-in-relation" as a "key to understanding the triune nature of God" (2001, p. 31). As we consider the *imago Dei* further along in this chapter, it should not be unexpected that "person's-in-community" will loom large as we consider what it means to be created in God's image. For an excellent and contemporary statement by an evangelical of what Richard was communicating, see Millard Erickson's *God in Three Persons: A Contemporary Interpretation of the Trinity* (1995, pp. 221-22).

believers. Though only fully realized in the Trinity, it extends to humanity (Leupp 2008, p. 74). Reminding ourselves of the context of where the apostle John said, "God is love," we read as follows:

> Dear friends, let us love one another, for love is of God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; but if we love each other, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us. (1 John 4:7-12)

What we see in these verses is that love shown amongst God's people is the very evidence that we are born of God and know him. God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself and our response to God who loved us first is love for those who are his. Furthermore, this love is not only the visible demonstration of God's love, but is a demonstration that God is "in" us and his love is "made complete in us." Here we again see the language of "in-ness." Therefore, we concur with Peter Holmes when he says that being reconciled with God and others and living out the capacity of love that is in us, in so "becoming we move into step with the becoming of social Trinity (2006, p. 187). Or in the words of Thomas Torrance, God has drawn near to us "in such a way as to draw us near to himself within the circle of his knowing of himself" (1996, p. 1) and there is the clear implication that the church in its unity "becomes an analogy for the Trinity: a diversity of persons united by human genus, spiritual birth, and Christian purpose, one body of witness in the world (cf. Paul in 1 Cor. 12:4-12)" (ibid.).[71]

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[71] It is to some of these ecclesiological implications derived from a Trinitarian understanding that we will turn in Chapter 6 of this dissertation.

Therefore, in the model and methodology of social trinitarianism, *perichoresis* has the advantage of best preserving, according to Millard Erickson, "the description of the relationships among the three persons found in Scripture." What is more, he adds, "While the earthly incarnate life of Jesus introduces some dimensions into the relationship that were not previously present, it gives us the most complete revelation both into the nature of those relationships during the time of that earthly existence and also in the eternal interaction of the three" (1995, p. 230). Therefore, according to Erickson, this model is best able to account for the

> distinctness of consciousness capable of originating thoughts and relationships among the members of the Trinity. The way in which each refers to the other, and interacts with the other, suggests a greater multiplicity of identity than has sometimes been thought of in Trinitarian theology. In particular, the parallel drawn between the oneness of the Father and the Son on the one hand and the believer to believer … on the other hand, suggests something of this relationship. Not that (this latter relationship) by any means (is) of the same degree as the relationship of the Father and Son one to another, but there must at least be some univocal element present, for such an analogy even to be suggested. (Ibid., pp. 227-28)[72]

Having considered the social understanding of the Trinity as the more fruitful explication of the doctrine, and the one that has the greatest prospect for undergirding a theology of the individual-in-community, the following extrapolations from the discussion above is offered derived from the methodology and resultant emphases of this way of thinking. First, when we speak of each person of the Trinity, each is constituted by a generic aspect of deity (*ousia*) whose attributes differentiate God from His creation.

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[72] Miroslav Volf's caution here is that "since optically human beings are manifestly not divine and since noetically human notions of the Triune God do not correspond exactly to who the Triune God is, Trinitarian concepts such as 'person', 'relation', or '*perichoresis*' can be applied to human community only in an analogous rather than a univocal sense. As creatures, human beings can correspond to the uncreated God only in a creaturely way; any other correspondence than creaturely ones would be wholly inappropriate" (2006, pp. 106-07).

Second, but what is primarily based on God's self-revelation is that each person within the Trinity is characterized by full self-consciousness which implies the reality of distinct persons (*hypostaseis*), which in turn presupposes distinct properties and makes possible and plausible actual internal relations. Third, each member of the Trinity exists in unique relatedness one with another, differentiating each member of the Godhead from the others; and fourth, *perichoresis*, the mutual indwelling of each in the other without confusion of self-consciousness but at the same time being interdependent and moving together in complete unity.[73] In the light of these summary statements, it seems reasonable to concur with J. Scott Horrell that such a social understanding of the Trinity necessitates "both ontological characteristics—i.e. those intrinsic to the divine nature and to individual self-consciousness—together with relationality and reciprocal real presence of each in the other." Therefore, rather than embracing "the either/or of … individuality … or the … perspective that 'person' is a mere knot of relationships with no substance or nature in itself, it seems that both ontological and relational perspectives must be held together when we think of the tripersonal God" (2004, p. 403).[74]

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[73] I am indebted to J. Scott Horrell for the bases of these four summary statements, which I have modified so as to capture those aspects that need to be emphasized from the discussion preceding. See his article, "Toward a Biblical Model of the Social Trinity: Avoiding Equivocation of Nature and Order" (2004, p. 403).

[74] Miroslav Volf, along these lines, says what Horrell is affirming when he writes that "one must conceive (of) the trinitarian persons as *subjects*. God's external works are not to be attributed to the one undifferentiated divine essence, but rather proceed from the divine persons. Accordingly, personhood cannot be conceived as pure relation, any more than relation can be conceived merely as a manifestation of personhood. Rather, person and relation emerge simultaneously and mutually presuppose one another." See his, *After Our Likeness: The Church as the Image of the Trinity* (1998, p. 205. Elsewhere Volf says in relation to the Trinity, "Community is not simply a collection of independent and self-standing persons; inversely, persons are not merely so many discrete individual parts and functions of the community. Persons and community are equiprimal in the Trinity" (2006, p. 110).

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4.3 A Fuller Understanding of the Image of God in Persons
Better Undergirds an Evangelical Theology
of the Individual-in-Community

If we grant that social trinitarianism is a way of conceiving of the Trinity that has great promise with its emphasis on Persons-in-relationship as having ontic significance, then what implications of this foundational doctrine must be explored as we seek to develop an evangelical theology of the individual-in-community. As we have looked at the biblical data that speaks of the divine life as one of loving relationship, it has been difficult not to see that scripturally we as believers are invited to participate in the divine life by loving one another and thereby participating in the social Trinity.

As we move out from the social Trinity with its strong communitarian overtones, a logical next step is to explore how this fundamental doctrine impinges on how we understand humanity as those created in God's image. What we would expect is that there are certain parallels between how we conceive of God and how we conceive of ourselves if we take the *imago Dei* in persons seriously. While we grant that there is a vast difference between us and God, between Creator and created, and that God's life is not our life in such a way that blurs this ontological distinction, we are still compelled to explore how being created intentionally by God to be *imago Dei* means people are created in God's "likeness" (Gen. 1:26).[75] To what extent do we find that the doctrine of the image of God in persons serves as a helpful transition from the ineffability of the Triune God to understanding ourselves better and the purpose for which we were made? As we

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[75] Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen makes this point in the following way: "Of course there is correspondence between the human and divine communities, if for no other reason than because humanity exists as *imago Dei*. Yet this correspondence, even at its best, is partial and fragmentary" (2007, p. 287).

shall see, this exploration will yield rich dividends for a development of a theology of the individual-in-community.

Going back to the earliest traditions of Israel, we discover how particularly concerned they were to show humankind's various communal relationships. The primacy of the vertical or God-centered communal relationship is reflected in Adam's special relationship with the Creator in that he was brought into existence by the very breath of God (Gen. 2:7) having been created in God's image (Gen. 1:26,27); he was given the possibility of living forever by partaking of the tree of life (a symbol of God himself) (Gen. 3:9,16,17, 22); and he had the privilege of a relationship with God characterised by a shared authority over creation and communion with God (Gen. 1:28-30; 3:8).

However, it is the phrase in Genesis 1:26 where God said, "Let us make humankind in our image, in our likeness" (cf. 3:22; 11:7) that requires our detailed attention because of the perceived communal orientation of what is stated here.[76] Some theologians view the plural pronouns used here as pointing to a plurality of persons in the

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[76]There are some theologians past and present who argue that "image" refers to that which makes us human, i.e. our intellect and will, while "likeness" refers to the moral/ethical nature of man. That no distinction between the two terms "image" and "likeness" should be made, contrary to the thinking of the Early Church Fathers, the Scholastics of the Middle Ages, and others can be argued for the following reasons. First, there is no *waw* conjunctive (and) between the phrases in the Hebrew. Second, both Genesis 1:27 and 9:6 employ only *selem* ("image"), apparently regarding the one word as sufficient to explain the entire idea. Third, Genesis 5:1 uses only *demut* ("likeness") with the same preposition which was affixed to *selem* in Genesis 1:26. This suggests again that the one word is considered sufficient to express the entire idea. Fourth, Clines makes the point that if there is not much difference in the prepositions and words that appear in Genesis 1:26, then one might consider that they form an hendiadys (Clines 1968, p. 92). The hendiadys joins two words into one concept and usually, but not necessarily, occurs with a conjunction (Waltke & O'Connor 1990, p. 70). Fifth, in Genesis 5:3 both terms are used, but the verse reverses both the order of the terms and the usage of the prepositions found in Genesis 1:26 indicating that these terms are interchangeable. Based on these exegetical factors, today the terms are generally viewed as simply stating emphatically and intensively the fact that humankind reflects the "very image" or "perfect likeness" of God. However, while there is consensus among scholars that no distinction should be made between these two terms, there is no such consensus as to what the *imago Dei* actually means. This will become apparent in the discussion that follows.

Godhead (Demarest & Lewis 1987, p. 258) and thereby functioning as a "proto-trinitarian declaration" (Grenz 1994, p. 227). A justification given for understanding this to be an allusion to the Trinity is as follows:

> The fact that plural pronouns were not used elsewhere in reference to God may suggest that God is calling the reader's attention to something unusual. Moreover, given the fact that the rest of Scripture depicts three persons working together in the *opera ad extra* (Ps. 33:6; John 1:3; 5:17, 19; Col. 1:16), this phenomenon of plural pronouns points to a plurality of persons in the Godhead. "It would seem most acceptable to hold to the interpretation advanced by the ancient church Fathers and universally accepted by scholars of the past, that this is a reference to the Triune God. … What is clearly indicated here is that God, in His unity, has a certain plurality." (Demarest & Lewis 1987, p. 258; cf. Reymond 1998, p. 425)

The implication of this understanding is that if humankind reflects the image of their Creator, then it can be theologically concluded that an essential aspect of the *imago Dei* is the mirroring of the rich communal life that exists between the Father, Son, and Spirit. What this means more specifically is stated by John P. Schantz: "Man's relatedness to his peers, his quest for human community, his bestowal of love upon others reflect the triune dynamic of God's inner life" (1977, p. 3). Schantz goes on to add,

> All human community, then, is a sign or "sacrament" of the Triune community in the Godhead. God has put something of himself in man; and part of this likeness is certainly man's inclination to community, a propensity pointing towards ultimate communion with the divine Community Itself. (Ibid.)

However, while the rich communal orientation of the statement, "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness" is not in doubt, more careful exegesis is required as not only is the referent of the plural pronouns of Genesis 1:26 in question among exegetes but because a better understanding of the "image" concept reveals a broadened and more profound "community" understanding.

Turning our attention first to the cohortative in Genesis 1:26, "Let us make," it is noted that while this cohortative is in the plural, every other verb prior to this in the

Genesis account that takes God (*Elohim*) as its subject is third person singular. Why then the use of the plural? A variety of suggestions have been made.

Jewish commentators along with von Rad and others[77] are of the persuasion that God is here addressing his angels in his heavenly court who are looking on in order to further highlight the pinnacle of his creation, as if to say, "Now watch this!" Therefore, it is more a statement of including them as active observers rather than them being co-participants in the creative work about to take place. However, as this statement is more clearly a statement of active participation, and angels nowhere else participated in the creative process, this explanation seems unsatisfactory and without biblical corroboration.[78]

A long held proposal by those following S.R. Driver is that the plural usage here is the plural of majesty. This proposal was bolstered by the observation that in the Hebrew the word for God is plural in form (eg. *Elohim*) but singular in meaning and the words for "lord" (*eg. Adonai*) or "master" are often plural even when referring to a single person "for the purpose of conveying the ideas of dignity and greatness" (Driver 1904, p. 14). But Wenham observes that the plural of majesty is not used with verbs in Hebrew

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[77]See for example Bruce Waltke's development of this view in his, *Genesis: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), pp. 64-5.

[78]J. Richard Middleton in his book, *The Liberating Image: The Imago Dei in Genesis 1*, goes to great lengths to show that God was in fact consulting with angels to create humanity when God said, "let us make," and goes on to suggest that Genesis 1 "may include the notion that humans are created in the likeness of angels." He bases his decison on an intertextual reading (eg. Isa. 6 and Psalm 8 in particular with their use of the plural noun *elohim*) of the plurals in Genesis 1:26 which "suggests the presence of an (adumbrated) royal metaphor in the background of the text, in which God is pictured as ruling the cosmos from his heavenly throne room, attended by angelic courtiers and emissaries" (2005, p. 59). While his work does establish a strong connection between ruling and the "*imago Dei*," he is unconvincing in his attempt to show that this connection means that the "let us make" of Genesis 1:26 includes angels in the phrase "our image." In what sense is the human being created in the image of angels? F. Delitzsch argues against this view by pointing out that God does not concede to the angels a part in the creation any more than he does their participation in sending forth a divine messenger in Isaiah 6:8 (1978, p. 99).

(1987, p. 28). What is more, this view seems flawed in that "the point of the verse is the unique correspondence between God and man, not the majesty of God" (Mathews 1996:161). Accordingly, few commentators today hold to the plural of majesty interpretation (Baker 2008, p. 19).

Calvin and the early Fathers took this use of the plural as a clear indication that there was a plurality in the Godhead and that here the Father is addressing the Son (as we see Christ's involvement in creation in John 1). In other words, they too saw this as a proto-trinitarian declaration. While this may well be the *sensus plenior* of the text based on John 1:3; 5:17, 19; and Col. 1:16, there are those scholars who think "that this was not what the plural meant to the original author" (Wenham 1987, p. 27).[79]

A modified version of the more traditonal view of the early Fathers and Calvin is that of Clines and Hasel. This particular view argues that while the plural shows the plurality of the Godhead, rather than God the Father addressing the Son, he is addressing God the Spirit who is already present within the creation account (1:2). While there is some debate in Genesis 1:2 as to whether *ruah* is best translated "Spirit" or "wind," the latter being argued for in the light of Ezekiel 37:9 ff. or the use of *elohim* elsewhere as a superlative (von Rad 1961, p. 49), the immediate context favours "Spirit." What argues strongly for this view is the very obscure verb used to describe the Spirit's activity in

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[79]Grenz states that reading into this text a "proto-trinitarian declaration" as Tertullian and many other exegetes since have done is erroneous. See Stanley Grenz's *Theology for the Community of God* (1994, p. 227). Karl Barth, on the other hand, is more conciliatory as he saw in this plural at least an intimation of the Trinity: "The saga undoubtedly speaks of a genuine plurality in the divine being, but it does not actually say that it is a Trinity" See Barth's *Church Dogmatics*, vol. 3, pt. 1 (1958, p. 192). Barth saw divine plurality as alone sufficient to the demands of the text, contrary to "modern exegesis in its arrogant rejection of the exegesis of the Early Church." While Barth does not stand fully with the initial attempts of the early Churchmen in their efforts to distill the doctrine of the Trinity from the plural, he clearly thinks that "what is here said about the Creator can finally and properly be understood only against the background of the Christian doctrine of the Trinity" (1958, p. 192).

Genesis 1:2 where it says, "Now the earth was formless and empty. … And the Spirit of God *was hovering* over the waters" (italics mine). This verb only occurs in one other place in the Old Testament, in Deuteronomy 32:11, where Yahweh's care for Israel is compared to an eagle "hovering" over its young. This picture of God's intimate care is conceptually visible in Ruth 2:12, "the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take refuge." The use of "hovering" in Deuteronomy as a picture of nurture and care would seem to support the translation of "Spirit" in Genesis 1:2 instead of "wind" Furthermore, the Spirit, set over and against the chaos of the earth, is in construct with "God" (*elohim*) and God begins to speak in Genesis 1:3. In addition, Moses uses the "Spirit of God" on numerous other occasions (Gen 6:3; 41:38; Exod 31:3). As Pannenberg observes, "The exact meaning of *ruah elohim,* translated 'Spirit of God,' has been the subject of much debate among exegetes, but only in regard to this one instance. Elsewhere, as the wording suggests, it is always rendered 'Spirit of God.' Why not here?" (1994, p. 77).

Hence, while the God of revelation was perceived of in montheistic terms in the Old Testament, there is ample evidence here that God was conceived of from the very beginning as a composite or multipersonal rather than a solitary unity.[80] Since there are already two persons of the Godhead acknowledged in the creation account, our understanding of "Let us make" as God the Father addressing God the Spirit is significant in that at the very least the narrator "envisaged God as associating others with himself in

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[80]Kenneth A. Mathews endorses this viewpoint when he says, "By its reference to 'the Spirit of God' preparing the 'earth' for the creative word (1:2), the narrative permits a coparticipant with God in creation." He finds support for this view in Proverbs 8:30 which speaks of the "personified 'Wisdom' as God's coparticipant in creation," and in statements by the later poets and prophets who "attribute the source of life to the "Spirit" (e.g., Job 33:4; Ps 104:30; Ezek 37)" (1995, p. 163).

some mysterious way as partners in the act of creation, and that he regarded Man as constituted in some sense after the pattern of a plurality of supernatural beings" (Bailey 1959, p. 267). So while taking seriously the caution of Donald Bloesch and others not to inappropriately "perceive God as a trinity of persons in Old Testament history" (1995, p. 168) as there would not have been the same full understanding of the Trinity that Christians have standing this side of the incarnation and Pentecost, we at least see in Genesis 1:26 a shadowy understanding of what has been revealed to us by the wider biblical witness which attributes all creation to the Father (Ps 102:25), to the Son (Col 1:16; Heb 1:10) and to the Spirit (Ps 104:30).[81] We can appropriately conclude then that the plural of self-reference "finds its outworking in the creation of humankind as a plural reality" (Grenz 1994, p. 227), and the orientation of this being a community-text is established.

We now turn to the important concept of the "image of God" because as we shall see, this concept is a pregnant one in terms of the early biblical revelation's development of a theology of the individual-in-community. As stated earlier, there has not been a great deal of consensus historically when it comes to the meaning of this phrase, but what is gradually emerging among evangelical theologians with regard to its meaning reveals a certain amount of consensus that is significant for a theology of the individual-in-community.

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[81] That a limited understanding by the original hearers should not detract from a fuller understanding that we can read back into what is said, see the argument made by Doug Baker in *Covenant and Community: Our Role as the Image of God* (2008, pp. 22-23). He is quite willing to assert that the "let us make" is a "(r)eference to the active participation of all three persons of the Trinity in creation" and "seems to be the only understanding that makes sense of the plural verb "let us," the plural "our" prefixed to a singular "image," the use of the cohortative voice, and the testimony of the whole of Scripture."

Perhaps the most adhered to understanding of the image of God during the history of Christian theology is the "structural" view (Grenz 1994, p. 219) or the "substantive" view (Erickson 1994, p. 498; cf. Middleton 2005, pp. 18ff.). The history of Christian doctrine reveals that this view originated with the church fathers but was given classic expression by the medieval scholastics. Later it was challenged by the Reformers, particularly Luther and to some extent Calvin, only to regain ascendancy in the theologies of Protestant orthodoxy and has many adherents today among evangelicals.[82]

This classic view understands the image of God primarily as some definite characteristic or quality within the makeup of the human. As to what characteristic or quality exactly corresponds to being created in God's image is not agreed upon by all advocates of this view, but what is agreed upon is that it is located within humans; it is a "quality" or "capacity" resident in their nature (Erickson 1994, p. 501). Because it is "a formal structure of the human person, the divine image is something we 'possess,' and it includes the properties which constitute us as human beings" (Grenz 1994, p. 219). Therefore, it is not lost in spite of our sinful, fallen state as it is a present reality for all humans at all times (ibid.).

Although various candidates have been suggested for the content of the image, David Cairns says that as a bare minimum, "in all the Christian writers up to Aquinas we find the image of God conceived as man's power of reason" (1953, p. 110). This idea "of the rational, substantial soul mirroring its divine archetype" (Middleton 2005, p. 19),

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[82] For a helpful summary of various historical understandings of God's image, see Doug Baker's book, *Covenant and Community* (pp. 2-14).

which reflects the persistent influence of Greek philosophy on Christian thought (ibid.; cf. Grenz 1994, p. 219), was, as Middleton points out,

> nuanced or supplemented in the Latin West by notions such as conscience, spirituality, immortality, freedom, and personhood and by Augustine's famous proposal of various intrapsychic trinitarian structures (particularly memory, intellect, and will) which correspond to the triune nature of God (ibid.). … This Augustinian triad is the basis for the later popular tradition of defining the image as intellect, emotion, and will. (Op. cit.)

To what can we attribute much of the speculation over the centuries surrounding this important concept of the *imago Dei* in humankind? Some attribute it to the "ambiguity of the biblical concept of the *imago Dei*" (Anderson & Reichenbach 1990, p. 198). Not only is the concept rarely used—in three passages in Genesis and in four in the New Testament[83]—but its meaning is never fully explicated in these texts. As Adrio König says, "(T)here is seemingly no direct and well-defined content given to the image of God in Genesis 1:26 f." (1982, p. 102). However, while this seems to clearly be the case, what is stated in these and other related texts must be carefully analyzed and be allowed to inform what this concept can and cannot mean.

We will look first at Genesis 9:6 at the indictment against murder. Here one person's blood should not be spilled by another because "God made man in his own image." Clearly the grounding of the image is in man's body (von Rad 1961, p. 391). Developing this further, most exegetes agree that Psalm 8:5 reveals that the "image" here includes outward splendor when it says, "You made him (humankind) a little lower than

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[83]This does not count references to our being in Christ's image (Rom 8:29; 1 Cor 15:49; 2 Cor 3:18) nor to Christ as being in God's image (2 Cor 4:4; Col 1:15). There is disagreement over whether the image of God as found in Jesus Christ is the same as found in created humans, but the possibility of these two concepts being connected will be explored later.

God, and crowned him with glory and honor."[84] What is noteworthy here, as William A. Dyrness points out, is that "*cabod*, 'glory,' the distinctive possession of God is here attributed to man. It is to be recalled that the fundamental meaning of this word is physical 'weight' and 'wealth' which by themselves command respect and honor" (1972, p. 162). What we see here is "the force of dignity of a being which shines out and therefore assumes visible form" (ibid.).

Another noteworthy example of this train of thought is found in Ezekiel 28:12 where the prophet in a lamentation over the King of Tyre refers to the perfection of the state of creation in general and man's place therein in particular: "You were the model of perfection, full of wisdom and perfect in beauty." Dyrness observes that this leads us to the conclusion that "an outward perfection is an intricate part of the original state" and that "(a)t the very least one should observe with von Rad that the issue of the image calls into question the spiritual/material split; it is the whole of man that partakes in the likeness of God" (1972, p. 163).[85] Clines states it well: "Man is the flesh-and-blood image of the invisible God. This is not to say that it is the body as opposed to something else, e.g. the spirit that is the image of God. For the body is not 'opposed' to the spirit; indeed as far as the image is concerned at least, what the body is the spirit is. It is the *homo*, not the *animus* or the *anima*, that is the *imago Dei*" (1968, p. 92).

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[84]See for example Charles A. & Emilie G. Briggs, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Psalms* (1906, p. 1:66) and Gerard von Rad, "The Divine Likeness in the OT" (2006 2:391).

[85]See also G. van der Leeuw: "Here we are concerned with man, not with his consciousness or immortality" (1963, p. 310). G. C. Berkouwer sees this kind of anthropomorphism as a means of knowing (not falsifying) God (1962, p. 8).

Another noteworthy text is Genesis 5:1-3 which seems to indicate that the image given to Seth was given in the same way that it had been received by Adam when it says,

> When God created man, he made him in the likeness of God. He created them, male and female,, and blessed them. And when they were created, he called them "man (*adam*)." When Adam had lived 130 years, he had a son in his own likeness, in his own image; and he named him Seth.

Implicit here, as von Rad notes, is that the image however conceived is to be attributed to every generation and not to the original pair only (op. cit.). Along with Genesis 9:6 and Psalm 8:5, the case for this conclusion seems justified.

In light of the foregoing considerations, it is easy to see why it is concluded that there is a substantive aspect to the image of God found in humankind. People's intrinsic worth, it is argued, resides in themselves by virtue of the way in which they were made and refers to something they are in totality without any separation of spirit over against body. Dyrness argues, "It is man as man, as a unity that has been created in the image of God and is somehow like God" (1972, p. 168). What is more, we see little evidence in the texts above that the image can be associated with peoples moral and spiritual faculties alone. This would be to introduce a variable to one's image status, whereas people are said to be in God's image regardless of any human activity either before the fall or after the fall (cf. Gen 9:6; Jas 3:9-10) (Erickson 1983, p. 513). Continuing with this train of thought, Dyrness asserts, "Primo man has been created as an individual that stands over against God; he is dependent and yet a real center of being and of power. He is a center of

value in a real world. He is important in the value structure of that world" (1972, p.

169).[86]

However, having said that the image of God as biblically understood implies the

essential unity of people as centres of value which supports to some extent a substantive

view of the image of God in people, we must take cognisance of the reaction by various

theologians to this view which historically has been somewhat speculative and static.

Again it must be re-emphasised that the biblical text does not enable the theologian to

locate the image of God in any particular faculty of man, and it is this understanding that

has provoked theologians to look more carefully at what the narrator of Genesis does say.

Going back to the creation accounts, it has been recognised that there are further insights

to be gleaned regarding the image of God in humankind that cannot be overlooked. As we

look at these, we discover not only greater clarity but also some important insights as we

develop a theology of the individual-in-community.

Going back to Genesis 1:26, what follows in verses 27 and 28 has been recognised

as foundational to a fuller understanding of the *imago Dei*. The text here reads as follows:

> Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule
> over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the
> earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground." So God created man
> in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created
> them. God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill

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[86] William C. Williams in his article, "The Image of God: Male and Female," offers these
comments which concur with what is stated here: "Basically, the image of God is the essence and substance
of theological humanness. By this term is intended that quality which theologically separates human beings
from lower animals and which provides some sort of analogous relationship with God, making it possible
for humans to communicate and fellowship with him. Further, since Adam transmits it to his progeny (Gen.
5:1–3), it is likewise clear that the image of God (*imago Dei*) was not lost in the fall. After the flood the
image of God became a universal standard for punishing antisocial actions (Gen. 9:6; cf. James 3:9)" (1984,
pp. 196-201).

the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground."

While many observations can be made based on this text, an important one that is significant for our purposes here has to do with that which makes this a "community-text," as noted by many thinkers since Karl Barth (Grenz 1994, p. 226; cf. Santmire 1991, p. 374). Their observation based upon this text is that the image of God is a social rather than an individual concept. The clue giving rise to this observation is seen where the narrator "explicitly links the plurality of humankind, which includes the plurality of sexes," (ibid., p. 227) to the plurality found in the divine self-reference, which has already been discussed above, leading to the conclusion that a significant outworking of God as a plural reality is found in the creation of humankind as a concomitant reality (ibid.).[87] The application of the *imago Dei* to human sexuality becomes even clearer when Genesis 1:27 is analyzed:

So God created man in his own image.
In the image of God he created   him.
Male and female   he created   them.

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[87]Grenz elaborates further by saying, "As a plural creation, however, humans are embodied, sexually differentiated creatures. This dimension of the creation narrative has led certain scholars to conclude that corporality is included in the concept of the image of God." Grenz recognises that this idea is not new because even John Calvin in his *Institutes* attempted to include the body in the divine image though through its connection with the soul. What is new among some theologians is the idea "that procreation may possibly be a functional dimension of the image and consequently in some sense serve as an analogy to God's creative action" (1994, p. 227). Hence, we see here among some theologians like Grenz and others that any conception of the *imago Dei* must at least include both a substantive aspect as well as a resultant functional aspect. This is further born out in Genesis 1:26-28 where God created man in his image and then issues a command to have dominion. This juxtaposition of these two concepts is considered by some to be more than coincidental but rather points us to the content of the image of God or at least to the idea that the scriptural context where the image of God is referred to points more to teleology than ontology. The functional view of the image of God in humankind has a long history. See Millard Erickson's (1994, pp. 508-09), Grenz's, *Theology for the Community of God* (1994, p. 226), and J. Richard Middleton's, *The Liberating Image: The Imago Dei in Genesis 1* (2005, pp. 25-29) for their elaborations on the functional view of the *imago Dei* and its background.

The poetic parallelism found in lines 2 and 3 strongly suggests that the term "him" (line 2) bears a close relationship to the word "them" (line 3). It also suggests a strong though unspecified tie between the term "image of God" (line 2) and the words "male and female" (line 3).

Based on this kind of observation derived from Genesis 1:26-28 and also Genesis 5:1-2 where humankind made in the image of God is linked with the words, "male and female he created them," there have been certain theologians following the lead of Karl Barth in particular who have understood the *imago Dei* exclusively in relational terms rather than in functional or substantive terms. Barth rejected any attempt to link some quality in humankind to being created in God's image. Rather, the image of God is found in man's being created male and female which indicates that man does not exist as a solitary individual but as two persons in relationship (1958, p. 184).

Developing further the interpretations of Wihelm Vischer and Dietrich Bonhoffer of the Genesis text while also employing the relational or I-Thou anthropology of Emil Brunner and Martin Buber, Barth put forward the idea that "the image of God refers to the God-given capacity of human beings in their co-humanity (as male and female) to be addressed by and to respond to God's word" (Middleton 2005, p. 22). Barth specifically "postulated two sets of relationships, ontologically constitutive for humanness, both of which image the intra-divine I-Thou relationship of the triune God" (ibid.). His own summary of his position is as follows: "The relationship between the summoning I in God's being and the summoned divine Thou is reflected both in the relationship of God to the man whom He has created, and also in the relationship between the I and the Thou between male and female, in human existence itself" (ibid. 22-23; cf. Barth 1958, p. 196).

In view of Barth's influence on various contemporary theologians including evangelical ones like Grenz[88] who have similarly interpreted the *imago Dei* in primarily relational terms, what can be said of this position by way of critique and in terms of its positive contribution to a theology of the individual-in-community? To begin with, it must be noted that Barth's position on the *imago Dei,* and that of those whom he interacted with like Buber and Brunner who were instrumental in developing this view, has been met with some criticism. A primary criticism has been that an unnecessary reductionism prevails in this viewpoint. While it is generally acknowledged that humankind was created for relationship with God and between the sexes, the question that remains is, does this define the image in total? Even if we say that relationship is intrinsic to the image particularly if we appropriate the concept of being-in-relationship as ontological and that "substance" cannot exhaust what it means to be created in God's image, what is it about humankind that makes possible or appropriate a relationship with God? Dyrness argues, "If … God's addressing of man is not incidental but essential to man as *humanitas*, then it follows that the image of God must be defined otherwise than by address. The fact is that if man were not like God in some way, he could not know him or be addressed by him" (1972, p. 167).

On the other hand, what we will come to see is the positive direction Barth and others initiated who have sought to draw attention to the relational aspect of the *imago Dei* which has helped bring about a necessary corrective to the overemphasis of the substantive categories used to define the *imago Dei*. What has come into far greater focus

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[88]See Stanley J. Grenz, *The Social God and the Relational Self: A Trinitarian Theology of the Imago Dei* (2001).

as evangelical theology has progressed in this locus of theology is that indeed a consequence of being created in God's image is that humankind is made for community and finds its highest expression therein as God Himself is communal and chose to act in creation communally. Our communion with both God and our fellow human beings is possible and essential because we are made in the image of God who enjoys communion in himself. Stressing the substantive or ontological to the exclusion of relationship has not taken into account seriously enough this understanding and what scripture itself holds together. As Stephen Seamands laments, in the West the conception of people which has even carried over into our theologizing has largely been that of "of persons as separate selves with individual centers of consciousness … where persons are viewed as free subjects who act on their own volition to establish relationships with others" (2005, p. 33). He goes on to say, "Relationships, however, are not considered essential to personhood. They may be necessary for growth and maturity, but persons, as typically conceived, can exist *apart from* relationships" (ibid.). By overemphasizing the substantive view of people and not taking into account the biblical balance of people created for community, and that relationship is essential to us being made in God's image, it is no wonder that "we generally define human dignity in terms of self-sufficiency and self-determination. Identity is conceived," as Seamands goes on to say, "in self-referential terms, so that the authentic self is the inner self. Persons are autonomous and distinct from one another, determining their own goals and desires" (ibid.). How contrary this is to the biblical view of people being created by a Triune God who has invited us to being in relationship with Himself, even participating in some way in his divinity. If the conception of the Trinity must include "an intimate dialogue between persons, and is of

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the very essence the negation of solitude" (Letham 2004, p. 459), then surely this way of conceiving of God must instruct how we see ourselves as having been made in His image.

Having attempted to maintain the balance between the ontological and relational aspects of being made in God's image, is there another perspective which can enable us to continue probing the depth of this concept of the *imago Dei*? In a recent work, already cited above, by Doug Baker entitled, *Covenant and Community: Our Role as Image of God* (2008), we find in his book just such a stimulus for further reflection on this pivotal concept that shows promise for the development of a theology of the individual-in-community. While a comprehensive summary of his work is not possible, certain salient points he puts forward will be summarized that indicate the direction of his argument that are worth considering.

What is clear at the outset as one reads Baker's work is that he is quite comfortable seeing the "let us make" of Genesis 1:26 as being a reference to the Trinity, all of whom were at work in the creation process (ibid., pp. 22-23).[89] Furthermore, Baker's position is that as human beings we do not "*carry*" God's image, rather "we are his image" (ibid., p. 14). By this he means, which agrees to a point with what has already been argued for above in this dissertation, that biblically speaking we are God's image, *en toto,* in that no one particular quality or trait or group of characteristics in us is an addition

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[89]Baker argues for this anachronistic reading by saying we should not "limit the possible meaning of God's words spoken before our creation to only those meanings which we think likely would have been in the mind of some hypothetical editor." Because the rest of scripture asserts that God's Spirit and God's Son were involved in creation, and because of the use of the cohortative voice, he sees no reason not to see here "the active participation of all three persons of the Trinity" and is what makes best sense of the plural verb "let us," and the plural "our" prefixed to a singular "image" (ibid.)

to us, but we are his image which is the very basis for affirming human dignity and worth which is inalienable (ibid.).

However, where Baker wishes to place his emphasis with regard to being made in God's image can be seen in the following quote: "Human dignity comes not from any traits inside of ourselves but from a *role* imposed upon us by our Creator at the time of our creation" (ibid.; italics mine). In other words, to be in God's image is the express purpose for which people were made, a purpose that will always be ours so long as we exist. Early on, Baker asserts that any "exclusively ontological interpretations of God's image" must be rejected as he is of the persuasion that no matter how one conceives of the attributes in humankind that might reflect God's image, God's image ends up being "portrayed by mere fragments of ourselves" (ibid, p. 6). Furthermore, Baker cannot see any one human being as being able to adequately reflect the image of God.

Rather, Baker takes a more teleological and corporate approach. How does he go about doing this? First of all, he gives considerable attention to the matter of how the various terms used to describe the creative action of God (i.e., *bara'* = to create, *yatsar* = to form; *'asah* = to make) with a view to demonstrating that each word has important nuances and were used for a purpose. With regard to *bara'* (to create), apart from the word being used in contexts of God creating *ex nihilo*, the word usage usually clarifies God's deity, "stressing either a *work* that was performed by the deity, that a work was *performed* by the deity, or the *deity* who performed a work." As the incomprehensibility of God's works is in view when *bara'* is used, commentary is invariably sparse and the sentences short and simple (ibid., p. 32). Nowhere in scripture are we given "a hint as to how and from what mold God has ever created anything" (ibid., p. 38). On the other hand, the word *yatsar* (to form) above all else, "expresses the making of a new thing from

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something that has already been in existence," and in this respect is the opposite of *bara'* (ibid., pp. 34-35). Coming to the important word *'asah* (to make), Baker's studied position is that this word whenever it appears is used in a context where the reason or purpose for the thing being made is in view (ibid., p. 35). Further on he says, "The word itself seems to assume and include, and even to require, the idea of a reason, a goal, and a purpose in the work of making" (ibid., p. 37).

Applying the usage of the terms above to the context of God making people in his own image, foundational to Baker's developing argument is how these three words are used in relation to God's creating of *adam*. Considering the word *yatsar* first, Genesis 2:7 says, "God formed (*yatsar*) the man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life." Here the usage conforms to what Baker pointed out earlier in that the text explains from what God made man and how he gave him life (ibid., p. 38)

Next, the word *bara'* reveals that God is the one doing the creating when he makes man in his own image. Here the point made is that we are given "no hint as to how or from what God created." Consistent with how the word is used elsewhere, the phrase "in his own image" cannot be seen to be giving details about the creative process, "for God's creating (whenever it is expressed with the word *bara'*) is always hidden in mystery, and recipes are never given for his hidden work." There is no "blueprint" here as this would "violate the veil of secrecy that Scripture holds over God's work of creation" (ibid.).

But herein lies the problem that Baker wishes to address: Invariably the image of God is given some sort of definite content where God's image is found in the sharing of certain traits such as holiness, reason or some other trait. However, to see the word *bara'* (to create) in this way is to give it the same force as the word *yatsar* (to form).

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Historically various attributes or potentials have been put forward as representing what it means to be made in God's image all implying God patterned human beings after himself. If this were so, Baker asserts that the only word that would have been suitable for such a reading would have been "form" (ibid., p. 39).

When it comes to the word *'asah* (to make), further clarity is gained. As we would expect, "Let us make man" should point us to the purpose for which God intended to make man and the context should make this explicit or implicit which in the context of Genesis 1:26 is done. Therefore, Baker's conclusion is that the "easiest interpretation of the twin phrases "in our image, in our likeness" is "the reason, the goal, the purpose for making *adam*. This is how we see the word 'make' operate; it is normally paired with the purpose for making" (ibid.).

So in the study of the three words above, the only one not paired with the concept of God's image is the word "form." Baker sees great significance in this in that the study of the three words above leads to the image concept expressing more the idea "of moving from one state to another," and "includes the idea of being made from something prior into something else." Then he asks the probing question, "Could it be that God wanted no hint of a method or of a material or of a pattern by and from which his image emerged?" (ibid.). Based upon this way of reading the passage, Baker offers the following translation: "Let us make mankind in the role of being our image, and for the purpose of displaying our likeness" (ibid.). The advantage of such a reading is that the longstanding differences regarding exactly what constitutes the image melts away. "If God's image is our purpose and our role, then it may be a purpose that we are fulfilling or not, and a role that we are living in or not, without hinting at a change in the fact that it is still our purpose and our intended role." Baker's concluding paragraph after exegeting these three

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words in the context of God making man in his image is as follows and summarises the thrust of his argument:

> Thus the word *'asah* rules out all of the standard theories, for they all posit the image as expressing within individuals a portion of what it means to be God. But if the phrase "in our image" is really revealing not the pattern but the purpose for which humanity is to be created, then we must realize that God will see his purposes through to completion. His purpose will stand. We can reasonably require that any exposition of this passage point toward the whole image of God—involving God's whole being and his whole life—and require that image to encompass all of what it means to be human. Anything less would fall short of the implications inherent in the word "make." (Ibid., p. 40)

Another important concept that Baker wishes to explore is the one of *adam*. The translations given to this word are typically, "man," "human beings," or "humankind." The full meaning of this word is what needs to be given greater attention so as to be less vague, and leads to a more corporate understanding than is typically advanced (ibid., p. 41).

As we are generally aware, *adam* can function in the Hebrew as either a proper name, "Adam," or it can function in a generic sense such as "humankind." As discussed already in this chapter, Baker too wishes to establish that *adam* in the context of Genesis 1:26 incorporates a more plural view as *adam* is both male and female, a plurality reiterated also in Genesis 5:2 (ibid., p. 42). Further study of the Hebrew term reveals that the word *adam* can carry at least three different meanings: Adam as a proper name, as a particular individual as in "person" or "the person," or humanity as a whole "as distinct from God and the rest of creation" (ibid., p. 43; cf. Wenham 1987, p. 32).

However, where Baker develops this concept even further is revealed in the following statement: "While nearly all modern translations and expositors see the concept of all humanity in the reference to *adam*, it is not often noted that this humanity is being considered as a single living body, a single group, rather than a plural collection of

individuals" (ibid., p. 44). What buttresses this understanding for Baker are a number of factors. One is that in the creation account, all living creatures were "called forth in the plural, as groups of individuals: plants yielding seed, fruit trees, swarms of living creatures," etc. The difference with *adam* is that from the very beginning *adam* was viewed as a "singular body" and not the plural *adamah* which would be the "difference between 'humankind' and 'humans'" (ibid., pp. 43-44). Another is that if God intended to make a single man or an individual in his image, the term *ish* could quite easily have been used as it is in Genesis 2:22-24 where the terms *ish* (man) and *ishshah* (woman) are used of a man and a woman in the singular. A third factor is that grammatically, "man" in Genesis 1:26 is singular but is paired with the plural verb, "let them rule." Hence the word *adam* cannot refer to an individual but must be "considered as a whole and is hence one unit. If it were a group considered as individuals, it would be plural, if it were simply an individual, it could not be paired with the plural 'let them rule.'" For Baker this strange grammar particularly pronounced in the Hebrew but softened by English translations of Genesis 1:26-27 is designed not just to indicate *adam* as a plural reality as stated earlier in this dissertation but as a much more close knit "single body." Therefore, *adam* in Genesis 1 as one considers its full range of meaning must refer "simultaneously to individuals and to all of humanity considered as a single body. We see that *adam* is one, *adam* is two; *adam* is many" (ibid., p. 48). Just as there is complexity in balancing the two aspects of God's plurality and his oneness (and without drawing too tight a parallel between the Trinity and *adam*), so too must we maintain the tension between God seeing us as both "a collective body … and as individuals" (ibid.).

A particular advantage, for Baker, of seeing *adam* in this way is that it coheres well with what other scriptures teach. This can be seen in the biblical concept of humanity

coming through the body of Adam, "the headwaters from which we flow as a single river physically, and our head spiritually from which we inherit our contrary and sinful nature." (cf. Gen. 3:20; Luke 3:38; 1 Cor. 15:22; and Rom. 5:15) (ibid., p. 44). The idea that God created all of us when he created Adam is certainly no foreign concept to scripture. Also, just as the church is the body of Christ, so too are we "the body of Adam, the filling out of humankind. … God called forth humanity in the singular, and then expounds that this single body is comprised of distinct units, 'male and female,' and 'them'" (ibid.).

Having explored the concept of God making humankind in his own image, Baker proposes that certain implications begin taking shape. First, "we realize that the full picture of what God means by his image will not become apparent if we look only at some particular part or individual" (ibid., p. 45). Using the analogy of a jigsaw puzzle, Baker makes the point that no one piece can give us the complete picture. In the same way, "God's image which he is forming will not be visible if we look solely at individuals." Even if we make an attempt to look at what each piece has in common, so too will we only end up with an "elementary" and even an "inadequate, and reductionist" view. "The full meaning of God's image is not visible from within the puzzle, from within the framework of history, but must be seen from the vantage point of the puzzle maker" (ibid.).

A second implication for Baker is that "God's image must be understood eschatologically, as the assignment imposed at our creation and goal towards which human history is moving (not by its own volition, but by God's overarching providence)" (ibid.). Not until all of humankind has entered the stage of history will God's image be complete. "God is still in the process of forming his image, and the grand flow of history

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is inevitably (because he is sovereignly in control of it) moving towards the fullness of that image" (ibid.).

In light of what Baker has argued for above, how then does he account for the fact that both the Old Testament and the New Testament indicate that all people are in God's image and likeness. Genesis 9:6 prohibits murder on the basis that all humans are created in God's image, and James 3:9 stands as a rebuke to those readers who "curse those (*anthropous*—a very generic term) who are made in the likeness of God." Previously in this dissertation we argued that these references seemed to confer some sort of ontic status to all human beings no matter who they are and is still true even after the Fall. Baker is aware of this potential contradiction to what he is arguing for and cautions that "the eschatological implications of God's image nor the universality of that image" must not be seen to be limiting God's image to only certain persons. All human beings are included (ibid. p. 46).

The way Baker negotiates this apparent inconsistency is by using initially the language of "covenant." Just as it is possible to be a covenant member, being a covenant keeper cannot be assumed. The two are "entirely different matters." However, "we cannot do the latter without the first being accomplished" (ibid., p. 47). In the same way, "many who are created to display God's likeness will never fulfil that role, just as many who are circumcised into Abraham, are not true Israel … and many who say "I do" do not fulfil the role of husband or wife" (ibid., p. 46). Therefore, what seems apparent in Baker's argument is that every human being is made in the image and likeness of God which is a necessary starting point, but not every human being ultimately will live out this role which all those who are in the community of believers across time will fulfil. Elsewhere, Baker again makes it clear that the sense of being made in God's image as Genesis 9:6

asserts (a "continuity of God's image") must be held together with the fact that "humanity does not display God's image." As he says, both "senses must be kept clear and distinct and both must be affirmed without allowing one to encroach on or displace the other. Yet they are linked. An undue dissimilarity must not be thrust between them" (ibid., pp. 74-75). Therefore, being created in God's image "encompasses our entire person, our entire race, all aspects of our lives, all of our history, and even all of our future" (ibid., p. 75).

In order to help us understand how the two senses of being created in God's image and not living out or displaying God's image can be affirmed without displacing each other, the following analogy is offered by Baker. Just as a king sends out an ambassador to another dominion with the expectation that the ambassador will represent him well, so too do we as people created in God's image represent God with the expectation that we will represent him well. However, being in the role does not necessarily mean the ambassador will live out his role in a responsible, king honouring way. He can live in the role without necessarily fulfilling the role. Another consideration is that any mistreatment of the ambassador will be considered an affront to the king and his dominion. In the same way, we are God's ambassadors, regardless of our actions, but we will be held accountable for how we represent him. But any mistreatment of us is still an affront to the king because we are his. Therefore, for Baker, we can be in the role of God's image, but not fulfilling this role. The essence of sin is not fulfilling our role as people made in God's image.

> But if our role as image bearers is to be viewed eschatologically, God who is rich in mercy and who is committed to us being in his image has begun the process and will bring to completion what he set out to do at creation. "We will finally be as we were created to be: the image, or mirror, of all of the glory of God." (Ibid., p. 76)

A further advantage Baker's sees regarding the image of God being individual, corporate as well as eschatological is that God who is far too great to be fully imaged in any one person, "even in our resurrected and perfected bodies," is more fully seen when we as the body of Christ are being transformed into God's image. "Our role is to show forth in ourselves as individuals and even more so in ourselves as a group a true picture of God's essential character. That is the glory of our creation and that is the eschatological end toward which God continues to draw his people" (ibid., p. 77).

What is more, this fuller understanding of the image of God provides a closer link between it and the Trinity. As Baker says, "If we were made to be God's image, then we should live as … they live. Our life as a people, and our lives as individuals, should be lived in imitation of the straining towards each other and intense self-sacrifice that make the three one" (ibid., p. 125). More specifically, the "parallels between the singularity and the plurality within the Trinity and the singularity and the plurality within *adam"* can be stated in ways that tie together much of what has been discussed in this chapter. While we will never fully emulate the Trinity in these various parallels due to our being human and fallen, Baker suggests the following as a brief summary of these points of contact:

1. Both the Godhead and humanity are characterized by a real, intrinsic and inescapable unity.
2. Both the Godhead and humanity are also characterized by a real and intrinsic individuality of persons.
3. The unity of the Godhead and the unity of humanity are each made perfect and complete in the bond of being covenanted each to the other.
4. Unity is expressed, exercised, and enjoyed by actively indwelling each other.
5. Neither we nor God are truly ourselves outside of these bonds … apart from active indwelling union with others. (Ibid., pp. 111-12)

As one considers Baker's approach, what is observed is that his view of the image of God in humankind provides a more robust understanding of this crucial and foundational concept, and shows great promise. What is particularly noteworthy is how

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his view of the image of God as our role and purpose expands the concept and overcomes a number of limitations of trying to ground the image of God in certain qualities or simply in individuals. While his resistance to ontological language when describing the image of God concept does not seem to be necessary in the light of more recent developments regarding an ontology grounded in relationship, his desire to see the concept expanded and more inclusive of humanity's intended role, purpose and ultimate goal seems to fit the overall tenor of scripture.[90] That God intended for us to mirror his image, an image that is both singular and plural, and that relationship and corporality must characterise what it means to be created in a triune God's image are all concepts that Baker's approach incorporates. What is more, his emphasis on all of humanity reflecting God's image that is being worked out in history as something God has committed himself to is a concept that invites further reflection.

4.4 Conclusion

In the above discussion where the Trinity is perceived of in more social terms where persons in relationship is given greater priority, and love, interdependence and moving together in complete unity summed up in the concept of *perichoresis* are so characteristic of inter-trinitarian relations, the implications of this understanding provides not only fertile soil for a more dynamic understanding of God, but also a fuller understanding of what it means for us as people created in God's image. The parallels between our life as God's people and God's trinitarian life are given fuller explication as

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[90] How Jesus Christ fulfills this role, purpose and goal will be looked at in the next chapter of this dissertation.

the social model with its emphasis on relationality and *perichoresis* is developed. The trinitarian life that we are invited to participate in by God holds out much promise for a theology of the individual-in-community. While it is important as mentioned above to maintain the necessary "distance" between us and God as we are created and he is Creator, there is ample evidence from scripture that we are in various ways to mirror God's triune life. The individual in isolation cannot do this, and the ontology of being in community takes on greater importance as we consider what it means to be created in God's image fulfilling a role and purpose that God has intended in his redemptive plan.

What is evident as the above chapter developed is that there is a fair amount of consensus across a broad spectrum of theologians including evangelical ones that there needs to be a greater stress on the idea that God's image is both individual and communal, reflective of the Trinity's own diversity and unity, and that this stress has been a welcomed one particularly among evangelical theologians in view of the historical reduction of these loci of theology being consumed with mere language of "substance." This positive development has led to the inter-trinitarian life and our being created in God's image as being the formative reality that we must continue to reckon with as opposed to the more static formulations of these concepts that have prevailed historically.

When all is concluded from the discussion above, a significant point of summary and conclusion that must be drawn from our understanding of the Trinity and the image of God in humankind is that the full realization of being in God's image is when we participate in the trinitarian indwelling by entering into loving relationship and reproducing this among ourselves as God's people. This is the role and the purpose that God has called us to. While we are individuals that are centres of value and importance bearing in mind that the relational cannot simply dissolve the particular, i.e., the

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individual, we gain much insight from the counterbalancing truth that we are created for community that is grounded in the social analogy of the community of the Trinity. God's image, while including individuals, is more fully displayed and realized in the interrelationships that can exist between individuals-in-community. It is only in community that we can most fully image the triune God and even this must be viewed in a teleological or eschatological sense as this is a reality that is being brought to completion. It is the trinitarian life ultimately that is paradigmatic for our being created and living out God's image. No theology of the individual-in-community can be adequately developed without such understandings, and further related theological developments and some of the implications of these concepts will be further explored as this dissertation progresses.

CHAPTER 5

AN EVANGELICAL THEOLOGY OF THE INDIVIDUAL-IN-
COMMUNITY—ITS SOTERIOLOGY REVISITED

5.1 Introduction

Continuing in the vein of this dissertation being an analysis and constructive

proposal towards the strengthening of an evangelical theology of the individual-in-

community, it is to the doctrine of salvation that we turn next. This is being done not only

because evangelicals place a high priority on salvation but because it is a significant area

of evangelical theology that is being revisited by some evangelical theologians because of

the perceived overemphasis on the individual that continues to characterise evangelical

soteriology. Seeing soteriology in more communal terms is viewed as not only an

important corrective but as leading to a more robust expression of various aspects of this

important doctrine which evangelicals hold dear. There is a perceived trend that

evangelicalism is growing in its understanding that "conversion alone means little until it

is reinforced by a community that makes sense of the new life that we have entered"

(Shelley & Shelley 1992, p. 52).

Granting that personal belief and individual commitment to the gospel for the

purpose of gaining eternal life for the individual are valid and central aspects of the

gospel as promulgated by evangelicals, there has been a growing unease among some

evangelical theologians that evangelical soteriology has been significantly reductionist in

this regard. As will become evident, there is significant disquiet among some evangelicals

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that turning God's work of salvation simply into what Scot McKnight disapprovingly refers to as "a story about *me and my own personal salvation*" is inadequate (2011, p. 62). While there are various aspects to this reductionism's inadequacy, at very least it has severed personal salvation from the broader narrative of scripture where God's work of salvation is so much more holistic and communally oriented, so much more grand and compelling. But more will be said about this as this chapter unfolds.

Another way of perceiving the problem before us is that when evangelicalism so prioritizes the salvation of the individual from future judgement (eschatological salvation), a proper understanding of creation and community can easily be neglected because of being perceived of as too temporal. Not only has this emphasis resulted in what Grenz calls a truncated soteriology (1993, p. 184) where community and ecclesiology are diminished, but it also runs the risk of resulting in "a truncated anthropology" (Aaron 2012, p. 160). What is meant by this is that when a pietistic worldview conceives of purity and self in a way that simply interiorizes them rather than "integrating them into a larger relational self," salvation in such a context is conceived of primarily in self-referential terms. This worldview with its exaggerated transcendence easily falls prey to a minimization of the physical and relational aspects of our present existence (ibid.). A seeking after a more holistic way of conceiving salvation that diminishes these reductionisms is what will be pursued in this chapter.

As the doctrine of salvation is such a broad study, it should be quite evident that in what follows cannot even begin to be a comprehensive treatment. Rather, in what follows is an exploration of certain soteriological themes where the concept of the individual-in-community is enlarged or reconceived. In order to provide even greater focus in this endeavour, some key identifiable themes will be pursued because they have been viewed

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by certain evangelicals as areas where evangelical soteriology needs to engage in further reflection so as to be strengthened. These themes will also grow out of where evangelical soteriology is perceived of as being reductionist by focusing too much on the individual, where it has overreacted to certain theological trends, and where it has tended to ignore or has just become blind to more communitarian ways of thinking that has biblical support.

As these themes are explored from the standpoint of primarily an evangelical self-critique, they will continue to develop along the way themes already touched on that have been viewed as provocative and helpful. These will include paying attention to the reading in community both modern and ancient of the broader narrative of scripture, the significance of the Trinity as "being in relationship" which must more directly impact our soteriology, and the continued unpacking of the idea of the *imago Dei* which must ultimately focus on the Lord Jesus Christ who has made it possible through salvation for us to fulfil our role and purpose as God's people of reflecting the Triune God in the world we live in.

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5.2 Evangelicalism and its Historical Horizons Leading
to a Narrowing of Salvation away from More
Communal Considerations

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In chapter two of this dissertation, the historical nature of evangelicalism with its propensity towards capitulating to modern individualism was shown to be a well-documented matter among evangelicals concerned by this on-going trend. By coming to understand evangelicalism's proclivities especially with regard to its undue emphasis on the priority of the individual, a greater awareness of what needs to be addressed in general was raised. In a more particular way, this also needs to be done when it comes to evangelicalism and its approach to the doctrine of salvation. By looking at how

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evangelicals have viewed salvation in the past, we will be made aware of issues in this locus of theology that need our more sustained attention.

In his helpful essay in this regard, "'Let Us See Thy Great Salvation' What Did it Mean to Be Saved for the Early Evangelicals?" D. Bruce Hindmarsh, asks the questions, "Is the typical evangelical understanding of salvation too narrow? Are evangelicals preoccupied with mere 'soul saving' and do they regard social concerns as secondary to or even a distraction from the gospel?" (2002, p. 43). That these questions have been of concern to some evangelicals is observed by Hindmarsh particularly as they have been addressed consistently by Lausanne Covenants of recent times[91] and by thoughtful, leading evangelicals like John R. Stott.

Why these questions have been of concern to evangelicals more recently as represented by those within the Lausanne movement can be traced back to what has become known as the "great reversal" of the early twentieth century. This trend, symptomatic of evangelicalism's neglect of more communal considerations, was a movement away from social issues primarily as a reaction to the social gospel of liberalism espoused by theologians like Walter Rauschenbusch.[92] The primary concern among conservative evangelicals was not only its rejection of liberalism with its social

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[91] The Lausanne Movement's document, "The Cape Town Commitment" (2010) reveals evangelicalism's most recent recommitment to addressing such questions. See also John R. W. Stott's, *Making Christ Known: Historic Mission Documents from the Lausanne Movement, 1974-1989* (1997).

[92] David Bosch in his *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (1991) points out how the development of the social gospel movement "both confirmed the worst fears of the evangelicals and proved to them that they had been correct" in severing ties with those mainline denominational churches that were perceived of as "apostate." "Their—predictable—reaction was to embrace an ever more absolute antithesis between evangelism and social concern" (p. 319).

gospel agenda[93] but the perceived danger that directing efforts in the direction of social reform and a more "social gospel" would supplant or siphon energy away from evangelistic devotion and effort and even somehow distort the gospel (ibid., p. 44).[94]

David Moberg in his book, *The Great Reversal: Reconciling Evangelism and Social Concern* (1977; rev. 2006), has been one theologian who has drawn attention through his work to the "false dichotomy between evangelism, which stresses personal salvation, and social concern, which emphasizes the regeneration of society." He expresses his concern that this false dichotomy "has hampered the work and witness of evangelicals" (2006, p. 150), and because of this long observed dichotomy, Hindermarsh even wonders if there is not "a congenital weakness in the evangelical tradition that pulls evangelicals in the direction of withdrawal from society and a privatized, individualistic piety" (op. cit., p. 45). As we have seen already in this dissertation, a number of critics have attributed at least in part this weakness to the Enlightenment. Following the analysis of David Bebbington, a leading historian of the evangelical movement, Hindmarsh approvingly quotes him when he states that "The Evangelical version of Protestantism was created by the Enlightenment" (ibid., p. 47; cf. Bebbington 1989, p. 74). The *Zeitgeist* of the Enlightenment with its emphasis on human autonomy giving rise to "individualism and a pathological naiveté about the interconnectedness of self and

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[93] For a description of the social gospel agenda see David Bosch's, *Transforming Mission*, in which he describes the rather emasculated concept of the kingdom of God that it presented which, quoting Niebuhr, involved "no discontinuities, no crisis, no tragedies or sacrifices, no loss of things, no cross and no resurrection" (1991, p. 321).

[94] For a more detailed history of the origin of the evangelical phenomenon that has come to be known as "the great reversal," see evangelical missiologist Ralph Winter's (2009, pp. 5-11).

society" has resulted in a narrowed understanding of salvation such that the focus is on the individual "thereby sacrificing its larger biblical sense" (ibid.).[95]

Of course, one would be remiss if one did not also point out as do Hindmarsh and Moberg (op. cit., pp. 28-30) that throughout evangelicalism's history, there has been "a recurring countervailing impulse to engage and reform society and to express faith in public works" (Hindmarsh 2002, pp. 45). For example, the evangelical efforts with regard to abolition and temperance of the nineteenth-century indicated significant social and political engagement by evangelicals. David Bosch reminds us that among those touched by the Awakenings stretching from the early 18th century on till the late 19th century, while there was a strong emphasis on conversion and one's eternal state by early evangelicals, there was "little separation between the soteriological and humanitarian" (1991, p. 288; cf. 281) These evangelicals "persisted in the pre-Enlightenment tradition of the indissoluble unity of 'evangelization' and 'humanization' … of 'service to the soul' and 'service to the body … of proclaiming the gospel and spreading 'beneficent civilization' (ibid.).

If one goes back to Charles Wesley (1703-91), as Hindmarsh does in a brief historical survey of his ministry, he notes that Wesley was concerned with more than just soul saving. There were at least five evident concerns in Wesley's ministry: "the poor, the

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[95] John Seel in his book, *The Evangelical Forfeit: Can we Recover?* says that there have been two consequences of the decades prior to the 1970s of evangelicalism's religious privatization and social isolation: a narrowed concern to the private world of family and home often characterized by a preoccupation with single issue politics like that of abortion or prayer in schools, and "a loss of a publically accessible language in which to enter the public debate in an increasingly secular and pluralistic society" (1993, pp. 41-42). Seel in his book written over twenty years ago generally lamented the fact that evangelicals lack a broader social vision informed by biblical concerns and are more occupied by personalities, consumerist strategies, and other populist driven priorities. This legacy seems to remain a concern among thoughtful evangelical commentators though as we shall see should not become an over generalized description of all evangelicals.

body *(the physical dimension of persons)*, society, the wider church, and the full and final salvation of the believer" (ibid., p. 47). Furthermore, as one looks at more recent evangelical efforts toward encouraging evangelical engagement with more communal oriented initiatives as evidenced by the Lausanne discussions, Hindmarsh sees in these efforts a significant attempt at redressing the trend of the great reversal by encouraging "a more balanced evangelical integration of gospel proclamation and social concern" (ibid.).[96]

But the question remains: have evangelicals integrated more communal concerns into their soteriology undergirded by well-thought-through biblical concepts or has its commitment to these communal concerns simply been an addition that subtly takes on a more voluntary status? Furthermore, to what extent has the "great reversal" been symptomatic of an evangelical soteriology that is deficient by its preoccupation with or overemphasis on the individual, and points to the need for an evangelical soteriology that is not only expanded but revised at a more fundamental level.[97]

A further instructive insight that Hindmarsh gives which provides a necessary historical context for the evangelical emphasis on individual salvation is one that should help evangelicals move from the past to the present. It is an insight that not only enables

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[96] David Swartz in his dissertation, "Left Behind: The Evangelical Left and the Limits of Evangelical Politics, 1965-1988" makes the point that "The caricature of evangelicalism as a monolithic political bloc gripped by only a few moral and political issues is inaccurate." He reminds us of "the long tradition of evangelical progressivism and social radicalism in American history" which if studied would not leave anyone surprised that there is an evangelical left that continues to present itself (2008, p. 6).

[97] Kathryn Teresa Long in her work*, The Revival of 1857-58: Interpreting an American Religious Awakening* (1998) makes the argument that the revival of the period indicated in the title placed a significant emphasis on inward piety that continued on in various evangelical movements which diminished or totally excluded any social consciousness thereby sowing the seeds of the great reversal.

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understanding of why evangelicals have historically emphasized individual salvation and why this must not be forgotten, but it also points to why this stress must be reshaped as present realities are different.

Hindmarsh's insight begins with the fact that early evangelicals like Wesley and Whitefield did conceive "of salvation primarily (and that is an important adverb) in terms of the individual and his or her eternal destiny" (ibid., p. 64) which certainly are not unanchored biblical ideas. But while they did so, this must be understood in the context of the prevailing status quo of an Established Church that had significant support from and by the people, and where most people were initiated into the church and regarded themselves as Christian as a matter of course (just as being born in a country makes one a citizen of that country). Christendom's hegemony in eighteenth-century society meant that most people saw it as their responsibility to at least go through the motions of churchly activity. "Evangelicalism represented a protest against the idea that adhering to Christian civil society as a nominal Christian was sufficient for salvation" (ibid., p. 65; cf. Walls 1994, p. 312). Evangelicalism came to the fore as Christendom was on the wane and modernity was on the rise. The space was opening up for greater individual agency such that people could respond to the gospel message in a more personal capacity.[98]

But as Hindmarsh rightly says, the protest of that era "with its excessively corporate but nominal view of salvation in the old age of Christendom" is no longer our

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[98] Elsewhere, Hindmarsh points out that the negative characterization of Christendom prior to the rise of evangelicalism in the late seventeenth century should not be overstated. As he assuages, "nominal Christianity provided many of the assumptions about creation, providence, moral order, eschatology, and much else, which the evangelical preachers used to urge their hearers to take faith more seriously and to make their Christianity more personal." This recognizing of a valuable and informative tradition providing a fertile soil for a more personal faith to take root in coheres well with the thrust of this dissertation (2001, pp. 78-79).

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protest. What "we now protest against (is) an excessive individualism in the old age of modernism. We worry that our typical understanding of salvation is deeply individual but not broad" (ibid.). So, while the early evangelicals narrowed salvation from an unhealthy, nominal status quo to a more personal commitment of the human heart so as to "repristinate the gospel" enabling it to "be heard afresh," the task that now lies before us is not to neglect the heart, an emphasis we dare not leave in view of its biblical emphasis, but to broaden salvation away from mere "narrowness and private peity" towards a repristinating of the gospel which engages more communal concerns that are broader and more spacious (ibid., pp. 65-66).

As we look further at the history of evangelicalism, we begin to see that other tendencies have tended to restrict its view of salvation. In order to see these tendencies more clearly, David Walker in his book, *Challenging Evangelicalism: Prophetic Witness and Theological Renewal* (1993), employs four useful words to express these tendencies which will be elaborated on further: "Retreat," "Ambiguities," "Revivalism" and "Dualism." Not only are these terms helpful foci for understanding evangelical tendencies in the area of salvation, but they are helpful in capturing the various ways evangelicalism has been challenged to think more broadly in its approach to the gospel and salvation issues. As we shall see, these categories are not clear cut but overlap in various ways.

With regard to "retreat," Walker essentially captures what Hindmarsh and Moberg have already pointed out regarding evangelicalism's retreat in the twentieth century away from social responsibility particularly from the 1920s until the 1960s which resulted in a narrowing of evangelicals understanding of salvation. While Walker does concede that there has been "a social awakening among evangelicals" which cannot be denied, he wonders if it has really gone deep enough in terms of broadening its horizons (1993, p.

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100). He finds a corroborating voice in the writing of Jim Wallis who says, "Does the word evangelical conjure up the vision of a gospel that turns the social order upside down?" Wallis's criticism is that evangelicalism, particularly in its American form, has largely been a religion for those in the top strata of the world system, as opposed to those at the bottom (ibid.). A gospel that is "good news to the poor, the captives and the oppressed" has largely been abandoned even though in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries on both side of the Atlantic such a retreat away from linking the gospel to social issues which focused on the poor, the at-risk, the disenfranchised was not in evidence among evangelicals (ibid., p. 101). In 1905 F.J. Foakes-Jackson was able to write the following indicating just how far evangelicalism has retreated:

> No branch indeed of the Western Church can be refused the honor of having assisted in the progress of human ideas[,] and non-Christians have participated largely in diffusing the modern spirit of kindness; but the credit for the inception of the movement belongs without doubt to that form of Protestantism which is distinguished by the importance it attaches to the doctrine of the Atonement. … The later Evangelicalism, which saw in the death of Christ the means of freed salvation for fallen humanity, caused its adherents to take the front rank as champions of the weak. … Prison reform, the prohibitions of the slave trade, the abolition of slavery, the Factory Acts, the protection of children, the crusade against cruelty to animals are all the outcome of the great Evangelical Revival of the eighteenth century. (As quoted by J. Daryl Charles 2002, p. 55)

While Walker does concede that there has been a social awakening among evangelicals, his fear is that it has unfortunately not gone deep enough. This is affirmed by other evangelical commentators who have written since Walker who contend that mainstream evangelicalism has largely remained in a state of retreat or isolation. J. Daryl Charles in his book*, The Unformed Conscience of Evangelicalism: Recovering the Church's Moral Vision*, attributes this tendency among evangelicals to two factors. The first has to do with evangelicalism being absorbed by culture and reflective of the values of the surrounding culture whereby contemporary evangelicalism is largely consumed

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with the culture's therapeutic and self-actualization concerns marked by a "psychologizing of the faith," a "consumerist mentality," and a "theological relativism" which means "picking and choosing what we want to believe as well as focusing on what will meet our 'personal' needs" (2002, pp. 56-57). These concerns were raised to a large extent in the second chapter of this dissertation.

The second factor, according to Charles, leading to retreat or isolation has to do with evangelicalism's pietistic roots. While the Pietistic Movement of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries was a legitimate expression of religious renewal born out of "dry, arid ritualism, legalism or pharisaism" thereby reflecting a legitimate expression of religious fervor, pietism came with certain inherent dangers. These dangers, as Charles warns, are that it "represents an inward turn, which, if unmediated, results in a privatizing of faith and a distrust of intellect" (ibid., p. 102).[99] The result of this negative form of pietism, which as some will argue is a caricature of true early Pietism, is that various unnecessary dichotomies or polarizations have taken root within evangelicalism: "head and heart, faith and reason, intellect and feeling, and countless other polarities" (ibid.). All of these factors have eroded evangelicalism's ability to truly engage society and bring the gospel to bear on all of life. It is no wonder then that Cherith Nordling bemoans the fact that influenced by modernity, western evangelical pietism has largely come to emphasize "salvation as an individual reality, while forgetting its corporate dimension." Evangelicalism has largely sided with an "individualistic, disembodied view of being

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[99] Often the word pietism or some cognate thereof is used in a rather negative manner as shorthand in some instances to describe the roots of evangelicalism's inwardness, individualistic spirituality, and withdrawal from society (quietism). Roger E. Olsen and Christian T. Collins Winn have coauthored a book entitled, *Reclaiming Pietism: Retrieving an Evangelical Tradition* (2015) in order to demonstrate that such an understanding of Pietism historically does not hold up against closer examination.

human" where "salvation means getting individual souls into heaven rather than celebrating the resurrection of male and female human beings as new creations who form together an eschatological *people* for and with God" (2007, p. 71).

The second useful word that Walker uses to describe evangelicalism's historical tendencies particularly as one analyzes its approach to social issues is the word "ambiguities." It is under this rubric that Walker raises a particular criticism of even earlier evangelicalism that calls for our consideration in spite of the many positive aspects of pre-twentieth century evangelicalism and its approach to social issues which have already been expressed. The particular ambiguity that Walker wishes to address begins by recognizing that in various instances historically evangelicals have committed themselves to the fact that salvation must be extended even to addressing matters of the human condition such as poverty and injustice. But, even though they worked hard in various philanthropic endeavors, they "saw no need to seek the renewal of society" (op. cit., p. 102). Hugh Conolly describes this tendency as "taking refuge in strategic measures … which acknowledges the need to make certain strategic remedial intentions without calling into question the entire social edifice" (2002, p. 117). While pursuing ends which would make the plight of the oppressed better, they themselves took for granted their social standing within society and did not address the structural evil that contributed to the existing wrongs. Their approach was, says Walker quoting Moberg, "individualistic and moralistic" causing them to "see the sources in terms of personal good and evil and blinded them to social causes that could not be attributed directly to individuals" (ibid.). Walker concludes his discussion of evangelical ambiguities by stating that

> These inclinations to engage in social welfare but avoid social action are still apparent in the evangelical community. One of the factors influencing this is the tendency to see sin in personal terms only and to ignore its social dimension. This

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is part of the individualism which marks mainline evangelical thought and affects its social perceptions. (Ibid.)

Another aspect of evangelicalism that helps us understand its history and propensities leading away from more communal considerations especially in the matter of salvation can be summed up in the word "revivalism." While revivalism did issue forth in certain forms of social concern where there was a marrying of "spiritual to social service" (ibid., p. 103) and even the more radical suggestion that "the sign of the true church was that it is marked by a 'gospel for the poor'" (ibid.),[100] we will come to see that revivalism left a lasting legacy of reinforcing a highly individualistic orientation in evangelicals understanding of salvation, particularly conversion.[101]

According to Gordon Smith in his work, *Beginning Well: Christian Conversion and Authentic Conversion*, asserts that we cannot understand how conversion is understood by many evangelicals even in the twenty-first century unless we take into account the abiding influence of revivalism. As we will come to see through his research, revivalism which has been a dominant force in the shaping of American piety, has had tremendous influence on evangelicals who have in one way or another become "unwitting children of the movement, associating the language and piety of revivalism with the New Testament" (2001, p. 94).

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[100] For a more recent work that demonstrates the coupling and de-coupling of revivalism and social concern particularly in New England see Benjamin Hartley's *Evangelicals at a Crossroads: Revivalism and Social Reform in Boston, 1860-1910 (Revisiting New England)* (2011). For an older work that describes the social concern that was coupled with revivalism in earlier evangelical expressions of faith, see Donald Dayton's *Discovering an Evangelical Heritage* (1988).

[101] For a helpful article that distinguishes between revival with its more theocentric overtones and biblical precedence, and revivalism which tended to be more anthropocentric with its emphasis on methodology and technique, see Gerald Priest's, "Revival and Revivalism: a Historical and Doctrinal Evaluation" (1996, pp. 223-52).

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According to Smith, probably the most influential voice in this historical movement in American evangelicalism was that of Charles Finney (1792-1875). Finney came onto the scene at a time when Puritanism had already provided a significant impetus in the direction of elevating the importance of conversion as vital to being a Christian, "indeed as the defining event of a person's life (and future life)" (ibid.). But where Finney differed with the dominant Puritan theology of that time was seen in his dismissal of Reformed and Calvinist thinking and his promoting of a greater emphasis on human responsibility with its stress on the free will of people and the importance of human agency (associated with Arminianism). With regard to agency, he stressed both the agency of the evangelist and the "sinner," so much so that he even "spoke against the notion that a conversion is the work of God—and that therefore conversion is necessarily left to God" (ibid.).

A second emphasis of Finney that has had an enduring legacy on evangelicals has been "the need for and possibility of an immediate crisis-point conversion" (ibid.). Here he was also rejecting the Puritan thinking of many of his predecessors who encouraged more of "an extensive period of conviction for sin" as being necessary for one's genuine conversion (ibid.).

A third aspect of the revivalist movement that Finney established was his strong emphasis on conversion as not being "a miracle but as resulting from the application of the right approach or method. This led to an emphasis on techniques aimed at getting people converted, and eventually to the language of 'winning souls' to speak of fostering or encouraging conversions" (ibid.; cf. Davies 2001, p. 1026). This emphasis on technique or method with its consistent stress on the importance of human agency and

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responsibility was deemed as leading with a high degree of certainty to conversions and souls being "won" (ibid.).

As a result of these various aspects of Finney's influence, revivalism came to be viewed as a form of Christianity that placed an emphasis on it being "'warm,' 'immediate,' and 'active,' and was not therefore creedally preoccupied." It also was spurred on by "supraecclesiastical mass meetings, surrender to a 'loving Savior'" which 'in turn empowered enthusiasts to 'witness'" (Wauzzinski 1993, p. 29).

Smith, along with others, recognize the strengths of revivalism particularly in its "uncompromising call for conversion to Jesus Christ" (ibid.), and its emphasis on the biblical "mandate for personal witness and world mission" (Dieter 2001, p. 1031). Furthermore, as stated earlier, there is little doubt that revivalism led to "significant moral, social and cultural changes" (ibid.; cf. Walker 1993, pp. 103-04, who points to various sources that substantiate this claim). But while acknowledging revivalisms positive contributions, Smith opines that as evangelicals, "we are well advised to note how revivalism has shaped our language and behavior, especially on the theme of conversion, in ways that urgently need to be reconsidered" (op. cit., p. 94).

Where Smith takes issue with revivalism primarily has to do with its one-sided emphasis on human volition. While revivalism was not wrong in its stressing of human responsibility and the importance of people's actions, it tended to be one-dimensional in its emphasis on "the surrender of the will." It fostered the idea that we are simply changed "through the act of our own will, that our conversion and transformation are fundamentally fruits of our own decisions" (ibid., p. 95). Not only did this dramatic, immediate and more "miraculous" view of conversion substantially diminish the idea that

God might work through other means that are slower, "through the renewal of the mind," through individual and corporate means, but it also

> nurtured the idea that religion is fundamentally private and personal. The emphasis on human volition implied an emphasis on the individual. … A person was a believer only if as an individual, before God, she personally chose to "accept" Christ. And while the Christian community could encourage and foster such a decision, the focus of attention was and continues to be on the individual. (Ibid., p. 96)[102]

The idea that conversion is an individual matter but needing to be understood and placed "within the context of the covenantal community" where subjective experience could be tempered and nurtured, and that "it immediately placed one at work within that community" was "a careful balance between the subjective and the objective, the individual and the communal" that revivalism did not foster (ibid., pp. 96-97). In other words, in revivalism

> subjectivism and individualism had gone to seed. Increasingly the only purpose for the church was to foster a particular kind of conversion, so much so that conversion became an end in itself. Conversions were sought without immediate reference to the nurturing community. Everything depended on whether one could answer the question "Are you saved?" In due time this led to the late nineteenth- and twentieth-century phenomenon of mass crusade evangelism, where conversion happened outside the context of the covenant community, divorced from its doctrinal heritage. (Ibid., p. 97)

What the above development of the terms "retreat," "ambiguities," and "revivalism" demonstrate in various ways is how mainstream evangelicalism has

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[102]Drawing on the historical analysis of George Marsden, David Bosch points out how D.L. Moody (1837-1899) perpetuated this whole revivalist approach of conversion being simply "the individual's choice" as being decisive. The shift in emphasis among evangelicals by the time of Moody according to Marsden was no longer the church primarily being a body "but was made up of free individuals who had freely chosen to join this specific denomination. " Moody "preached a message that viewed the sinner as standing alone before God. Also, the Holy Spirit was understood as working only in the hearts of individuals and was known primarily through personal experience" (Bosch 1991, p. 317).

historically narrowed the horizons of soteriology through a process of privatizing faith and the diminishing of more communal considerations. What is more, it raises the matter needing further attention of, to what extent do evangelicals still persist in various dualisms, dichotomies or polarizations that reinforce this tendency that require our more careful attention?[103] This is being done based on the idea that as we identify and think through these dualisms, there will be a movement towards holism and understanding salvation more broadly and even a reframing of various soteriological themes in a more communal and less privatized way.

Turning to the matter of evangelical dualisms that have continued to influence evangelical soteriological perspectives, how can these be expressed more clearly leading to a greater awareness of what needs to be addressed? But first of all, we need to look at how individualism and dualism are closely joined. If we look at how these two philosophies find expression within mainstream evangelicalism, we discover that they result in the same effect: A "faith in which context is ignored" (Walker 1993, p. 178). According to Walker, on the one hand, individualism separates the person from the "the life situation or the community." The effect of this way of thinking is that people are generally abstracted from their social milieu and priority is given to the well-being of the

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[103] Daniel Migliore draws our attention to various dualisms that have insinuated themselves "into the theology and life of the church from its beginnings to the present. Consider some of the forms it has taken and continues to take: the spiritual is good, the physical is evil; the intellectual is good, the sexual is evil; the masculine is good, the feminine is evil; white is good, black is evil; human beings are good, the natural environment is evil. Over against all such dualisms, Christian faith declares that all that God has created is good" (2004, p. 107). The few that are covered in this chapter are those that persist more subtly within mainstream evangelicalism that undermine a theology of the individual-in-community and understanding what we are saved for.

self. Dualism, on the other hand, separates "the spiritual and material aspects of life." The resultant effect in notion and praxis "is an almost exclusive focus on the spiritual needs of the individual" (ibid.). While the spiritual and material are not totally divorced, the prevailing "assumption is that the spiritual needs of individuals are so important that even if their social needs are never addressed, what matters will have happened if their spiritual needs are met" (ibid., p. 179).[104] What this emphasis does is to create a much greater disjuncture between these two realms than is warranted.

Therefore, within evangelical thought there has been this challenge that Walker refers to as an intertwining "individualism-dualism" (ibid.). As though to allay evangelical sensitivities, he qualifies this challenge by saying that all of what is being said in this regard is not to undermine the importance of the individual or to diminish the spiritual realm of life. But while individuals have value and spirituality is important, what must be addressed is what he refers to as the "unwarranted and harmful separation" of the individual and social environment, the spiritual and the material (ibid.).

That such a separation of particularly the material and the spiritual continues to have such tenacity can be attributed at least in part to the long history that it has particularly when it comes to how salvation has come to be understood in the West. In their development of salvation as primarily spiritual, Bevens and Schroeder explain how

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[104] Louise Kretzschmar in this regard gives the following insight: "A privatized theology is inherently dualistic in that it separates reality into different spheres whereby the influence of religion is thought to bear upon the private but not the public sphere. Dualism operates on several levels; between the spiritual and the material; the secular and the sacred; the saving of souls and social involvement; or theological statements and political activism" (1998, pp. 129-30). That the spiritual, material dualism presents particular problems in the African context is developed by Samuel Abogunrin as the African worldview does not bifurcate the spiritual and material, and such a bifurcation actually does not cohere well with scripture. He argues this second point from the Gospel of Luke where the concept of liberation is present, and he concludes his study by elaborating the point that in Luke the liberation God intends leads to the total well-being of God's people, physically and spiritually (2007, pp.27-43).

this view has been cast over the ages and into the present. This view begins with a particular understanding of sin where human beings are entangled in sin and if left to their own devices will be subject to eternal judgment and punishment. "It is through Christ's satisfactory, redeeming work that people become 'disentangled' and so are able to live in ways that will ensure eternal life" (2004, p. 44). Salvation, though having something of a beginning in this life, "was conceived as something that is accomplished *after* death and *out of* this world" reflecting the thinking of Aquinas who "wrote of sanctifying grace as the 'seed of glory' (ibid.). Drawing on the writing of David Bosch, Bevens and Schroeder point out how as soteriology in the West increasingly embraced Anselm's theory of vicarious satisfaction, salvation was primarily perceived of as "the redemption of individual souls in the hereafter, which would take effect at the occasion of the miniature apocalypse of the death of the individual believer" (ibid.). This in turn led to a distinction being made between God's "salvific" and his "providential" work because as "salvation referred to spiritual, nonmaterial justification of the sinner before God," it was his salvific work that was most important as this was the means by which eternal punishment would be avoided. On the other hand, "God's benevolent, everyday providential activities were God's actions on behalf of human, societal and human welfare, but they had nothing to do with salvation" (ibid.).

In this view of salvation described above, salvation is understood as intensely personal. Bevans and Schroeder explain how this is so in two senses: First, "particularly since the full emergence of the individual with modernity, it is something that happens only to an individual and only with full individual consent; that is, it happens when one accepts Jesus as personal savior" (ibid., pp. 44-45). The second sense in which salvation is personal is that it "is restricted to interior, spiritual renewal and transformation" (ibid.,

p. 45). In this second sense, there is no space for salvation including "structural, political or cosmic renewal" (ibid.). Therefore, what this intensely personal view of salvation does particularly among mainstream evangelicals is to bolster this divide between the individual and the communal, the personal and the social, the spiritual and the material. The language used to describe salvation reinforces individualism in that it asserts a wholly privatized faith whose role is limited to the personal concerns of the believer such that any social dimension to faith is excluded except as a possible consequence of what is first and foremost personal.[105]

Another way of looking at this spiritual, material dualism that has persisted is also to understand it in terms of a separation of the inner and outer realms of Christian experience and discipleship which translates into a strongly emphasized differentiation "between vertical and horizontal relationships" (Walker 1993, p. 185). In this understanding, the inner realm is where God is experienced whereas the outer realm is tied to our experience of the world. "(T)he inner realm is the locus of the vertical relationship with God … a realm of unchanging spiritual realities. … The outer realm is the locus of horizontal relationships … of physical and material existence." The result of

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[105]Tim Suttle, writing as an evangelical pastor, makes the following summation that adds another voice to those above who decry evangelicals excessive personalization of the gospel: "For the past few centuries, individualistic conceptions of the gospel have championed some truly good things: the emphasis that every human person can have a personal relationship with God through faith in Christ; the essential nature of personal faith; the priesthood of the believer; the missionary spirit; the consistent appeal to the authority of scripture; the resistance of the absolute power of a corrupt church; and many others. But, the resulting forms and modes of what it means to follow Christ have been overly-geared toward individual salvation and self-enhancement. As a result, the individualistic nature of the gospel has become distorted and overplayed. Individualism has usurped the essential communal and corporate nature of the Christian faith, and the social claims which Jesus makes on the life of his followers have been drowned out and ignored. When this happened the gospel lost its power" (2011, p. 11).

this kind of thinking is to bring out from under God's influence any material or social aspect of life (ibid.).

As one would expect, this dualism takes on a marked separation between individual and corporate experience. When priority is given to the personal, the inner, and the "spiritual" soon "God can only be known on the individual level. Access to him is denied except through the channel of personal inner experiences undergone by separate individuals" (ibid, p. 186). What then is diminished is any concept of

> God's direct action within society. What happens in society (communal outer experience) is determined by what happens within people (individual inner experience). There is a decidedly one way flow of influence from within persons out to society with no acknowledgment of the counter flow from the outer environment to the inner world of experience. (Ibid.)

With this spiritual and material dualism that has been so characteristic of western and evangelical thinking in mind, the question that must be asked is, to what extent has this dualism persisted within evangelical thought and life and has it had other repercussions needing our attention? In 1983 in an article entitled, "The Experiential Etiology of Evangelical Dualism," John H. Yoder expressed the opinion that within the Anglo-Saxon evangelical world, the idea "that one cannot separate the inward and the outward components of the Gospel … is increasingly becoming accepted" (449). However, as he continued in his article, he made it clear that many missionary personnel come into missionary service from evangelical church backgrounds where this dualism persists. His major concern as he wrote was that certain dualisms, particular those separating the inward and the outward, tended to relegate Christian ethics to "secondary or derivative status" (ibid., p. 450) and by so doing effectively removing "it from the agenda of important concerns" (ibid., p. 451).

What Yoder pointed to as a tendency among evangelicals to separate theology from ethics, thereby reinforcing the priority of the inward over the outward, is supported by the analysis of others. For example, J. Daryl Charles draws our attention to an unfortunate and significant repercussion of a particular aspect of Reformation thinking that has subtly persisted since Luther where theology and ethics have been separated which has contributed in a way to the ongoing diminishing of ethics to secondary status among evangelicals. According to Charles, evangelicals have taken pride in tracing their roots to the Reformation, which as a "protest" movement accentuated the importance of faith and grace as a counter to what was seen "as a works-oriented righteousness based on human merit" (op. cit., p. 76). This helps one understand why evangelicals have tended to be very "wary where they sense justification by faith, the merit of the cross and divine grace are being compromised" (ibid.). Unfortunately, this theological prioritizing of justification by faith and the aspect of grace as unmerited has shaped how evangelicals have approached the New Testament. The example Charles gives is how the writings of the apostle Paul are given greater significance as opposed to books like James, Jude and 2 Peter which have tended "to be relegated to secondary importance within the canon." This has continued the attitude Luther himself had who "laid the groundwork for what biblical theologians called a 'canon within a canon'" (ibid.).

The legacy, according to Charles, that Luther has left within the academy and among mainstream evangelicals is the continued transmission of a "fatal assumption— fatal insofar as letters such as James, Peter and Jude (i.e., the General Epistles) mirror *the heart of the Christian ethical tradition*" (ibid.). What these letters reveal is that "ethics and 'pastoral theology' rather than theological formulation of doctrine per se are accentuated" (ibid.). So Charles's contention is that the accentuation of doctrine over

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ethics has been the "fatal flaw' within evangelicalism and runs contrary to a more carefully-thought-through biblical theology. The relationship between the doctrinal and the ethical is to be maintained in this way:

> While the letter of James shares a common theological basis with Paul's writings, it emphasizes the *ethics* of Christian belief. Any reading of the New Testament that is careful to take into account *both* doctrinal *and* ethical emphases is able to guard against the error of faith without validating either faith without works or a legalism devoid of grace. The priority of ethics over doctrine in the General Epistles has important implications for the Christian community and contemporary evangelicals in particular (which is not to minimize the importance of doctrine). (Ibid.)[106]

Therefore, in Charles's analysis, this lingering "influence of Luther, whose prioritizing of books in the New Testament has had the unfortunate consequence of separating ethics from theology and relegating ethical books of the New Testament to secondary status" (ibid., p. 77).

So as we combine the analysis of Yoder and Charles, we see that the unfortunate and persistent result of prioritizing the inner over the outward concerns of the Christian life can be linked to the separation of the doctrinal and ethical dimensions of the Christian faith whereby the outward and the ethical have been relegated to a secondary status. As we make this connection, does it not become more and more clear that as evangelicals have prioritized the inward spirituality of the believer over the outward context of the Christian life, and as evangelicals have emphasized the doctrinal over the ethical in scripture, they have unwittingly prioritized the individual over the communal? Has it not

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[106] Elsewhere, J. Daryl Charles develops this understanding of the contribution the General Epistles make to our understanding of the New Testament in his article, "Interpreting the General Epistles" (2001, pp. 433-56).

become a case of a philosophical or world-view dualism working itself out in a biblical dualism that has undercut the communal and the ethical?[107]

Another dualism within mainstream evangelicalism that Walker points to in his work, *Challenging Evangelicalism*: *Prophetic Witness and Theological Renewal*, is that of the "division between the present and future" (op. cit., p. 187) What this dualism does is to so separate the present and the future that renewal and social transformation are projected almost exclusively towards Christ's future return. "The exclusivism of this hope separates what will be from what is in such a way that expectation of social change in the present is severely reduced, if not eliminated" (ibid., pp. 187-88). Gary Dorien, attributes this kind of thinking among evangelicals largely to a premillennialist mindset—as does Walker (p. 188)—akin to "Darby's apocalyptical reading of scripture" (1998, pp. 156-58). This has tended to foster, says Walker, a "pessimism about this world" and has tended to discourage "social involvement because real change can only take place when the Lord returns." This eschatological emphasis has contributed to the exclusion from the church's mission any social agendas (ibid.).

The important emphasis on the second coming of Christ, even though it is a vital expression of evangelical Christianity, has come to function in a harmful way when expressed in a certain way, says Walker. In an "apocalyptical reading of scripture," as

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[107]Louise Kretzschmar similarly makes the point that "Dualism results in an artificial separation between personal and social ethics. A dichotomy is created between 'secular' concerns, on the one hand, and 'spiritual' concerns on the other. Thus, to 'save souls' is the mission of the Church, but to engage in the active, structural transformation of society is not conceived of as part of the Church's mission. At most, the duty of the Church is conceived of as verbally proclaiming the social implications of the Gospel to the governing authorities. Thus, to encourage the spiritual growth of individuals is laudable, but to seek to improve the material lifestyle of communities by restructuring the educational system, the laws of the country and the economy, is seen as unnecessary, even counterproductive, to the essential task of converting individuals" (1998, p. 130).

referred to by Dorien above, prophecy looms large where its fulfillment to a great extent points to a world that is on a downward trend. The only hope is in the return of Christ which will usher in God's kingdom where justice and peace will prevail. "Because of this no significant social change can occur before Christ returns" (ibid.). The negative events of present history are seen as an indication not only of the fulfillment of end-times prophecies but an indication of Satan's rule and that any working towards a better world is a capitulation to the humanistic idea that we can make this world a better place.

"The effect of this kind of reasoning is to deny God's present action in society, make the present age (apart from the church) the domain of Satan, and make social action appear futile" (ibid.). In this schematic, there is little incentive for Christians to be involved in justice and peace, and any more community oriented initiatives, whereas the idea of individual salvation is accentuated so as to engender hope and escape judgment.

Now it might be argued that what has just been described is more reflective of certain more extreme positions within the premillennialist camp which have tended towards a more exaggerated view of this world's evilness and an escapist eschatology. However, Walker drawing on the work of Howard Snyder sees this kind of thinking as more of an expression of the "kingdom as future hope model." In this most common model of understanding the kingdom of God in church history, Snyder explains that "the emphasis on the kingdom as a social and physical reality is placed in the future reign of Christ. The kingdom as a present reality is only seen in spiritual and individual terms" (ibid., p. 189). In this future kingdom model God is seen as "reigning eternally over the entire cosmos, but primarily in a spiritual sense or within a spiritual realm" (ibid.). It is here that it is worth quoting Snyder as he explains how this futurist model undercuts the social dimension of Christian living in the present:

> At some point in the future, God's reign will be fully manifest on earth as well as in heaven. It is God and God alone who reigns; in this model there is little place for human agency in building or manifesting the kingdom. God (primarily as Jesus Christ or the Holy Spirit) now rules secretly in the hearts of believers, whose response is to be one of faith, devotion, and obedience within the limited sphere of their lives. There is little expectation of a public, social-oriented role for Christians or for the church that contributes anything to the kingdom of God. (1991, p. 27)

According to Snyder, while this model does take seriously the future aspect of God's kingdom and the Christian hope we should have as we look forward to Christ's return, it does have at least three weaknesses: First, it tends towards a pessimism in the present that undermines "confidence in the power of God's grace in the world" and induces an unbiblical quietism (ibid., p. 38). If there is work to be done, it is "solely one of working to rescue souls from this passing world for eternal life in the world to come." What is more, it can have the effect of creating indifference among Christians to social issues and "it makes it possible for Christians to ignore … the poor and the oppressed, for such efforts may be seen as distractions from central kingdom concerns" (ibid.). A second criticism of this model is that it "may have too narrow a view of the signs of the kingdom." By this Snyder means that it tends only to associate the coming of the kingdom as a present reality "in conversions or in the growth of the church or perhaps in miracles, spiritual gifts, or natural disasters" and tends to ignore any more "organic or ecological images and understandings" that might be present in scripture (ibid.). A third criticism is that the emphasis in this model "undercuts God's grace or the present work of the Holy Spirit in the world other than in either individualistic or apocalyptic senses" (ibid.).

In view of what has been said above about this division between the present and the future in evangelical thought, where the reign of Christ in the present is simply in the hearts of Christians and his reign in the future over the whole earth as a social reality,

Walker's assessment is that this kind of division leads to "a blank space" where "the kingdom is not a social reality relating to our present world." The present concern only has to do with what is fundamentally the "spiritual mission of the church. This has no causative connection to the future; the present does not prepare the way for the earthly kingdom. It only prepares individual believers for the heavenly kingdom." What this does, says Walker, is effectively separate "the future from the present, the coming of the kingdom in society from the spiritual work of the church" (op. cit., pp. 189-90).

So according to both Snyder and Walker, an unnecessary dualism separating the present from a more holistic future where the social significance of the kingdom is being anticipated in the present is their concern. What they are not arguing for is an ushering in of God's reign through overly triumphalistic agendas, but is more in line with what David Bosch described as God's reign in the present as demonstrated by Christ as being "the expression of God's caring authority over the whole of life" (1991, p. 34). Just as Jesus inaugurated the kingdom and did not consummate it, so to in evangelical proclamation and action, should there not be the "erecting of signs of God's ultimate reign—not more, but certainly not less either"? (ibid., p. 35). Therefore, as we work out more social conceptions of God's kingdom in the present, the cry from various quarters has been for evangelicals to view the reign of God in the present in more concrete terms that approximate and anticipate God's future reign. The call has been for greater continuity between the two. This is based more on the idea that the in-breaking of God's kingdom takes place "'in the midst of history' whose values 'point to profoundly social as well as personal and spiritual realities' which must be the focus of the churches task (Walker quoting Groome, op. cit., p. 191).

Therefore, as we have considered mainstream evangelicalisms historical bent toward retreat away from more social and communal considerations, toward ambiguities that prevent addressing the sin we are saved from as more structural, toward revivalist thinking that so privatizes conversion and prioritizes the individual that leads to little consideration being given to the communal in salvation, and various dualisms that undercut our Christian role as a community of faith in this world, we become increasingly convinced that an evangelical casting of salvation that is more communal needs to be undertaken. When Hindermarsh quoted earlier wonders if there is not "a congenital weakness in the evangelical tradition that pulls evangelicals in the direction of withdrawal from society and a privatized, individualistic piety," we have to concur and begin to see that a complex web of various lines of thinking have contributed to this weakness. Deeply ingrained in the evangelical tradition are various ways of speaking, various assumed principles, and certain unquestioned presuppositions that provide the perspective, categories, and images through which evangelicals formulate their understanding of salvation that are being challenged particularly by certain thinkers within the evangelical academic fraternity. So what lies before us is a consideration of what is being positively put forward by certain evangelicals as an antidote to these various unhelpful and narrow understandings of salvation so that our understanding of salvation is broadened and more communal in its expression.[108] While all of the above

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[108]Robert Wauzzinski provocatively disagrees with the idea that within evangelicalism there has been a "great reversal" where at one time evangelicals had a deeply rooted theology and world view that meant it was integrally involved in social redirection undergirded by more communal concerns but at some point in time reversed its thinking and engagement. In his assessment, all that changed was the greater stress evangelicalism gave to the inner more personal and psychological issues that really reflected a "truncated, privatized view of religion" that had been in the making for a long time (1993, p. 60).

dualisms cannot within the limited scope of this dissertation be dealt with directly, what will be put forward in what follows are various concepts that are seen as helping undermine an overly individualistic soteriology and positively helping provide provocative fundamental concepts that help broaden an evangelical understanding of the nature and scope of God's salvific work in his world.

5.3 The Broadening of Evangelical Horizons within its Soteriology towards More Communal Considerations

When one considers the soteriology of evangelicalism, as we have seen and will see in greater depth is that there has been a growing awareness particularly among various evangelical theologians and commentators on the evangelical movement that evangelical soteriology is either becoming or needing to become more aware of certain communal strands within the biblical witness impinging on its understanding of some key aspects of this doctrine. If we go back to a significant and influential work by Robert Banks published in 1994 entitled, *Paul's Idea of Community*, he boldly stated based on his studies of Pauline literature, "The Gospel is not a purely personal matter. It has a social dimension. It is a community affair. To embrace the gospel, then, is to enter into community. One cannot have the one without the other" (26). Banks made this statement based on the fact that Paul not only proclaimed Christ as the means by which people are brought "into an intimate relationship with God," but also has as a consequence a "personal relationship with one another" (ibid.). In other words, "for Paul the gospel bound believers to one another as well as to God." The support for such an assertion Banks grounded in the following Pauline collocations:

> Acceptance by Christ necessitated acceptance of those whom he had already welcomed (Romans 15:7); reconciliation with God entailed reconciliation with others who exhibited the character of gospel preaching (Phil 4:2-3); union in the

Spirit involved union with one another for the Spirit was primarily a shared, not individual experience. (2 Cor 13:14; Phil 2:1; Eph 4:3). (Ibid.)

At much the same time when Banks was writing, Stanley Grenz was calling for the recognition by evangelicals that God's program includes far more than "the salvation of the isolated individual" (1993, p. 184). While affirming the evangelical concern that God's agenda "in the world is directed to individual humans in the midst of their sin and need," his critique of this emphasis was that it all too often ended up "reflecting a truncated soteriology" in that it failed to take into account that God's "program overflows the individual to encompass social interaction" (ibid.). Furthermore, Grenz made the call to evangelicals to see that God's plan includes much more than redeemed individuals, as important as this truth is. Added to this longstanding awareness needs to be the understanding that God "intends to bring forth a corporate, reconciled body, 'one new humanity' (Eph 2:14-19), living in the redeemed new creation" (ibid., p. 185). For Grenz,

> This corporate-cosmic dimension of God's program reflects a complete biblical soteriology, which is related to the complete biblical picture of the nature of guilt and estrangement. We are guilty before God and estranged from God. But this guilt and estrangement are also experienced in our relationships with one another, with ourselves and with creation. Consequently, the salvific program of God is not only directed to establishing "peace with God"; it extends to the healing of relationships—to ourselves, to one another and to nature. (Ibid.)

As we consider Banks and Grenz's observation that any explication of evangelical soteriology must be cognizant of the biblical witness that it has a significant communal dimension, and as we considered earlier on in this chapter the various evangelical ways of thinking that have historically led to an overemphasis on the individual in salvation matters almost to the exclusion of the communal, what themes might we consider that offer the promise of bringing the more communal in evangelical soteriology into focus? While a number of themes can be suggested, a good starting

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point has to be incorporating some insights from a Trinitarian soteriology. If we grant as was pointed out in Chapter 3, following the thinking of Roderick Leupp that "there is no theological place, however studied or casual, where the trinitarian perspective is not welcome and indeed necessary" (2008, p. 12), then this certainly is an encouraged starting point. Furthermore, this starting point takes seriously the call of Jonathan Wilson speaking in the context of revisioning evangelical soteriology to make sure that the trinitarian nature of our faith is "explicit and exposed" (2002, p. 192). Following on from engaging in developing some aspects of a trinitarian soteriology, must be a greater emphasis on union with Christ than has been prevalent among evangelicals. Why this comes next will become evident and will serve as an intermediate step towards developing a soteriology that is more conscious of what it means to live out more fully persons being made in the image of God.

As these major themes are developed, various other sub-themes will come into focus along the way such as "salvation as teleological" (Wilson 2002, p. 186) which is much along the lines of what Grenz is talking about above. What is meant by this is that salvation must be viewed more by evangelicals "as a goal-directed process" (ibid.). In Wilson's estimation, evangelicals have been good at describing what we are saved from, but they have been not so good at describing what we are saved for. What this has meant is that certain rich communal themes of scripture with regard to the goal of salvation have been downplayed or viewed as secondary among evangelicals. What is more, we will come to see that we are not just saved for heaven; we are saved for a particular role in the interim. Furthermore, even in allowing our conception of sin to be broadened where often the emphasis is on what we have been saved from, we will be encouraged

to see what we are saved for as even the biblical understanding of sin moves us away from purely individualistic concerns and more communal considerations.

Another sub-theme that will appear along the way has to do with the critique of evangelicalism that it tends towards a "disembodied, decontextualized soteriology" (ibid., p. 189). The particular critique and proposed corrective in view here has to do with making too great a disconnect between salvation and this present life with its social, cultural and relational—embodiment—dimensions. Salvation and our situatedness need to be given greater attention. This will go a long way towards addressing the various dualisms that were described as being prevalent in evangelical thinking earlier on in this chapter.[109]

5.3.1 A Trinitarian Soteriology that is
More Communally Oriented

In Chapter 4 of this dissertation, a significant aspect of that chapter was to demonstrate the parallels between our life as God's people and God's trinitarian life with its emphasis on relationality and *perichoresis* which are both significant emphases within a social trinitarian development of this fundamental doctrine. It was asserted that the trinitarian life that we are invited to participate in by God holds out much promise

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[109]Another sub-theme that could be covered is that of salvation and the creation, or what might be referred to as "cosmological soteriology". Salvation has according to Wilson been viewed among evangelicals as more salvation "from creation rather than with creation" (2002., p. 187). That there are those who see the importance for picking up on this aspect of salvation is to be expected because evangelicals have tended to so individualise salvation that any notion of expanding salvation to the world we live in with others and having a responsibility as saved people in some way towards creation is not given sufficient theological basis and consideration. I will not be covering this aspect of salvation in this chapter due to the extended treatment it requires, but it will be an area developed to some extent in Chapter 6 when dealing with the significance of the people of God and their role in this present age as we move towards a new heavens and a new earth.

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for a theology of the individual-in-community. A significant point of summary and conclusion at the end of Chapter 4 was that a social trinitarian perspective brings one to the important understanding that as God's people we are invited to participate in the trinitarian indwelling of the triune God by entering into loving relationship with Him and reproducing this among ourselves as God's people. Therefore, I concur with Stanley Grenz that a significant outcome of this truth that God's reality is a triune one, is that His salvific purposes must include and be seen as "directed toward bringing God's highest creation—humankind—to reflect the eternal divine nature, that is, bringing us to be in actuality the image of God" (1993, p. 185). For Grenz a certain logic prevails that merits our consideration: If God is a triune being who is best understood as a social being, his salvific work must go beyond the mere saving of the individual soul as God is not solitary; it must include God's people not only reflecting but also participating in the triune life. The reconciling work of Christ is not only to reconcile us to Christ, but to reconcile us to one another—"a fellowship of reconciliation"—thereby being enabled to participate in God's divine reality (ibid., p. 188).

According to Fred Sanders, at its core, evangelical Christianity bears testament "most clearly … to the fact that the personal salvation we experience is reconciliation with God the Father, carried out through God the Son, in the power of God the Holy Spirit" (2010, p. 9). With this understanding, Sanders makes the sweeping statement that "evangelical Christians have been in reality the most thoroughly Trinitarian Christians in the history of the church" (ibid.). Because evangelicals are gospel centred Christians, Sanders reminds us that "the gospel is Trinitarian, and the gospel is the Trinity. Christian salvation comes through the Trinity, happens through the Trinity, and brings us home to the Trinity" (ibid., p. 10).

But, while evangelicals in one sense have been Trinitarian in that they have acknowledged the three persons of the Trinity in various ways, according to Sanders, in evangelicalism "that presupposition has been for too long left unexpressed, tacit rather than explicit, and taken for granted rather than celebrated and taught" (ibid., 11).[110] His exhortation is that evangelicals "are at risk of lapsing into sub-Trinitarian practices and beliefs," of acting as though they "serve a merely unipersonal deity rather than the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit." Evangelicals "are at risk of staying in the shallows" as they are all too often merely about "the moment of conversion" (ibid., p. 12). Evangelical shallowness can largely be attributed to the neglect of the Trinitarian nature of evangelical faith rooted in the gospel. That a neglect of Trinitarian thinking has in particular affected evangelicals deeper understanding of the gospel and salvation is brought out in the following elaboration by Sanders when he says,

> Our great need is to be led further in to what we already have. The gospel is so deep that it not only meets our deepest needs but comes from God's deepest self. The salvation proclaimed in the gospel is not some mechanical operation that God took on as a side project. It is a "mystery that was kept for long ages" (Rom. 16:25), a mystery of salvation that goes back into the heart of God, decreed "before the foundation of the world" (Eph. 1:4; 1 Pet. 1:20). When God undertook our salvation, he did it in a way that put divine resources into play, resources which involve him personally in the task. The more we explore and understand the depth of God's commitment to salvation, the more we have to come to grips with the triunity of the one God. The deeper we dig in to the gospel, the deeper we go in to the mystery of the Trinity. (Ibid., p. 13)

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[110] T.F. Torrance is of the opinion that a much more robust and more biblical doctrine of salvation is better understood through the grid of Trinitarianism which needs to be more explicitly stated and developed: "salvation means union with Christ and being adopted as sons and daughters of the Father in the incorporating communion of the Holy Spirit. Even the tempting alternative that salvation in Jesus Christ involves an implicit awareness of the Triune God should be regarded as insufficient. In fact, in theology and ministry alike, it is precisely this assumed adequacy of implicit Trinitarianism that paved the way towards both implicit neglect and explicit rejection of the doctrine of the Trinity." See Dick O. Eugenio's analysis of T.F. Torrance's soteriology in *Communion with the Triune God: The Trinitarian Soteriology of T. F. Torrance* (2004, Kindle locations 4921-25)

Therefore, for Sanders and others, as we will see in due course, a more robust understanding of the gospel and salvation will come out of understanding these important biblical concepts in the light of the Trinity.

One theologian who championed the idea that the importance of our understanding of the Trinity must underlie our understanding of the gospel and salvation is Thomas F. Torrance. Building on the biblical theme of God is love spoken of in 1 John 4:8 and following, Torrance reminds us that while God did manifest his love for people by "sending his only Son into the world so that we might live through him," this truth does not mean that God is Love in virtue of his love for us, but that God is in himself the perfection of Love in loving and being loved which out of sheer love overflows freely towards others." This God who is Love "is the eternally loving One in himself who loves through himself, whose Love moves unceasingly within his eternal Life as God, so that in loving us in the gift of his dear Son and the mission of his Spirit he loves us with the very Love which he is." Therefore, what constitutes the very heart of the gospel, according to Torrance, is that this very "Communion of Love which the One God eternally is in himself, and is indeed towards us … freely and lovingly moves outward toward others whom God creates for fellowship with himself so that they may share with him the very Communion of Love which is his own divine Life and Being" (1996, pp. 5-6).

Why this is so important for Torrance has to do with how we perceive of the evangelical events described in the New Testament of God's manifestation of himself, through the Son and by the Holy Spirit. His caution is that what is described in the historical events ends up being "empty if they are sundered from their roots in history." What he means by this is comes out in what follows:

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They (the evangelical events) have saving import for us only if the historical presentation of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit flow from and direct us back to personal realities inside the divine Life. That is to say, the historical manifestation of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit have evangelical and theological significance only as they have a transhistorical and transfinite reference beyond to an ultimate ground in God himself. They cannot be Gospel if their reference breaks off at the finite boundaries of this world of space and time, for as such they would be empty of divine validity and saving significance—that would be to leave us trapped in some kind of historical positivism. The historical manifestations of the Trinity are *Gospel*, however, if they are grounded beyond history in the personal distinctions between the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit inherent in the Godhead, that is, if the Fatherhood of the Father, the Sonship of the Son, and the Communion of the Spirit belong to the inner Life of God and constitute his very Being. (Ibid., p. 6)

Based on Torrance's development above of how closely we need to hold the historical revelation of the triune God with who God is in himself, it helps us understand why he concludes that the "economic Trinity might well be spoken of as the *evangelical Trinity* and the ontological Trinity as the *theological Trinity*." It is "evangelical" in the sense "that knowledge of the Trinity is evangelically grounded because 'it is revealed to us through the incarnate or human economy which Christ undertook toward us, in the midst of us, and for our sakes'" (Eugenio 2014, pp. 158-59; cf. Torrance 1996, p. 7). "Torrance opts for the term evangelical Trinity because of his emphasis on the evangelical-soteriological nature of the Triune God, because there is no God who is not a redeeming God" (Eugenio 2014, p. 159). It is "theological," according to Torrance, in the sense that the Trinity "refers to the truth of the eternal Being and Activity of God as he is in himself, the essential Deity, or 'Theology'" (ibid.). Therefore, Torrance's understanding of the Trinity is truly evangelical in that it is grounded in the understanding that we come to know God as he inherently is in himself through "what he is towards us in Jesus Christ, and that the economy of God's grace in Jesus Christ is nothing other than a revelation of the Trinitarian relations of God's own being" (ibid., p.

22) What God is *ad extra* is what he is *in se* and therefore the Gospel is inseparable from who God is.

As one reads Thomas Torrance on the Trinity and his elaboration of the evangelical Trinity and the theological Trinity and without going into too much further detail as to how exactly these two interrelate at an epistemological level, his insistence is that if we assume that the Triune life of God that people are invited into is at the very core of the gospel, then this truth must broaden the way salvation is understood. This is at the very heart of what Torrance is wanting to communicate and is the explicit centre of Fred Sanders work already referred to in Chapter 4 of this dissertation entitled, *The Deep Things of God: How the Trinity Changes Everything,* where he makes Torrance's point in an abbreviated way: "the Trinity is the Gospel." According to Sanders, this is so "because the good news of salvation is ultimately that God opens his Trinitarian life to us." Therefore, the gospel must be understood as God "graciously taking us into the fellowship of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit to be our salvation" (2010, p. 98). Going back to Torrance, this truth of God as Trinity being the eternal ground out of which flows the gospel which is God's "communion-seeking love and grace toward us is" being a reflection and extension of the *perichoretic* life that exists between the members of the Trinity is stated in the following way:

> The Father is not properly (*kurios*) Father apart from the Son and the Spirit, and the Son is not properly Son apart from the Father and the Spirit, and the Spirit is not properly Spirit apart from the Father and the Son, for by their individual characteristics or distinctive properties as Father, Son and Holy Spirit, they exist in and through one Another and belong to and ever live for each Other. Each person is intrinsically who he is for the other two. They coinhere in one Another by virtue of the dynamic Communion which they constitute in their belonging to one Another. Hence in establishing communion with us through his Son and in his Spirit God wants us to participate in this living Communion which as Father, Son and Holy Spirit he eternally is, and it is thus that the nature of his divine Being is disclosed to us as Communion, *ousia* as *koinonia*. (op. cit., pp. 132-33)

Roderick Leupp similarly makes this point that salvation is to be joined in the divine life. For him, "(t)his is salvation." Quoting Geoffrey Wainwright, the following elaboration is offered: "Salvation is to be drawn, in a way appropriate to creatures, into the very life of God, to be given by the graciousness of God a share in the communion of the divine persons." With this concept in mind, the conclusion is drawn that salvation cannot be a "once-only simplicity" but must be "a continual immersion" sustained by the three persons of the Trinity (Leupp 2008, p. 143). Or to put it another way, "salvation, instead of being neatly encapsulated as 'accepting Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour,'" a rather reductionist formula commonly used by evangelicals, "should actually be perceived from a trinitarian angle: salvation means union with Christ and being adopted as sons and daughters of the Father in the incorporating communion of the Holy Spirit" (Eugenio 2014, p. 156).

Furthermore, not only does this concept of being drawn into the very life of the triune God in salvation as "a continual immersion" seem to be a helpful and promising extrapolation of trinitarian theology, but the New Testament embraces and reinforces this concept in the language that it uses where not only are we drawn into the community of God individually but communally. For example, as pointed out in Chapter 4 of this dissertation, Jesus uses the language of in-ness applying it to believers: "I in you, you in me; … The father and I will come to you; … We will send (our) Spirit; … As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you; … Love one another as I have loved you" (selected from John 14-17); or consider Paul's language: "The church … the dwelling place of God by the Spirit" (Eph. 2:20,21); or Peter's where he says through God's "great promises … you may become partakers of the divine nature" (2 Peter 1:4). Putting all of these statements together, it can be seen why Robert Henderson says, "Our *good news/gospel* is

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incomplete without that corporate dimension of God's great salvation" (2006, p. 134). It should not come as a surprise to us, as Douglas Hall insists, that "the Trinity is nothing more or less than an extension of the fundamental ontic insistence that God … is being-with, that is, God is love (1 Jn. 4:16)," and that a major theme declared in the New Testament is that God yearns "for ever more actualized expressions of mutuality" that finds its fullest expression possible in God-with-us (Emmanuel) (1986, p. 120). So, here again we find the reiteration that the economic or evangelical Trinity reveals the ontic or theological Trinity, as expressed by Thomas Torrance, and that our understanding of salvation cannot be separated from this fundamental conceptualization; we cannot separate what the scriptures hold together.

If we concede and affirm that the concept of the Trinity as portrayed in the Bible implies a rudimentary ontology of being-with and that the triune God "is the source and ground of being" for us as God's people, as Hall puts it (ibid.), then surely a primary way of conceiving of salvation must be as the beginning of the restoration of what God saw as broken, namely, people being-in-relationship. If among evangelicals, the primary way of constructing soteriology is by focusing on "the position or status" (Coppedge 2007, p. 279) of the believer so that the individual soul is saved in the *eschato*n, then what can easily be eclipsed is any concept that we are saved to be in relationship so that we more fully reflect what it means to be created in the image of God.[111] To give greater

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[111] Allan Coppedge makes the point in his, *The God Who Is Triune: Revisioning the Christian Doctrine of God,* that according to the New Testament salvation "is about transformation and relationships, not just position or status." He bases this understanding on the following: "Our understanding of salvation focuses on having a life-giving relationship with Jesus. The Gospel of John is important to this perspective because it describes salvation in terms of finding life in Jesus (Jn 3:36; 20:30-31). Salvation is also described in terms of regeneration, or the remaking of persons as God intended them to be (Tit 3:5). Paul

prominence to the position or status of an individual in salvation to the exclusion or diminishment of the relational aspect is to ultimately say that an evangelical understanding of the Trinity has little or no bearing on its soteriology which is the point Sanders makes above.

So, when a major criticism of evangelicalism's soteriology as expressed by Louise Kretzschmar is that "salvation is understood primarily (if not exclusively) as the justification and sanctification of the individual," and that "conversion is conceived of as beginning and ending with the individual's relationship with God" (op. cit., p. 131), a helpful corrective to this kind of thinking is to demonstrate how far short this thinking falls in reflecting Trinitarian life. What is not denied is the need for individual justification and sanctification, nor the need for "personal relationship," but if our salvation is grounded in the Triune God who is for us and for others, and that relationship is a primary category in who God is and what he wants us to reflect, then Kretzschmar's critique takes on even greater force. The contention here is that if Trinitarian thinking underlies evangelical soteriology, all sorts of dualisms begin to erode: the individual and the communal, doctrine and ethics, the private and the social, being the more obvious ones. All of these dualisms cannot withstand the critique of a triune God who is active in relationship in history reflecting who He is eternally. If salvation is "joining," "sharing and "participating" in the life of the Trinity made

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also describes salvation as becoming a new creation (2 Cor 5:17). The triune God, who originally gave life at creation, sent his Son into the world to make it possible for persons to be re-created in his image. Through the Spirit, people are made alive in Christ and remade in the image of the Creator (Eph 2:5; Col 3:10)." More will be said as this dissertation progresses about salvation and the re-creation of the image of God in persons and what this means.

possible by the Trinity, it is difficult to see how one can so prioritize the individual over the communal in salvation when recognizing the very Source of this great salvation.

In the light of these statements about the Trinity and our life as Christians, we find ourselves resonating with those who warn us against an understanding of "personal relationship" that is simply "a pointer to our richly developed inwardness in its religious manifestation," or "a monotonously self-referential and inwardly focused piety," as Fred Sanders describes this evangelical tendency. Rather, trinitarian salvation is personal in so far as it enables one to enter deeply into the richness of divine life (2010, p. 191). Eugene Peterson takes this concept further when he says, the perichoretic life of the "Trinity is a steady call and invitation to participate in the energetically active life of God. … We are not spectators to God, there is always a hand reaching out to pull us into the trinitarian actions of holy creation, holy salvation and holy community" (2004, pp. 243-44). Therefore, we cannot know God simply "through impersonal abstractions, … through programmatic projects," or "in solitary isolation. The Trinity insists that God is not an idea or a force or a private experience but personal and only known in personal response and engagement" in a world far larger "than we can imagine on our own" (ibid., p. 243).

5.3.2 Union with Christ as a Significant Individual-in-Community Soteriological Theme

Because salvation within evangelicalism has not been typically conceived in this way where God's work in salvation is understood as participating in the life of the Trinity in so far as we can as human beings where God initiates and sustains this relationship out of his very being, we discover another area of soteriology, already referred to in this chapter incidentally, that is being revisited among evangelicals: the

theme of union with Christ. Why this is an important aspect of salvation that needs to be revisited especially by evangelicals who are concerned about the communal becoming more central to evangelical theology, will become evident as this section develops. While a full exploration of this doctrine cannot be undertaken here, the promise of our union with Christ in some of its aspects will be used to demonstrate how God specifically enables us to participate in his life with its rich relational, communal overtones.

When talking of our union with Christ, we are talking of a concept derived from and encompassing a variety of particularly Pauline and Johannine terms, expressions and images that denote a believer's oneness with Christ. Of the terms or expressions that are most ubiquitous is the Pauline phrase "in Christ" or some cognate thereof. Some examples of these are where believers either individually or corporately are described as inheritors of eternal life in Christ (Rom. 6:23); elected in Christ (Eph. 1:4); called in Christ (1 Cor. 1:9); sanctified in Christ (1 Cor. 1:2); justified in Christ (Rom. 8:1); glorified in Christ (Rom. 8:30; 2 Cor. 3:18); made alive in Christ (15:22; Eph. 2:5); created anew in Christ (2 Cor. 5:17); adopted as children of God in Christ (Gal. 3:26); and raised with Christ (Col. 3:1). As we look at these descriptions of what it means to being "in Christ," it is becomes clear why Marcus Johnson says "this phrase is simply what it means to *be* a Christian (cf. Rom. 16:1-13; Phil. 4:21; Col. 1:2)" (2013, p. 19). So important is this concept that Robert Reymond describes it as "the fountainhead from which flows the Christian's every spiritual blessing" (2010, p.739).

As we read the Apostle Paul further, he expands this concept even more which will begin to move us toward an important conclusion being made particularly as we

observe the participatory language used first by Paul and then by John in the New

Testament. According to the Apostle Paul, believers through being in Christ have been

> crucified with him (Gal. 2:20), buried with him (Rom. 6:3), united with him in his resurrection (Rom. 6:5), and seated with him in the heavenly places (Eph. 2:6); Christ being formed in believers (Gal. 4:19) and dwelling in our hearts (Eph. 3:17); the church as members—limbs and organs—of Christ's body (1 Cor. 6:15; 12:27); Christ in us (2 Cor. 13:5) and us in him (1 Cor. 1:30); the church as one flesh with Christ (Eph. 5:31-32); and believers gaining Christ/being found in him (Phil. 3:8-9). (Johnson 2013:19-20)

Therefore, Paul's concept of union with Christ incorporates us into Christ's death and

resurrection and that believers now find their life "in Christ." This ubiquitous imagery is

one of the most comprehensive images used by him for salvation itself.

Moving on to the Johannine writings, he also uses the "union with Christ"

concept just as prolifically as does Paul. As we look at his imagery and lexis, Jesus is

said to abide in us and us in him (John 6:56; 15:4-7) which is made possible by Jesus

himself and the Spirit (1 John 3:24; 4:12-16). We are said to be one with Christ and the

Father (John 14:20; 17:21-23). Jesus as the true vine is the one in who we are to abide

and apart from this abiding, believers can do nothing (John 15:1-5). Jesus is described as

the living water (John 4:14; 7:37) and the bread of life (John 6:33, 48) and it is in the

eating and drinking of his flesh and blood that eternal life is found (John 6:53-57). In

Jesus is the resurrection and life (John 11:25).

What is quite remarkable as one studies particularly the perichoretic language of

John is that not only does he speak of the Father and the Son indwelling one another

where they are said to be "in" one another, but this serves as a precursor to saying that

believers are in some sense both in the Father and in the Son. For example in John 14:20

we read, "In that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in

you." Later on in John 17:22-23, Jesus says, "The glory that you have given me I have

given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me." In the light of this Johannine train of thought, Jesus' very definition of the believing community is that they indwell the Father and the Son. Jesus and believers indwell one another such that they mutually abide in one another.

Therefore, union with Christ incorporates this amazing truth that the mutual indwelling that exists between Father and Son also applies to believers. (Peterson 2015; Kindle 7635) While it is right to insist that the Creator/creature distinction must be maintained in that believers do not share in the Godhead's divinity, this mutual indwelling of Father, Son and believer means that we must not diminish

> the fact that the divine persons have fellowship with us (1 John 1:3), and we with them, due to the Trinity's grace! The initiative and glory belong to them alone, but the fellowship that results is also ours. It is mysterious and marvellous indeed to try and understand how Christians are "in" the Trinity. In a way fitting for creatures and only by grace, through and in Christ we participate in the divine love and life the Trinitarian persons have always shared. (Ibid.)

In studying both the Pauline and Johannine language and assertions about the nature of salvation and what it means to be in Christ, we find ourselves concurring with Marcus Johnson that they "are of a vital, organic, and personal nature" (op. cit., p. 20). Jesus is more than just a provider of various spiritual blessings such as eternal life, abundant life, or resurrection life, but he "*is in himself* the blessings he provides." In the writings of Paul and in John, so emphatic is the personalization of salvation that we are driven to conclude that not only are believers beneficiaries of various salvation blessings because of our being united with Christ, but that "they are not available to us except *by*

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our participation in Christ's life" (ibid.).[112] But even more than this, as we listen to the Apostle Paul and John and the references to the Father and the Spirit and their involvement to us being in Christ, we must bring all of these truths to bear such that "the good news of salvation is ultimately that God opens his Trinitarian life to us. Every other blessing is either a preparation for that or a result of it, but the thing itself is God graciously taking us into the fellowship of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, to be our salvation."[113] This insight of Fred Sanders (2010, p. 98) is at once both Christocentric but not "Father-forgetful and Spirit-ignoring" (ibid., p. 175) and points us in the direction that the Trinitarian shape of salvation "is the horizon against which we must understand our salvation in Christ" (ibid.).

Therefore, the promise of our being united with Christ not only is a primary way of conceiving of salvation but also points to the concept that salvation is not just a matter of being saved and gaining future salvation through Christ; it reveals that salvation is participation in the very life of God and cannot be separated from the economy of the communal life that God desires in the present that points to the life that will be in the future. Just as God is one in the shared life that exists between Father, Son

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[112] Wayne Grudem says in this regard that "there is a real, personal dwelling of Christ in us and that this does not mean that we merely agree with Christ or that his ideas are in us. Rather, *he* is in us and remains in us through faith (Eph. 3:17; 2 Cor. 13:5)" (1995, p. 845).

[113] Wayne Grudem explains based on several scriptural references that "because we are in union with Christ in these several relationships, we also are brought into union with the Father and with the Holy Spirit. We are *in the Father* (John 17:21; 1 Thess. 1:1; 2 Thess. 1:1; 1 John 2:24; 4:15–16; 5:20) and *in the Holy Spirit* (Rom. 8:9; 1 Cor. 3:16; 6:19; 2 Tim. 1:14). *The Father is in us* (John 14:23) and *the Holy Spirit is in us* (Rom. 8:9, 11). We are *like the Father* (Matt. 5:44–45, 48; Eph. 4:32; Col. 3:10; 1 Peter 1:15–16) and *like the Holy Spirit* (Rom. 8:4–6; Gal. 5:22–23; John 16:13). We have fellowship *with the Father* (1 John 1:3; Matt. 6:9; 2 Cor. 6:16–18) and *with the Holy Spirit* (Rom. 8:16; Acts 15:28; 2 Cor. 13:14; Eph. 4:30)" (1995, p. 847).

and Spirit, so do we in our union with Christ share in fellowship with them and with one another. Damien Casey sums up well the essence of what is being asserted here:

> Salvation is social and communal, not isolated and individualistic. We are not saved alone but as members of a single human family. Salvation is social and communal especially because of our faith in the Holy Trinity. The determining element of our humanity is the fact that we are created in the image of God, and that means the image of the Holy Trinity which is not merely personal but interpersonal. God as Trinity is not a unit but a union; not self-love but shared love. God is communion and as Trinity is mutuality, self-giving, "I and Thou."[114]

It is with this development in mind that in a more sustained way in chapter 6 of this dissertation, the argument will be made that the Trinitarian nature of our salvation which our being united with Christ enables must undergird our ecclesiology. A major implication of believers union with Christ is that it inevitably and inseparably links soteriology to ecclesiology.

That there is need among evangelicals to revisit and explore this important facet of soteriology, union with Christ, is brought out by Marcus Johnson in his work, *One with Christ: An Evangelical Theology of Salvation,* when he says, "In far too many evangelical expressions of the gospel, the saving work of Christ has been so distanced from his person that the notion of a saving *personal* union with the incarnate, crucified, resurrected, *living* Jesus strikes us as rather outlandish" (2013, p. 15). Johnson is not alone in his observation that ordinary evangelicals have generally distanced themselves from a theology of union with Christ. Todd Billings makes a similar claim in his book,

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[114] For a detailed and helpful discussion of the nature of our salvation in Christ with a primary emphasis on various models of salvation that have been conceived ever since the Christological controversies of the fourth and fifth centuries but with primary emphasis on the model of "participation" in the divine life of the Triune God, see Damien Casey's, "The Nature of our Salvation in Christ: Salvation as Participation and Divinization" in the e-journal, Theology@McAuley, Issue Three, 2002. http://dlibrary.acu.edu.au/staffhome /dacasey/salvationasparticipation.html, accessed 21 October 2015.

Union with Christ: Reframing Theology and Ministry for the Church. The reasons given by Johnson and Billings as to why they make this assessment is instructive and compelling particularly where their assessment reveals those tendencies among evangelicals which have the unfortunate effect of diminishing an area of soteriology that has such promise for a theology of the individual-in-community.

As we listen to Billings, his assessment of why evangelicals generally tend to ignore or at least neglect a doctrine like union with Christ begins with some sociological analysis. Following the insight of sociologists Robert Wuthnow and Christian Smith, Billings' derived insight is "that while many Americans, for example, claim to be 'Christian,' their theology is often much more deistic than Christian." What this means is that salvation is viewed "in terms of the benefits it provides to the individual and their self-confidence rather than in terms of a restored communion with God and neighbor." Therefore, the unfortunate result is that "(r)eligious traditions are dealt with by "tinkering" mixing and matching from various Christian and non-Christian sources to fill the purpose of solving one's immediate problems" (2011, pp. 19-20).

While Billings sociological critique may be regarded as quite strident and may be dismissed as simply reflective of more superficial forms of general evangelicalism, other more theological reasons are suggested as to why union with Christ is neglected thereby diminishing evangelical soteriology.

That evangelicals have indeed neglected this important doctrine based upon a literature review is the finding of Marcus Johnson. His studied position is that the theological texts that evangelicals tend to turn to whether popular or academic generally neglect this important doctrine. If union with Christ is dealt with at all (in some texts it is totally absent), it is either regarded as non-primary and subsumed under another loci

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of theology or sentimentalised. Even where it is ostensibly dealt with as important, such treatments "ultimately fall short of demonstrating why it is central to understanding salvation as a whole" (op. cit., pp. 25-26). However, in his footnotes Johnson points to Billings book referred to above and a few others where union with Christ among a few evangelical academics is now being given a more central status (ibid., pp. 26).

A reason as to why union with Christ has been neglected in evangelical theological literature stems from the observation that "personal, organic, participational categories have been assigned at best a secondary place in evangelical soteriological understanding" (ibid.). What have been given greater prominence in evangelical soteriology are the legal or forensic aspects. This is made particularly evident by the prominence given to such doctrines as justification with its legal aspects emphasised. While an emphasis on justification has biblical warrant, what Johnson and others are questioning is why justification and doctrines like union with Christ are even separated. "Luther and Calvin believed that justification depends on union with Christ for its cogency" and it is from union with Christ the "the reality from which to articulate a particularly rich, classically Protestant understanding of justification" comes (ibid.). While a comprehensive study of this assertion is beyond the scope of this dissertation, Johnson is not alone in his questioning of this separation.[115]

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[115] While a full development of the term "justification" as it relates to other soteriological aspects such as union with Christ is beyond the scope of this dissertation, helpful and provocative discussions regarding justification continue to draw attention for good reason. Justification has been largely understood within a judicial framework with its forensic aspect being highlighted, while the ongoing aspects of salvation have been understood more in relational terms. This dichotomy of understanding justification as legal and the ongoing aspects of the Christian life as relational is what is being question and regarded as artificial. While there is a declarative aspect to justification, a more helpful paradigm for understanding justification is in the context of relationship. Derek Flood brings this out in the following explanation:

Another reason why contemporary evangelicals have tended to neglect or diminish a doctrine like union with Christ stems from what was developed in a significant way in chapter three of this dissertation: the evangelical tendency to neglect tradition, particularly "the theological tradition from which it springs" (ibid.). According to Johnson, evangelicals have tended to ignore the past running the risk of "historical amnesia" which in turn leads to a lack of theological depth and identity. "Union with Christ is among those doctrines that, while historically well attested, have escaped the notice of our churches" (ibid., pp. 26-27). When evangelicals overlook this important aspect of soteriology, what Johnson and Billings bemoan is the neglect of a doctrine that was not only central to early church theologians such as Irenaeus of Lyons (140-200), Athanasius of Alexandria (296-373), Augustine of Hippo (354-430), and Cyril of Alexandria (375-444), but also among Reformers like Luther and Calvin. If this were not the case among evangelicals, Billings assessment is that "the functional or 'lived' theologies of salvation in the West" would not have the deficiencies it does in those areas where "a Reformational theology of union with Christ has strengths" (op. cit., p. 20). The positive aspect derived from an understanding of union with Christ in tradition

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"Justification in our lives involves a positional change where we are brought out of darkness and into God's family, and thus 'set right'. Understood in this relational context justification is a change of identity, a relational change of who we belong to. … Being placed in our new identity, sanctification naturally flows from justification as we grow in love. Understanding the concept of justification by grace in Paul's epistles from this relational framework fits much better with the entire thrust of his writing and terminology, whereas in a legal paradigm the terms quickly become confusing and problematic." See Derek Flood's article, "An Evangelical Relational Theology: A Personal Relationship with God as Theological Leitmotif" (2007). For a differently nuanced position from a reformed and evangelical theologian, Michael Horton wants it to be known that the classical covenant position wants to maintain the legal and the relational when he says that "the solidarity of the body with its head is simultaneously legal and relational, judicial and familial. In such a union, there can be no facile oppositions between law and love, the courtroom and the family room, a verdict of righteousness *extra nos*, and an organic, living, and growing relationship in which the justified grow up into Christ" (2007, p. 130).

is that it fundamentally meant that salvation is participation by the believer in the triune life of God. Johnson, after reading the work by Donald Fairburn, *Life in the Trinity*, deems he makes a compelling argument that in tradition our union with Christ through the Spirit meant that as believers we "share in the personal relation and love between the Father and the Son, and in the manifold blessings that result" (op. cit., p. 21). This understanding within tradition, says Fairburn, was based first and foremost on an understanding derived from the writings of Paul and John where they always wrote of salvation in the context of dealing with the working of God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit. Furthermore, whenever Paul and John wrote concerning salvation, "the context for the discussion was a treatment of God, of Christ, of the Holy Spirit. And whenever they did write of different aspects of salvation, they made clear that these aspects hinged on and revolved around participation in Christ" (ibid.). Therefore, based upon what is "ubiquitous and regnant" not only within scripture itself but also what was so among theologians and pastors who have guided the church for centuries, evangelicalism has largely ignored this rich tradition to its detriment (ibid., pp. 20-27).

A final and more conjectural reason, by Johnson's own admission, as to why among evangelicals there has been a tendency to neglect a more robust understanding of our participation in Christ which the doctrine of union of Christ points to is our modern aversion to "embrace mystery at the heart of our faith confession. … To many evangelical ears, 'union with Christ' terminology and imagery sound 'mystical,' and we prefer to cede mystical concepts and categories to Roman Catholic and eastern Orthodox theologies" (ibid., p. 27). Not only has this resulted in a failure to understand the role of mystery in our faith, but it has more importantly lead to an unfortunate separation of soteriology and ecclesiology. How does Johnson arrive at this conclusion?

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First of all, says Johnson, there has been a failure to make a distinction between mysticism and mystery in evangelical theology. Mysticism, that "vague speculative, unmediated, and direct experience of God, or absorption into God" is contrasted with that which is true of nearly all of the central evangelicals doctrines where mystery is inevitably encountered: "e.g., the creation of the world *ex nihilo*, the virgin birth, the incarnation, the hypostatic union, the resurrection, the Trinity, the inspiration of Scripture, and others" (ibid.). Despite this very obvious aspect of faith, modern evangelicals are more prepared to give greater priority to those expressions of their faith that are "amenable to logical, rational systematization than to embrace the mysteries of our faith in a state of wonder and confession." In this regard, the statement of K. Scott Oliphant is found helpful: "It is certainly not the case that the relationship of God to the world is absolutely inexplicable; rather, in whatever ways it is explicable, it will always remain for us incomprehensible as well" (ibid.). Therefore, mystery denotes "a reality that can be apprehended, pointed to, and described, but *never* explained, let alone explained away" (ibid.).

Because of this aversion to mystery, Johnson concludes, as already stated above, that this has led to a "regrettable bifurcation of soteriology and ecclesiology." This is the result of not taking "the rich and compelling imagery in Scripture that testifies to the church's living, organic relationship to Jesus Christ" more seriously in a way that the mystery of Christ's body, the church, is not reduced to "mere metaphors and sentiments." When the corresponding identity markers of being the body of Christ, that of baptism and the Lord's Supper, do not "show forth and seal the good news that we truly share in Christ's, burial and resurrection," then these sacraments are diminished and "the church as the body of Christ becomes barely relevant to the gospel of salvation

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'in Christ Jesus.'" Therefore, for Johnson, what compels a recovery of the primary significance of union with Christ is that it

> will provide a way for the evangelical church to see once again why the work of Christ cannot be separated from his person; why the gloriously good news about salvation rests in the church being joined to the One who is salvation himself; and why Jesus Christ is the essence of the church, or else the church is no more than a voluntaristic religious club of like-minded folk. (Ibid., p. 28)

That a theology of union with Christ has such promise for an evangelical theology of the individual-in-community is surfaced even more clearly by Billings. For him, not only does this doctrine centre on the Christian's identity being in Jesus Christ himself and in the Triune God's claim upon the Christian, but also reveals that salvation

> is not self-centered but is a renewal and restoration of the self precisely through orienting the self toward God, toward the church as the body of Christ, and toward the neighbor. Individual believers discover their true identity in communion rather than in a pragmatic, individualistic approach to salvation. … The God encountered in union with Jesus Christ is at once more majestic and more intimate. (Ibid., p. 20)

As one reads both Johnson and Billings, it becomes clear that for them union with Christ has the paradoxical effect of drawing one into the very life of God in Christ which in turn leads to a reorienting of the self away from self-centeredness and towards being the body of Christ which means being for others. Union with Christ speaks of a movement of being drawn deeper into the triune life of God with all of the mystery that this entails enabling the individual to find his or her greater identity by being in communion/fellowship with God and his people. It is in the combining of the social Trinity with the union of Christ that the believer is brought into relationship not only with the Godhead but those who are the objects of his covenantal, "evangelical" (Torrance) love.

5.3.3 The Individual-in-Community and a
Broadened Conception of Salvation from Sin

Another way of bringing into greater focus salvation as the restoration of being-in-relationship which is reflective of Trinitarian life is to consider how sin has so marred the communal dimension and how we need to see sin in the much broader context that defines it. A major criticism of evangelicalism ironically is that while evangelicals claim to take sin seriously, it stands accused of having a very limited view of sin that does not give enough importance to context. Sin is typically individualised such that personal sins are the focus. Louise Kretzschmar's critique is that in evangelicalism "(s)in is primarily conceived of as alienation from God; salvation therefore only means 'getting right with God'. Consequently, sin and salvation are treated as having exclusively vertical (God-human) implications" (1998, p. 24). Scot McKnight describes this evangelical emphasis as being on "an individual, existential, private sin-problem" (2011, p. 37).

With such an emphasis in view, the immediate question that comes to mind is how do evangelicals given to such an individual and private view of sin incorporate an understanding that many sins have deep communal effects: for example our "insularity, our aloneness, our persistent egoism" (Hall 1986, p. 121) that prevent us from meeting, engaging and helping one another; or the support of unjust systems that exploit others for economic gain and deny people basic human rights (Kretzschmar 1998, p. 132) such that there is indeed structural sin that is more than just personal (Sider 1999, p. 199); or racism, imperialism, sexism, xenophobia, tribalism that are persistent sins that have such damaging communal results? To this list could be added many more categories of sins that have significant communal ramifications and stem from not just personal attitudes but peoples socialization and body politic. Robert Sherman helps us see why it will not

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suffice to locate sin merely in individuals. His description of how individual sin and

structural sin are connected is worthy of our attention:

> The repercussions of individual acts embed themselves in a broader context, so that the acts and their context then combine and interact in unexpected ways, and, as a result, become the context in which further individual acts are done. … The upshot is that the morally wrong, the evil, becomes systemic. That is, evil is a matter no longer merely of particular misdeeds but also of broader structures and patterns of being, of received cultures and thought worlds. Past acts shape the ways individuals and societies perceive reality; that perception then becomes the basis upon which individuals, groups, and whole societies engage in further actions—or refrain from acting. A reality established in part by previous actions (or inactions) and their entrenched effects thereby influences or even determines future courses of acting or not acting. (2015, pp. 18-19)

Maybe the answer as to why social or structural sin is not given greater force is

given by Cynthea Moe-Lobeda when she says that the problem is not that social or

structural evil is not acknowledged. In much contemporary theology, and I might add

even within some evangelical theologies, there is this acknowledgement. "Rather," she

emphatically states, "*the crucial point is that social structural sin makes monumental*

demands on the practice of faith and morality and many of those demands remain largely

unacknowledged" (italics hers). A consequence of this is that "many faith communities

response to sin is aimed at the individual's sin, rather than at social structural sin in which

the individual participates simply by living as we do" (2013, p. 58). Hugh Conolly in his

work entitled, *Sin,* calls this the "mistaken mentality" of "taking refuge in the private." It

is the common tendency which is well documented and critiqued of creating a clear

bifurcation between the social realm and the realm of faith and morals. Conolly's

diagnosis is that this stance "affords the individual the possibility of a certain ethical

ambiguity—not to say double-think—in for instance defending human rights on the one

hand while ring-fencing all other aspects of faith and morality as private property" (2002,

p. 117). But the more significant consequence is stated by Moe-Lobeda when she says,

"*To the extent structural sin is not taken seriously, so too, are central aspects of Christian life ignored*" (op. cit.).

This brings us to what we will consider next which is the broader issue of how personal and social ethics in scripture are to be understood in relation to one another. In beginning to develop why she contends that central aspects of the Christian life are ignored when social structural sin is not taken seriously, Moe-Lobeda bases this on the observation that while sin has been understood in various ways throughout church history, the most common misunderstanding is that sin, biblically speaking, is primarily "individual wrongdoings, (including thoughts, words, feelings, acts, etc.)." However, the biblical notion of sin, she says, is far more

> complex and far-reaching. … Sin in its fullest sense refers to disorientation from right relationship with God, which then leads to disorientation with right relationship with self, others, and all of creation. That disorientation results in wrongdoings. Sin is dislocating God from the center of reality. (Ibid.)

That sin must be understood more broadly and cannot be construed biblically as just individual is countered by the Old Testament evangelical Anglican scholar, Christopher Wright. He argues that we read the Old Testament anachronistically when we make a "distinction between personal and social ethics." Rather, "individual ethics are 'community-shaped'" (2004, p. 363). Because this way of thinking is so contrary to our western individualistic way of thought, Wright contends, we need "to undergo a certain reorientation in our habitual pattern of ethical thought in this matter if we are to see things from an Old Testament perspective. We tend to work at the inward level and then work outwards" (ibid.). In this way of thinking, if enough people live out a particularly moral way of life, then society will be transformed so that it will be a conducive environment for the individual pursuit of personal goodness. The emphasis is on the kind of people we

must be, while the kind of society we wish to see lies as a benefit "in the background" (ibid.).

Rather, the way the Old Testament prioritizes its ethics is elaborated on by Wright:

> It says, here is the kind of society the Lord wants. This God's desire is for a holy people, a redeemed community, a model society through whom God can display a prototype of the new humanity he intends to create. God wants a society that will reflect his own character and priorities, especially marked by justice and compassion. Now if *that* is the kind of society God wants, *this* is the kind of person that you must be if you belong to it. Individual ethics are thus derived from the theology of the redeemed people of God. Put another way, individual ethics just as much as social ethics in the Old Testament are *covenantal*. The covenant was established between God and Israel as a *people*, but its moral implications affected every *person* within it. (Ibid., p. 364)

So what Wright does is help us construct a hermeneutical lens through which we are to see individual ethics in the light of the larger picture of social or communal ethics and ultimately theocentrically. That God wanted to form a particular people as a whole to reflect his character in this schema not only has the advantage of being true to the Old Testament but more fully reflects our God who is in relationship and therefore prioritizes relationship and holism. The elevation of personal ethics over the communal is more a product of our western individualism, and ends up diminishing, for example, the social-economic challenges confronted by the Old Testament prophets like Amos, Micah and Isaiah, and diminishes the concept that sin must ultimately be understood in terms of God's character and will corporately and then individually, and that which detracts from them. Therefore, according to Wright, the better way of reading the Old Testament is to look at what kind of society God wanted that reflected him and only then drawing out the individual implications this demanded (ibid.).

In order to begin to show that this is how the New Testament also needs to be read, Wright's development is helpful. While God no longer in the New Testament made

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his focus an ethnic and geographically bound people (the emphasis here being on discontinuity) (ibid., p. 188), the ethics that was introduced in the Old Testament "is wholly in accord with the emphasis in the New Testament" (ibid., p. 364).[116] It is here that Wright sees great continuity. As we look at much of the New Testament's ethical instruction, it "is given in the context of the nature of the community of God" which "has been called into being in Christ." Therefore, the context of individual ethical behavior is that of the "whole church, living, learning and worshiping together and serving Christ in the world" (ibid.). The example given of this priority and progression is of Paul's letter to the Ephesians. In this epistle, we see the great ethical chapters (4-6) that start with the injunction to "live a life worthy of the calling you have received," following on from the first three chapters where "the calling" is described as being "a member of God's new society" where the miracle of social and spiritual reconciliation" has been made possible by God in Christ. "The *personal* moral standards of the later chapters are asserted on the basis of membership of the redeemed *community* expounded in the earlier ones" (ibid.).

That Wright is not alone in his understanding of this hermeneutical principal of beginning with the communal and moving inwards towards the individual when it also comes to the New Testament is attested by Tom Holland in his *Contours of Pauline Theology*. After a detailed study of the "body of Christ" and "the body of sin" in the Pauline corpus, Holland's conclusion is that Paul's theology always begins with the

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[116] Elsewhere, Christopher Wright asks what we as New Testament Christians are to make of the socio-economic aspects which had such great significance in the life of Israel? "Has it all just been transcended, spiritualized and forgotten?" His answer is that it has not as we find in the New Testament, particularly as one tracks the development and use of the concept of *koinonia*, that "in the realm of corporate sharing and practical responsibility," the socio-economic dimension "is just as much a feature of the New as of the Old Testament" (2004, pp. 193-94).

community and then moves to the individual. The basic error that he sees in much New Testament exegesis is that it speaks first and foremost "of the experience of the individual believer." He says, based on his study, that this has been "a mistake of massive proportions, which has left Christianity with an enormous emphasis on the individual with hardly any texts to support its doctrine of the church" (2004, p. 110). His proposal is that we need to begin with the communal aspects of the text which are primary and only then move towards those texts which apply to the individual. "This reverses the whole perspective and by this method we have a strong doctrine of the church, which becomes the basis of understanding the doctrine of individual application" (ibid.).

So drawing on the insights of Wright and Holland, as well as going back to Robert Bank's work cited earlier in this chapter, the best way to understand the ethics of the Old and New Testaments is to see that the communal has a certain priority over the individual, and that the individual finds its necessary context in the communal. This has significant implications for evangelicals as to how they understand the will of God, his redemptive plan that focused on a covenant community, and, more specifically here, what constitutes sin in biblical thought. While sin has a personal dimension to it, and there is individual responsibility, what has been developed above prevents sin from being exclusively individualized and privatized and shown to be more far-reaching and complex. What is more, this more communal approach has the advantage of bringing into greater focus the relational aspect of our life together as God's people reflective of the Triune life that in biblical thought underlies it. If as evangelicals we do take seriously the communal dimensions of the Christian life and that sin mars the social order, then to what extent we should engage in a world where many social ills prevail, and how our soteriology and ultimately our life as the church should be a sign or pointer to an alternate society and life

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becomes all the more poignant.[117] How this can happen to some extent will be taken up in

the sixth chapter of this dissertation, as it is the inevitable challenge if the ramifications of

what is described above are reflective of biblical thought.

As we reflect further on sin as both corporate and personal, communal and

individual, and that the interrelationship of these dimensions is indeed complex and

cannot be simply separated out, a word needs to be said about conversion as being much

more profound and far-reaching than simply individual conversion where personal sin is

the focus. In short, if sin is complex, then conversion too cannot simply be an interior

reality but must also be, as Hugh Connolly says, "an external and relational enterprise.

True conversion is at once interior and exterior" (2002, p. 118). Conversion cannot be

primarily or "substantially" an internal reality which may express itself in outward

relationships. If conversion has to do with all of life, then there is a sense in which ones

"entire life of discipleship … can be seen as a continuous conversion" and "implies the

healing and restoration of all relationships" which is to be expressive of our commitment

(ibid.). While this is a complex task requiring "the wisdom, insight and strength to

transcend, critique, and, if necessary, reject the prevailing values of one's own culture,"

the task of Christians, the theologian and believers in general, is to help surface how the

individual and society relate in complex symbiotic relationship, and to combat sin in all

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[117] Hugh Conolly, in the light of the social dimension of sin, makes the point that sin is the "failure
to respond, failure to strive toward right relations, and failure to be fully responsible is the very essence of
sin. This understanding underscores the inadequacy by itself of a 'debt-language' that places too much
reliance on those models of law and obedience that tend to characterise and indeed caricature sin in a
mechanical, individualistic and actualistic way." (op. cit. p. 148) Damien Casey, concurs that "one can
consider sin as a lack of true humanness, but above all else a loss of relationship. To be human according to
God's Trinitarian image is to love one another after the model of the mutual love of the persons of the
Trinity. Sinfulness as a lack of true humaneness is isolation, from both God and our fellow human beings. It
is the absence of communion." See his article, "The Nature of Our Salvation in Christ: Our Salvation as
Participation and Divinisation," http://dlibrary.acu.edu.au/staffhome/dacasey/salvationasparticipation.html.

of its expressions (ibid., p. 119). Therefore, social structural sin and my sin may be far more closely connected than is often thought, and if the gospel and conversion must in some way address all the sins that so easily besets us, then conversion must be seen as continuous and requisite of our ethical and prophetic voices rendering the "invisible sin visible" (ibid., 118).

5.3.4 The Gospel Including the Restoration of the *Imago Dei* Moves Us away from an Individualistic Conception of Salvation

Having considered how our understanding of the Trinity with its significant relational ontology should underlie our evangelical soteriology and that the evangelical understanding of sin that is such a major emphasis within its anthropology and subsequent soteriology must be understood as not only individual but must be situated within a broader and more complex communal context, some further reflection on the gospel seems appropriate at this point. If the good news of God's saving activity in Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit is a most basic statement of the gospel and that the gospel must include the Christ event which was constituted by his incarnation, death, resurrection and ascension, then how must the gospel be understood so that its contribution to a soteriology of the individual-in-community is more evident? As has already been voiced, there has been a certain amount of disquiet among some evangelical theologians and commentators that the evangelical understanding of the gospel is far too narrow and individualistic. Darrell Guder is one of those who voice this concern, and his analysis of how mainstream evangelicals understand the gospel is captured in the following: "The evangelistic gospel of contemporary postmodern, post-Constantinian, North Atlantic Christianity is … largely individualized" and "has also been privatized" (2000, p. 117). He continues by saying, "The gospel of God's mission in Jesus Christ,

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forming a missional community as its witness, and moving out to the ends of the earth to demonstrate the truth of the inbreaking kingdom, has been reduced to a pallid set of values" (too often defining "the gospel in terms of happiness and evangelizing for success"). In his assessment, "The reductionism is complete" (ibid., p. 188).

In order to have a broader understanding of the gospel that goes beyond mere individualistic understandings, a helpful starting point is to ask two important but fundamental questions: First, how are people saved, and second, why are they saved? As we seek answers to these questions, we will discover much that coheres with what has already been developed in this chapter and dissertation so far. Not only do these questions raise important matters in the light of our sinfulness as human beings, but they are thoroughly ontological in that they ultimately ask what it means to be truly human created in the image of the triune God and united with Christ. Cherith Nordling elaborates and phrases the question this way,

> What does it mean for us as women and men to be saved from our sinful and broken humanity, to have our *imago Dei* redeemed and restored as a new creation in and through Jesus Christ, and to live in relational and ethical correspondence to that present and future reality? What does it mean to have our *human being* transformed and grounded in the true image of God, corporately and individually shaped by the Spirit? In this sense, to ask, "What does it mean to be saved?" is to ask *about being human, being in Christ*, and *being in the Spirit* as differentiated but ontologically equal participants in Christ's body. (2002, p. 116)

Using Nordling as a helpful conversation partner, we first of all cover the matter of how people are saved. Here Nordling is quick to note that she is not asking the related but typical evangelical question of "What does it mean to get saved?" She is averse to this formulation in that it places too much emphasis on "private human attainment" where the emphasis is on "'getting' or 'having' Jesus Christ as personal Lord and Savior." What gets lost in this general evangelical formulation is that so often it has more to do with "personalized religious experience" than it does with God's gracious "'personal'

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encounter with humanity in his "Triune Personhood and covenanting love for and among his creation." Her aversion is further driven by her weariness of "a culture of personal acquisition and pluralistic accommodation" where "western individualism and consumerism meet religious marketing" (ibid.). Nordling recognizes that she may well be overstating her point, but she does so because too often the *imago Dei*, defined as "the relational, corporate union and communion of men and women together for and with one another and God," a concept that will be developed as we proceed, is no longer central but is substituted by the "individual self who functions as the central subject in every narrative—even the biblical one. Suddenly, God exists for the creature rather than the creature for God and his creation, particularly other human beings" (ibid., p. 117). Scot McKnight refers to this evangelical phenomenon as severing salvation from the broader story of God's work in and among a people, from Creation to Christ, such that "the gospel gets distorted" (2011, p. 36). The idea, says Nordling, "that we have been created for God's eternal pleasure and communion" made possible by God who "through his own Being-Act in Christ and Spirit, has done everything necessary to make such communion possible" is eclipsed when human choice and attainment in salvation is overemphasized (op. cit.).

While Nordling is not dismissive of the idea that in the how of salvation there is the individual and "unique encounter between God and each of his children" as this would be to discount the imagery of the Bible where God searches for the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the prodigal son (Luke 15) But, in the broader context of scripture, God does not save us individually from our sin to "then set up individual, relational dyads with us" (ibid.). Rather, the sheep, the coin and the prodigal son are rejoined to their rightful place with others. "Our heavenly Father brings us home, gives us new birth by His Spirit,

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and in Jesus restores us to the relational reality that defines us (John 3:1-8; Romans 8)." God brings us into relationship "first with the divine communion of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit and then into the community formed ontologically by and in that divine communion" (ibid., p. 118). Such a restoration points to the theologically impossible idea of "a dyadic, privatized relationship with God" especially where salvation is concerned. By virtue of God in his very being "is one God in three Persons, there is no possibility of relating to God as the divine, solitary Other. Relationship with God is always and forever participation in the preexisting *koinonia* of the divine Persons" (ibid.) which must also include God's people who we are saved to be in fellowship with.

Nordling's conclusion is that couching salvation in terms of "getting saved" with its implicit connotations of "human acquisition or a privatized divine-human relationship" fails to take into account a fuller understanding of what it means to be created in God's image with its significant communal dimensions thereby distorting *the true imago Dei* (ibid.). Such an understanding, using the words of Douglas Hall, fails to reflect the "complex constellation of relationships for which we were intended" (1986, p. 116) which should not surprise us when we consider the overall tenor of scripture centered on God-with-us where God yearns and makes possible "ever more actualized expressions of mutuality (ibid., p. 120).

What then does a fuller understanding of what it means to be saved entail? What is the good news of the gospel? In summary, Nordling contends that being saved is "to be renewed in the true image of God as women and men in Christ, to have our relationality restored so that our sinful selves, hopelessly *incurvatus in se*, are set free to be new creations in true divine and human *koinonia*" (op. cit., p. 122).

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In developing her thinking on what it means to be saved, Nordling begins with a desire to have a robust understanding of the original purpose of creation. Following the lead of Colin Gunton, she places salvation and creation in the context of eschatology in that creation has always had a "future direction and directedness" to it, in that it was always intended to be perfect and complete. The idea that salvation history is simply "a series of divine interventions" does not match the narrative of scripture where the intended original purpose of creation has always been undergirded by God's "unerring divine love and purpose of creation" (ibid.). This is most clearly revealed in Eph 1:4-5 and 9-10:

> For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Christ, in accordance with his please and will. … He made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, to be put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfillment—to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ.

What cannot be construed from this passage as well as others in the scriptures is that God had to change his plan or seek some alternate "creation—plan B." Salvation as being in covenant relationship with God has been God's "first and only plan of creation" (ibid.). Elsewhere, Paul speaks of Christ's coming as the realization of "the mystery" of God's will and his "plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and on earth" (Col. 1:19-20). As we look at these texts, we observe that the mystery of God's will is that he "intended to be both Lord of creation and *part* of it." (ibid. 123) Therefore, God who came in the flesh and dwelt among us as the one who revealed the glory of God (John 1:1-2, 14) "became one with broken humanity to restore it to its true divine likeness" (ibid.).

In line with God's intentions from the beginning, as we look at the use of the term "image" or *eikon* as used by the Apostle Paul, we discover that he reserves the concept

primarily for Jesus Christ. Nordling is in accord with much New Testament scholarship

that says we cannot understand the concept of the image of God apart from the revelation

of Jesus Christ as the one who images and reveals the glory of the Father and images the

true intended purpose for which humanity was created.[118] As Rikk Watt points out in his

essay, "The New Exodus/New Creational Restoration of the Image of God," because

Jesus was both fully human and divine indwelt by the Spirit, he was perfectly able to

reveal the image of God. "As the Son of man, he can not only deliver and restore us but

also show us what it means to be truly human" (2002, p. 33). Even a cursory examination

of Paul and the New Testament reveals a linkage of the image of God to Jesus as the

perfect representation that is inescapable:

> Jesus is plainly declared to be the genuine image of the invisible God (2 Cor. 4:4; Col. 1:15), a new Adam (Rom. 5:12-19; 1 Cor. 15:21-22, 45-49), and the beginning of a new humanity, the firstborn of the new creation (Col. 1:15, 18). In every respect, he is qualified, as Hebrews declares, to be our True High Priest (Heb. 4:14-8:13) and so to lead us into our ultimate Sabbath rest (Heb. 4:1-11). In Christ, the beginning of the new creation, God has declared, "Let light shine out of darkness" (2 Cor. 4:6 NRSV), whereby we are transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another" (2 Cor. 3:18 NRSV), having the same mind that was in Jesus Christ (Phil. 2:1-18). (Ibid., p. 34-35)

To these New Testament allusions to the Old Testament that refers to humanity

being in the image of God and linking them to Jesus Christ, Nordling adds a theme from

the writer of Hebrews where he says, "'The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the

exact representation [*charakter*] of his being' and *also* the fully human, flesh-and-blood

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[118] Robert Letham describes this connection as follows: "Genesis states that man and his wife were created in the image of God. The image of God is identified for us in the N.T. Paul points out that it is Christ who is the image of God (2 Cor. 4:4; Col. 1:15). … In Paul's thought, Christ as the second Adam is the image of God. Adam was created in Christ and then fell from that condition, but now, in grace, we are being renewed in the image of God, *in Christ the second Adam*, and thus in knowledge, righteousness, and holiness" (2011, p. 14).

image who suffered and tasted death *with* and *for* everyone (Heb. 1:3; 2:9) (op. cit., p. 123).

So, what we discover in the New Testament is that there is this inescapable holding together of "the revelation of Jesus Christ as the divine Son who both images and manifests the glory of the Father *and* images the true form of created humanity. He is both humanity's redeemer and prototype." The reason why we are saved is so that we who are new, redeemed human creations might be brought into right relationship with God through the new Adam, Jesus Christ, (Rom. 5:12-21) which includes "the restoration of the *imago Dei* in the original *'adam*—humankind, male and female (Gen. 5:1-2)" (ibid., pp. 123-34).

But, not only does this restoration of the image of God in persons through our being united with Christ who is the perfect representation of God's image serve in a way that speaks of what Christ has done for us in his incarnation, but as Robert Peterson provocatively wants us to consider, Christ being "the true image of God means we were made like Christ in the beginning." There is an ontic connection between us, made in the image of God and Christ who is the true image of God making "us compatible with God himself." He develops this idea quoting Philip Hughes:

> Man alone has affinities that reach both downward within the world over which he has been placed and upward to the Creator who is the Lord of all being. The truth that lies behind this double linkage is, first of all, that man is God's *creature*; secondly, that man alone of God's creatures is formed *in the image* of God; and thirdly, that the eternal Son is *the Image* in accordance with which man was formed. The deeply intimate bond that binds man in the Second Person of the Godhead is thus constitutional to the very being of man. (2015, loc. 5570)

Therefore, our being united with Christ who is the Image of God and our participation in the life of the Trinity because of our being made in the image of God takes on even greater significance.

As we listen to this kind of development of the image of God and the closeness with which it is identified with the image of God in Christ, the concept of divinization or theosis comes to mind.[119] Evangelicals have generally tended to steer clear of this kind of terminology because it seems to violate the historic Christian understanding of the essential qualitative distinction between God and the creation" (Rakestraw 1997, p. 266).[120] While on the one hand, we do not want to, as Robert Peterson reminds us, "break down the distinction between God and his creatures" as the "line between creatures and Creator" should not be crossed as we are not absorbed into God (op. cit., loc. 4852), Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen clarifies that deification as developed by Eastern Orthodoxy never meant this. Only "poorly-read Protestants have insisted that the Eastern Orthodox" position propagates this line of thinking. (2004, p. 6)

Robert Rakestraw in his article, "Becoming Like God: An Evangelical Doctrine of Theosis", says that the language of theosis or deification "may be just what is needed to awaken . . . Christians to the truth of their union with Christ." (op.cit.) Rakestraw goes to great lengths to point out in his article that theosis "did not have in mind a transformation of the human into the divine, an ontological or essential change of humanity into deity." He offers the definition of the evangelical Anglican, Philip Edgecumbe Hughes, who saw "considerable value in the doctrine of theosis" as a useful one for understanding what it

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[119] Along these lines, the evangelical scholar Velti-Matti Kärkkäinen instructs us that another term for "deification/divinization is 'Christification.' This is based on the idea that there is a christological structure to the human being and the destiny of humanity is to be found in Christ. Theosis is the mystery of human nature's perfection in Christ, not its alteration or destruction, because theosis is the mystery of eternal life in communion with God in the divine Logos." See Kärkkäinen's, *One with God: Salvation as Deification and Justification* (2004, p. 25).

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entails: Theosis is "the reintegration of the divine image of man's creation through the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit conforming the redeemed into the likeness of Christ, and also of the believer's transition from mortality to immortality so that he is enabled to participate in the eternal bliss and glory of the kingdom of God." (ibid., p. 261) Hughes taught that "above all, theosis is the restoration and reintegration of the 'image' or as some prefer, 'likeness' of God, seriously distorted by the fall, in the children of God. In this life Christians grow more and more into the very likeness and character of God as God was revealed in the man Jesus Christ." (ibid.) That theosis, however, means more than the usual Protestant understanding of sanctification is brought out by Rakeshaw when he says that while theosis does not teach an "ontological change of humanity into deity there is a very real impartation of the divine life to the whole human being—body and soul." Theosis carries with it the idea of human beings who are created in the image of God being "called to become like God by realizing the potential for ontological sharing in the life of God, yet never in such a way that theosis means sharing in God's essence." (ibid.)[121]

However, while this is a necessary distinction that should not be downplayed, the question is, why does this need to be a concern if the concept of "image" is not to be understood so much as an endowment or referring to "essence", but more in terms of relationship? Douglas Hall, going back to Calvin's helpful metaphor of a mirror when teaching on the image, finds a great deal of utility in this concept that helps us see the

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[121]Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen is encouraged by the rereading by many Protestants including evangelical ones of "their heritage through the church catholic." This includes the reading of its heritage through the lens of Eastern Orthodoxy. "In this rereading the idea of union, even deification, is being reclaimed and reappropriated as one of the oldest, if not the oldest Christian symbol of salvation." See his, *One with God: Salvation as Deification and Justification* (2004, p. 8).

image more in terms of relationship. Drawing on T.F. Torrance's understanding of

Calvin's development of the *imago* as a mirror, what is brought out is that this imagery

> precludes any interpretation of the image of God as an endowment, for "only while the mirror actually reflects an object does it have the image of that object. There is no such thing in Calvin's thought an *image* dissociated from the act of reflecting. He does not use such expressions as *engrave* and *sculptured*, but only in a metaphorical sense and never dissociated from the idea of the mirror." Therefore, when Calvin associates the image of God with the "original integrity" of "Adam"—"when he was endued with a right understanding"—he is not singling out the human understanding and will as if they were the image, but he is presupposing something about the fundamental orientation of the creature vis-à-vis the Creator: that is positioned before God, responding positively to God's sovereign presence; in a word—Calvin's perennial word!—*obedient*. "That is man's true rectitude: to be created in the image of God is to be opposite to or to respond to Him in such a way that God may be able to behold Himself in man as in a mirror." (Op. cit., p. 104)

So what Hall following in the footsteps of T.F. Torrance and certain Reformers

like Calvin want us to consider is that a mirror is a helpful metaphor when it comes to the

concept of being in the image of God, and that "it is only human relationships" that we

are "provided an adequate analogy." It is only as people respond in relationship positively

to God that they can be said to be mirroring God's image. "Corresponding to this concept

of the image of God as human orientation toward God—as its negative side or

antithesis—is the whole Reformation conception of sin as estrangement from God" (ibid.,

p. 105). So whether we are looking at the positive or the negative side of the *imago*

concept, "the informing 'picture' in both of these key concepts of the faith is the notion of

relationship. " Our posture towards others with whom we should be in relationship is

what is "absolutely determinative," as it is only in relationship that those qualities which

reflect God move from being dormant or potential to being realized (ibid.).

As we listen to Nordling, to whom we will return shortly, and others like Peterson

and Hall with his reflections on the image concept informed by his understanding of

Reformational thinking, we find much that this coheres well with what Doug Baker says

as developed in chapter four of this dissertation. By way of reminder, what Baker develops is that people in general do not reflect God's image because of sin; it only remains a potentiality because we were created to be in God's image. What is more, no one person can fully realize what it means to image God as he is far too great for any one of us to image. God's image cannot be properly understood in any fragmentary way. In the light of this, "God's work continues" (op. cit., p. 72). This work that God has done is that Jesus, as our head, has ascended and has sent believers his Spirit which inhabits his body corporately (Eph 1:22-23; 5:23) so that "as a single living and functioning body in which each follower of Christ forms a part and has a function" (Rom. 12:4; 1 Cor. 12:12-31) does God's image begin to be realized. The work that God set himself to complete that began at creation will be brought to completion. "This purpose is our eschatological end. We will finally be as we were created to be: the image, or mirror, of all of the glory of God" (ibid., p. 76). However, in the interim, "saints are still being made into God's image" which is an image that is "to be displayed not only in individuals, but more fully in the interrelationships between individuals, in the union of individuals. Only together can we display the image of the Trinity" (ibid., p. 72). This is the glorious role or purpose for which we have been saved, to image God together in Christ who is our head and as such serves as the very link between us and the Godhead.[122]

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[122] Cherith Nordling's understanding in this matter coheres well with that of Baker's and gives further biblical elaboration when she says, "This eschatological restoration of the image of God is both individual and communal for God's people who belong to Christ and are joined to the fellowship of the triune God through the Spirit. We are both the new temple, the locus of God's Presence, and the royal priesthood in service to God (1 Cor. 3: 16– 17; 6: 19– 20; 1 Pet. 2: 4– 5, 9). As new creatures who together share in the cruciform image of Jesus Christ, we are empowered by the Spirit of Christ and uniquely gifted in love to participate as co-heirs in both suffering and glory (Rom. 8: 17). Joined to Christ and to one another as his Body, we are equally re-created, privileged, and empowered as 'children of Abraham' to live as image-bearers for one another (Gal. 3: 28; 1 Cor. 12– 14)" (2007, pp. 69-70).

Returning to the thinking of Nordling, what she does is coax out more fully the implications of what it means for us who have been "borne in the likeness of the earthly man" to "bear the likeness of the man from heaven" (1 Cor. 15:49; cf. 2 Cor. 3:18) who is our prototype (op. cit., p. 124). In other words, what we have been saved for as those who are in Christ reflecting together God's image requires further reflection. Using the life of Christ as paradigmatic for us, what Nordling wants to develop is anticipated in the following:

> As from God, Jesus does not exist first for himself, nor for a cause or an idea, but for others—for God and for his fellow human beings. To *be* for others constitutes his identity as a human *being* and has its basis in his relation to God. What Jesus does for others is not done in his own name or authority. It is done in the name and loving character of the Father. This character, by its very nature, looks outward to serve the interests of the other. Jesus' existence is wholly determined by the One who created and re-creates us, the One who chose from all eternity to be *God for us*. (Ibid.)

When one considers the life and death of Christ, the point that Nordling wants to accentuate is that he allowed "his own existence to be framed by his fellow human beings in their alienation, suffering, and peril" (ibid.). What we see is that Jesus Christ identified himself with humanity, the first Adam, by bearing human nature so as "to become the second, reconciled, and renewed Adam." In this act, he became "most truly himself—'an I who gives himself wholly to the cause and being for others'" (ibid., p. 125). But the paradigm does not end here. Jesus obedience was made possible by the Spirit. It was the enabling power of the Spirit that made Jesus "the first truly human person, fulfilling the divine life of the Son by making the Father known and uniting the world to him" (ibid.). That Jesus with the Spirit would be baptized and then go on led by the Spirit into the desert to exercise "human obedience unto death" resisting the machinations of the evil one, and only afterwards ascribing Isaiah's messianic word to himself (Luke 4:18; cf. Isa. 61:1) should not surprise us. What is more, what we see in Jesus's human existence, his

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mission in obedience to the Father and to the Spirit, was to begin "the great re-creative process … reversing the effects of sin so that the blind could see and the lame could walk. The disenfranchised were included and honored, the lost were found and reconciled, the brokenhearted were comforted, and the dead were raised to life" (ibid.).

In what is described above, Jesus Christ was establishing the pattern for us to follow. Nordling encouragement is that "we should be doing what we were destined for in the manner and likeness of our Lord. It could not be more explicit: 'This is how we know we are in him: Whoever claims to live in him must live as Jesus did. … This is how love is made complete among us … in this world we are like Jesus'" (1 John 2:6; 4:17) (2014, p. 198). Just as he was "for God and for others," empowered by the Spirit, we too who are a new creation are to live Spirit-led lives of obedience, and this new life lived together is to be cruciform. What this means is for us "to be for the other, to 'carry each other's burdens' and so 'fulfill the law of Christ … (Gal. 6:2)'" (ibid., p. 126).[123] The singular path to a cruciform life lived for others is made clear by Paul: "by constantly relying on, walking in, keeping in step with, and living in the Spirit (Gal. 2:20; 5:25), who conforms and transforms us in Christ (Rom. 8:29; 12:2)" (ibid.). The outworking of this life of being in Christ, about which Paul is unrelenting, says Nordling, demands a radical

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[123] A study of the one another's of the New Testament reveals that it is a ubiquitous theme. One writer observes 59 mentions of this concept by various New Testament writers (George 1991, 129-31). This should not surprise us in the light of us reflecting Christ by being for others. Our union with Christ and being the body of Christ means we are members of one another (Rom. 12:5) and therefore interdependent. This also coheres with the concept of fellowship in the New Testament. A brief study of the two word groups used for fellowship in the Greek New Testament, *koinos*, *koinonia*, *koinonos*, etc., and *metochos*, *metoche*, reveal four related and essential elements that describe what fellowship involves: relationship, partnership, companionship, and stewardship. See Jerry Bridges discussion of *koinonia* in his book, *True Fellowship* (1985, pp. 16-23). Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen similarly states that "in its basic meaning, the term *koinonia* denotes sharing, participation, community, communion at the spiritual, social, even material level" (2007, p. 4). The one another's of scripture all encourage true *koinonia* and together they emphasize that being for others is a significant aspect of what we are saved for.

conformity to Christ in that we are to be willing to have our relational life completely overhauled so that we form the one people of God. (cf. Col. 3:9-11; Gal. 3:26-29) (ibid., pp. 126-27). That this cruciform life is indeed radical is brought out by Rick Watts when says the way of cross-bearing servanthood (Isa. 42:16; so Mark 8:14-10:52) not only means to have a heart of stone replaced by a heart of flesh which means an individual summoning "to live out the compassion of Yahweh," but also juxtaposed in this section of Mark is the idea that his disciples "are summoned to a community of cruciform existence in which true holiness is intrinsically related to how they treat even the little ones who follow Jesus (Mark 9:33-10:45) (2002, p. 32). Therefore, it is the individual-in-community living out the kingdom ethic of being for others, even the least of them, is what it means to be saved. It is here that Grenz provides us with a fitting concluding word:

> The eschatological destiny of bearing the divine image is present in the here and now as the Spirit is at work transforming those who are in Christ into the image that Christ bears. In this process humans are becoming the new humanity in accordance with God's intent from the beginning. New Testament writers, however, repeatedly declare that an imperative is always bound up with the indicative. Those who are destined to be the new humanity and as such to reflect the divine image, and therefore are already in the process of being transformed into that image, carry the ethical responsibility to live out that reality in the present. (2001, p. 251)

5.4 Conclusion

As the above chapter is brought to a conclusion, it culminates with the idea that the restoration of the image of God as demonstrated and made possible in the life and sacrifice of Christ moves us towards the concept of God in Christ forming a people committed to being for others. God's intention is to form a people for himself where the relational life of his people is so transformed that it is only by the power of the Spirit that this possibility can be realized. The good news of Jesus Christ is that through our union

with him which brings us into fellowship with the evangelical, triune God makes possible us fulfilling our role as those created in the image of God. Therefore, instead of viewing salvation as something acquired or achieved in a decisional moment where we are the primary actors, salvation as good news is the work of God where we are brought into the awareness that God is for us and he is for our salvation. To be saved is the appropriate human response to God's amazing provision for us through Jesus Christ which is to be received, embraced, and enjoyed as both an individual and corporate reality.

Why these are such important concepts for evangelicals must be considered with the constant specter of individualism as a primary force operating in the background. As developed earlier in this chapter, deeply ingrained in the evangelical tradition are various ways of speaking, various assumed principles, and certain unquestioned presuppositions that provide the perspectives, categories, and images through which evangelicals formulate their understanding of salvation, and they all skew salvation in the direction of focusing on the individual. But this individualist emphasis in evangelicalism, as I have argued with the aid of Walker, Grenz, Nordling, and others, "owes more to modern culture than to biblical faith." (Vanhoozer 2004:86) At its best, evangelicalism understands that to be saved is not simply "individual; rather, it is to be part of what God is doing to renew his created order." (ibid.) In its more truncated form where it prioritizes a piety that primarily has inward turn, evangelicalism neglects the importance of life in the present where we point people through our life together empowered by God to the future reality of a new heavens and a new earth. This inward turn has historically resulted in a very evident retreat from the importance of the social dimensions of our faith, an engaging in ambiguities that prevent addressing the sin we are saved from as individual and structural, revivalist thinking that so privatizes conversion and prioritizes the

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decisions of individuals that leads to little consideration being given to the communal in salvation, and has been affected by various dualisms that undercut the Christian's role as a community of faith in this world.

That God is relational, that he is reaching out to humanity and the created order through the Spirit so that in some sense we may join in the life of God has not been an evangelical emphasis. Because of evangelicalism's general preoccupation or emphasis on forensic or more static aspects of salvation, in this chapter I have deliberately chosen some aspects of salvation that emphasize the more relational, organic dimensions. The intention is to counter much evangelical rhetoric which largely focuses on the individual—where the individual's choice is prioritized and "my assurance of salvation" is given primacy.

It is therefore not surprising that talk of a social Trinity and a relational God and that our being united to Christ bringing us into the realm of being in fellowship with the Godhead and his people as a profound mystery and work of God is not typical evangelical discourse. As we will see in chapter 6, this is also why evangelicals are seen as having a very weak or diminished ecclesiology. A soteriology focused on the individual has undermined its ecclesiology. This is not to deny by any means that God is concerned about individuals and that he works in the life of individuals, but it is contrary to God's very nature and being not to unite us to himself and to others who are members of his body. No doctrine of salvation can be complete where it leaves us alone with our solitary, inner selves, where God sets up "individual, relational dyads with us" (Nordling). God's work through Christ by his Spirit (the "Evangelical Trinity" as coined by T.F Torrance), is to lift us into the very life of God so that we in turn might enter into the lives of others. It is in this process that the image of God is fully realized in us as we fulfill our role

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together with God's people. The Christian life is no mere call to moralistic good deeds and a preoccupation with personal sin, but is so much more grand. It is the high call of God to assist others in seeing the reality that is God through our corporate life and a willingness within the community of faith to confront that which distorts this corporate calling. Salvation is the individual-in-community being brought into the very being of God in humanly appropriate ways so that our life together points others to the God who is triune—Being in community. It is here that the words of Kevin Vanhhoozer provide a fitting transition from this chapter into what will follow in the next: "At its best, evangelicalism names the tradition that continually reflects on exactly what it means to be a people of the gospel. The visible church matters because it is a concrete sign of the emerging eschatological reality inaugurated by Jesus: a community of reconciliation. . . . The church, I submit, is the *company of the gospel*" (ibid.) It is to this company of the gospel that we now turn.

CHAPTER 6

AN EVANGELICAL THEOLOGY OF THE INDIVIDUAL-
IN-COMMUNITY--TOWARDS A MORE
PROMINENT ECCLESIOLOGY

6.1 Introduction

As this dissertation has been a work offering an analysis of evangelicalism so that

a constructive proposal can be made towards strengthening an evangelical theology of the

individual-in-community, we now come to the area of ecclesiology as a fitting concluding

chapter. An argument could be made that an incipient ecclesiology has already been in

the making in the previous chapters. Negatively speaking, in chapter 2 the assertion was

that the dominance of western individualism has undermined the idea of being the church.

To the extent that evangelicalism has embraced individualism by allowing it to take

precedence in our responses and general thinking, a robust evangelical ecclesiology has

been undermined and has taken on the status of being "one more thing" in the midst of

our busy and fragmented lives. Positively speaking, in chapter 3 the thrust was that

reading the Bible with the community of faith is a necessary and responsible task. The

Bible was never meant to be read and understood solely by the individual believer, but in

a tradition and community that informs and helps us grasp and pass on what the Spirit of

God is saying to the church at large and the church in its contextual particularity. In

chapter 4, the doctrine of the social Trinity which is being increasingly embraced by

evangelicals with its emphasis on perichoresis, relationality, and interdependence and our

being created in the image of God as both an individual and corporate reality all point to

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the conclusion that we cannot image the Triune God apart from a community, the people

of God, the body of Christ—a churchly embodiment. What is more, as developed in

chapter 5, as we broaden the horizons of an evangelical soteriology, we see that salvation

cannot be conceived of apart from a community of faith where the Triune God is at work

forming his church in Christ by his Spirit which entails a renewing of the image of God as

a corporate reality which will be fully realized in the future.

Methodologically speaking, this dissertation could have begun with ecclesiology

as this would have given it primacy rather than its typical near "last place" position so

common in much evangelical systematic theologizing. That God anticipates, assumes,

and gives primacy to the building of his church in scripture could have been stated at the

outset, and the various loci of theology discussed so far in this dissertation used to

demonstrate that none can be properly conceived and given thorough treatment apart from

a proper understanding of at least a foundational ecclesiology. For example Wolfhart

Pannenberg starts his *Systematic Theology* by discussing the foundational theological

issues pertaining to the church and then moves into the topics of faith and salvation. He

does this because his contention is that "the fellowship of individuals with Jesus is always

mediated by the church" (Kärkkäinen 2002, p. 12). Gerhard Lohfink asserts that the

people of God is not just a theme in the Bible, but is "the basis, the ground of all biblical

theology in both the Old and the New Testaments" (1999, p. 124).[124] Such a development

in this dissertation may well have been a helpful antidote to an evangelical ecclesiology

that is so often regarded by thoughtful analysts of the movement as either non-existent or

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[124]An African theologian who puts much stress on "the model of 'the community of God'" as one "that best describes the church and fits the biblical data" and one that "resonates very well with Africans" is Samuel Kunhiyop in his book, *African Christian Theology* (2012, p. 145. See his entire chapter 8 on "The Community of God").

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more of an appendage (this perspective will become evident as this chapter unfolds and will be substantiated).

Be this as it may, up to this point an ecclesiology has only been emerging in this dissertation and something must be said in a more purposeful way in this final chapter about how a more robust evangelical ecclesiology can contribute to and result from a theology of the individual-in-community. Certainly for many reading this dissertation, this concluding task may be viewed as necessary as it is inevitable because the idea of Christian community and the church are such intertwined concepts these days. Some of the concepts developed so far will make this task easier, but the challenge is what further concepts or emphases can be brought to bear so that a stronger evangelical ecclesiology can contribute to and emerge from a theology of the individual-in-community?

6.2 Evangelicalism and some Historical Factors that have Undermined its Ecclesiology

To begin the search for some themes apart from those already dealt with that may lead to a more robust evangelical ecclesiology that accords with a theology of the individual-in-community, an investigation needs to be made into why some astute commentators on the evangelical movement are of the opinion that evangelical ecclesiology is either in an unhealthy state or is viewed as not reflective enough of biblical thought; positively stated, that ecclesiology in evangelical thought must be restored to its rightful place as central to God's plan. What will begin to surface, as we shall see, are not issues of secondary importance over which various traditions respectfully differ, but those ultimate themes that elevate the centrality of the church in God's eternal plan. If the doctrine of the church is going to be given higher regard, then it will need to be understood in association with those great themes of scripture such as "the

glory of God; salvation history; the kingdom of God; the attributes of God; the image of

God; the mission of God; and the call to love, holiness, unity, and truth." (Easley and

Morgan 2013:xii) Certainly, all of these themes cannot be covered here in any

comprehensive way as they relate to ecclesiology, but where necessary they will be

concepts utilized along the way so as to by association elevate ecclesiology from its

perceived secondary status within evangelicalism.

As we begin this quest of discovering some specific themes, we need to get a

sense of how evangelical ecclesiology is generally perceived and why. Matt Jenson

writes, bringing to our attention how some have viewed evangelical ecclesiology, "that

evangelicals have little, if any, ecclesiology" which "seems to be assumed by many,

feared by most of the rest, and challenged by only a brave few." "Indeed," he says, "some

have wondered whether the very notion of evangelical ecclesiology is not something of a

category mistake." Even if this deficiency is overstated, Jenson remarks that "when

people consider evangelical distinctives, they will be forgiven for not first thinking of the

doctrine of the church" (2012, p. 81).[125] Harper and Metzger remark that "this

conundrum is no more pointedly exemplified than in the stunning fact that the statement

of faith of the National Association of Evangelicals makes no mention of the church!"

(2009, p. 15).[126] Michael Horton here is worth quoting at length because his analysis of

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[125]Jenson points us to John G. Stackhouse, Jr. (2003) as an example of those who raise questions of evangelical ecclesiology. He also directs us to D.G. Hart who makes the argument that a strengthening of evangelical ecclesiology will inevitably result in evangelicals moving away from evangelicalism. See Hart's article, "The Church in Evangelical Theologies, Past and Future" (2005, pp. 23-40).

[126] Their comment about the NAE's lack of any mention of the church is given further context: "The statement, while brief, addresses the Bible, the Trinity, the person and work of Christ, the Holy Spirit, salvation, sanctification for a godly life, and the resurrection to heaven or hell, but not the church, other

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the present state of ecclesiology among evangelicals coheres well with much of what has

been developed in this dissertation so far:

> It is not difficult to make the case that evangelicalism (generally speaking) exhibits a low doctrine of the church. Emerging out of the churches of the Reformation as well as the Anabaptist heritage, pietism—especially in the United States and Britain—evangelicalism was defined by a series of "awakenings" and a subsequent history of revivals. Often, these movements were celebrated as extraordinary works of the Spirit in contrast with the ordinary ministry of the church and they spawned a vast network of parachurch ministries.
>
> It is possible today for a professing believer to go from the nursery to children's church to the youth group to campus ministries to groups for singles, then young marrieds, all the way to "empty nesters" and "golden oldies," without ever having actually joined a church, or at least without having been immersed in the cross-generational and cross-cultural communion of saints that is generated through the public ministry of Word, sacrament, and discipline. Is it then any wonder that so many evangelical young people abandon the church by their sophomore year in college, especially when they have routinely heard the distinction between "becoming a Christian" and "joining a church"? (2013, p. 134)

While Horton does give some indication as to why evangelicals generally have a

weak ecclesiology, it is to others that we go to for a more detailed explanation of why this

is the case and does corroborate what Horton is saying. Going back to Matt Jenson, to

what does Jenson attribute a diminished ecclesiology among evangelicals? He firstly

ascribes it to the Reformation priority of "the faith of the individual and the Pietist and

Puritan emphasis on *Herzreligion*," or heart religion, such that "evangelicals have

prioritized the personal, often over against the communal." He then points to "the activist

orientation of evangelicals, who are busy with the work of witness and who frequently

take a functional approach to theological reflection." For example, mission is given a

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than to affirm that there is a spiritual unity among believers. See www.nae.net/ index.cfm?FUSEACTION=nae.statement_of_ faith" (Harper & Metzger 2009,p. 294).

certain primacy but it is not carefully thought through as it relates to a robust

ecclesiology. The thinking is, "If it is good for the mission, it is worth doing."[127] Finally,

Jenson suggests that "evangelical" tends to describe "a certain form of piety rather than

an intellectual or theological orientation" (ibid., p. 82).

In his essay, "Is Evangelical Ecclesiology an Oxymoron? A Historical

Perspective," Bruce Hindmarsh offers a brief history of evangelicalism's developing

ecclesiology that largely coheres with Jenson's analysis but offers some further analysis

that is helpful. For example, he notes that while evangelicalism did place a strong

emphasis on a pietistic heart religion where the work of the Spirit was emphasized, and

that there is a true universal church with its underlying unity, it also stood as a reaction to

historical, institutional church forms which were regarded as either secondary and/or

divisive such that any ordering of church life needed to be downplayed (2003, pp. 34-

35).[128] The particulars of church form were downplayed by being regarded as the

nominal expressions of Christianity in that they were "linked to the merely physical

aspects of church life and discipline ('going to church and sacrament'), but true belief

was equated with a wholly inward and spiritual experience of regeneration" (ibid., p. 35).

In this way, evangelicalism as it developed was able to draw members from various

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[127] Michael Horton's observation in this regard is that the evangelical movement is generally held together "by a common attachment to revivals and the parachurch societies that emerge from them" and he sees this as "a practical subversion of particular churches of any ecclesiological stripe." He goes along with David Wells observation "that parachurch ministries are increasingly replacing the church itself" and that by "focusing on the essentials, conservative ministers within established denominations often downplayed their confessional distinctives in order to cooperate in a common evangelical vision for mission" (2013, p. 135).

[128]Richard Bushman says in relation to the First Great Awakening in America, "The truly revolutionary aspect of the Awakening was the dilution of divine sanction in traditional institutions and the investiture of authority in some inward experience. Thereby the church lost power, and individuals gained it, using it to reform the old order in both principle and practice" (1970, p. 220).

communions "in a trans-denominational experience of solidarity" (ibid., p. 34). In such an understanding, the dichotomy between the visible expression and the invisible reality of being a Christian took shape. Without this dichotomy, cohesion among evangelicals across the denominational divide was not possible. Therefore, evangelical ecclesiology largely expressed itself in terms of "the local fellowship of true believers and the consciousness of the universal church, but all the ecclesiastical constructions in between (e.g., church order) were radically reduced to adiaphora." Not to do so would only result in friction and reduce evangelicalism's effectiveness (ibid., p. 33).[129] To this we can add the echo of Stanley Grenz:

> The new evangelicalism with its goal of fostering a broad coalition of believers … required a new doctrine of the church. The emerging ecclesiology focused on a spiritual unity enjoyed by individual believers which transcends the visible churches. Christ can have loyal followers in any and all denominations, evangelicals claim, and these loyal followers constitute the true church, the only ecclesia that is of ultimate importance.

However, as Hindmarsh insightfully points out, rejecting the particularities of a confessional tradition with its inevitable biases in favor of a piety of the heart represented "an enormous and culpable naïveté and sentimentalism" (ibid., p. 34). The incongruity and unsustainability of this kind of thinking quickly became apparent. Here was a movement that claimed to represent an outworking of the Holy Spirit and sought to be the realization among the various visible churches of "the underlying unity of all the children

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[129] Stanley Grenz similarly states that much of evangelicalism was driven by a transdenominationalism that sought and needed to draw people into a coalition of persons for the purpose of defending orthodoxy and enabling greater evangelization. Various voluntary societies most visible in a plethora of parachurch organisations were formed that enabled the circumventing of "the sticky issues of denominational loyalties that could so easily derail the evangelical program." The unintended but real effect of these formations was a "quasi-church or quasi-denominational" current within evangelicalism that served to diminish the concept of the importance of the local church (1993, p. 175). That many of these movements were pioneered and sustained by influential figures should not be surprising in the light of what Hindmarsh goes on to develop.

of God." But soon it "was a movement … dogged by separatism and internal schism."

Why was this so? Because sooner or later, Christians have to say something meaningful

and to do this words must be used, and this brings one into the orbit of discursive

theology. If something is to be done, a choosing between different possible actions must

be made "and this places one in the realm of church order and liturgy" (ibid., pp. 34-35).

As ecclesial authority "had been decisively rejected or subordinated to other spiritual

ideals," some other authority had to take its place as authority cannot be rejected forever

(ibid., p. 35). Soon various evangelical societies articulated their stand around certain

leaders. Converts aligned themselves to each other around a particular messenger of the

gospel, and as time went along the movement became "especially vulnerable to a popular

cult of personality and rhetorical suasion." Therefore, Hindmarsh sums up an emerging

paradox within evangelical ecclesiology which took shape in the unprecedented

conditions of the early modern world as follows:

> It represented a new ecclesial consciousness of the modern world, one that seemed
> … to manifest temporarily the underlying unity of the children of God and to
> express this in various extra-ecclesiastical settings. But at the same time, the
> movement was always a restless "movement," iconoclastic of all forms of order,
> often guilty of schism, and in danger of turning the proclamation of the eternal
> gospel into matters of popular suasion and the politics of public personalities.
> (Ibid., p. 36)

Hindmarsh's observation is that in many cases these same issues still "remain a part of

the paradoxical relationship between evangelicalism and ecclesiology today" (ibid.).

Reading both Jenson and Hindmarsh, what becomes evident is that while

evangelicalism wanted to be a religion of the heart and one that gave greater attention to

the work of the Spirit in an individual's life, in so doing it placed an inordinate emphasis

on individual piety and on a diminished ecclesiology because of ecclesiology's

association with the earthly forms or institutionalism that had so characterized it and been

associated with its nominalism.[130] The visible ecclesiology of the pre-modern era with all

of its accoutrements was pushed aside by elevating the invisible ecclesia of the modern

era in the hope of uniting true believers who could be drawn from any and every Christian

tradition if the issues of the heart were addressed according to evangelical notions.

Unfortunately, what offered great promise as being a movement of the Spirit where the

grandeur of the "mystical body of Christ among the nations and indeed among the

churches" (ibid., p. 37) was a worthy vision, all too quickly succumbed to an unrealistic

rejection of earthly forms and an unsustainable unity because of the inevitable rise of

personalities as an authority as opposed to a churchly authority which represented a

wisdom of the ages. Schism and a lack of unity was the unfortunate byproduct of

evangelicalism. Evangelical ecclesiology was not able to live out the reality that it

proclaimed.

Therefore, a major issue that surfaces in the light of what has been said is as

follows: To what extent should the focus be on the church as a disembodied entity?

Maybe the problem was an overly institutionalized church, but can it ever be a

disembodied church where we simply focus on its invisible nature so to bypass

evangelicalism's "general suspicions of organizations, institutions, and bureaucracies"?

(Horton 2013, p. 135). By placing an emphasis on "issues of the heart," what is

perpetuated is the spiritual versus material divide. The living out of the Christian faith in

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[130]D.G. Hart concurs that a major factor that undercuts the church in evangelical piety "is a fear of hypocrisy and nominal Christianity. Pietists and revivalists both recognized that forms of churchly Christian devotion, such as attending worship and participating in the means of grace, can be faked. So in order to correct for the abuse that comes with the motions, evangelicals concocted various other measures of genuine Christianity, from religious affections and personal testimonies to speaking in tongues." This leads him to the conclusion that "evangelicalism with its stress on the personal and the subjective is inherently antagonistic to the corporate and formal ways of churchly Christianity" (2005, pp. 39-40).

the concrete circumstances of life with all its messiness and the people of God as a visible expression of God's inaugurated kingdom seems to be subtly undermined by such an emphasis. What concepts need to be revisited so that the church as a visible organism is able to reflect and sustain the kind of community God intended for it to be?

Having asserted that a significant aspect of evangelicalism's history has been the elevated concept of the invisible church leading to a diminishing of the visible or local church, to what extent has this persisted because of other theological understandings.[131] Stanley Grenz in his, *Revisioning Evangelical Theology: A Fresh Agenda for the 21st Century,* writes that while in some quarters there has been a call for a greater emphasis to be placed on the local church in evangelical ecclesiology,[132] his assessment is "the dominant thinking within evangelicalism moves in the opposite direction." As he sees it,

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[131] That the distinction between an invisible and visible church is a justifiable one is not at issue here. The Westminster Standards. Chapter 25, states: "The catholic or universal church, which is invisible, consists of the whole number of the elect, that have been, are, or shall be gathered into one, under Christ the Head thereof; and is the spouse, the body, the fullness of him that filleth all in all. The visible church, which is also catholic or universal under the gospel (not confined to one nation, as before under the law), consists of all those throughout the world that profess the true religion; and of their children: and is the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ, the house and family of God, out of which there is no ordinary possibility of salvation" (sections 1, 2). That this distinction does not imply that God has two separate churches is stated by Brian Schwertly. This distinction was never intended to undermine the "one church, that Jesus has only one bride, people, church, or body. Our Lord does not have two churches but only one. The terms 'invisible' and 'visible' are used to describe two distinct aspects of the one church; or, to put it another way, the church is considered from two different perspectives. It is not that there are two separate air tight categories with one group on heaven and another on earth. On the contrary, there is a great overlap between both categories. All genuine believers are members of the invisible church whether they are living in heaven or on earth, whether they are alive or dead (i.e., have died physically). Not all professing Christians, however, who are members of the visible church, are members of the invisible church. Some people who make a profession of faith and are baptized are hypocrites. Such people do not truly believe in Christ (thus are never truly united to Him by faith) and are not part of the invisible church" (n.d., paragraph 2).

[132]The example of the New Testament evangelical scholar, D.A. Carson, is given who argues that this distinction is "either fundamentally mistaken, or at best of marginal importance." Grenz also points to the Baptists who have traditionally held high the concept of the local church with its New Testament grounding, and other evangelical denominations have similarly been characterized by a renewed emphasis on the visible church where some have even made the assertion that "all church is local." See his, *Revisioning Evangelical Theology: A Fresh Agenda for the 21st Century* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1993) p. 173.

evangelical theology generally focuses, maybe not intentionally, on an implicit universal and invisible church resulting in many evangelicals having "little place for the local church" (ibid.).

He says there are several reasons for this erroneous understanding. The first reason he gives has to do with the influence exerted by the older dispensational movement, viz-a-viz progressive dispensationalism, where prominent theologians gave particular stress to the company of the elect apart from the local church. The example is given of the dispensational theologian Robert Lightner who declared that the "company of the redeemed is called the church without consideration of whether or not those who are a part of it are members of local churches." Grenz points out that the tendency by dispensationalists "to elevate the invisible church at the expense of the local congregation" thereby "minimizing to the point of unimportance" the visible church to which believers are included has engendered a particular criticism coming from within evangelicalism itself: "(T)he church as the concrete assembling of the body of Christ, the body of believers that you or I assemble with as the church … has tended to be of negligible importance in dispensational theology" (ibid.). In line with Grenz's assessment of dispensationalism's influence regarding this matter of minimizing of the local church, Dennis Okholm similarly attributes to dispensationalist teaching "the absence of a robust evangelical ecclesiology" (2005, p. 42). While dispensationalists only make up about one third of America's forty or fifty million evangelicals, it is a movement that has exerted considerable influence and is "one of the most common expressions of evangelical Christianity" (ibid., pp. 42-43). Grenz primarily attributes the dispensationalist teaching of a radical disjunction between the kingdom of God, which is entirely future, and the church which is over-spiritualized, as leading to a minimizing of a healthy ecclesiology,

(op. cit., p. 181) as does Okholm who also attributes much of this failure to dispensationalism's concept of the church as "a parenthetical entity" (op. cit., pp. 42ff.).[133]

That there is another more significant theological factor, according to Grenz, at work in this inflating of the invisible church over the visible provokes further reflection. Drawing on the insights of C. Norman Kraus, a Mennonite theologian, the link is made between evangelicalism's truncated ecclesiology and "an inadequate soteriology." According to Kraus, because evangelicals have so individualized and privatized salvation, it is invariably defined "in terms of a theological affirmation of belief in Christ" and is "exclusive of social dimensions." The result of this truncation of soteriology is that "evangelicalism lacks an ecclesiology that can undergird a church of disciples" (ibid., p. 174). Clark Pinnock also attributes a diminished ecclesiology among evangelicals to an abbreviated soteriology when he says, "We give the impression that all that interests us is the justification of individual sinners and not their sanctification or the institution of the church or the sanctification of the world" (ibid., p. 175).

Another angle by which to understand how a diminished soteriology has affected evangelical ecclesiology is elucidated by Darrell Guder. His approach is that much of the continued emphasis on the individualization and privatization of faith where so much emphasis is placed on "worship and preaching in much of modern church practice … designed to meet individual needs for the assurance of salvation" (2000, p. 135) has

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[133] Grenz was aware of progressive dispensationalism's less radical separation of the church and Israel, but he was convinced that it is simply not possible to have "a separate theological understanding for Israel that does not detract from the primacy of the church in the program of God for the salvation of the world" (1992, p. 123).

detracted from the mission of the church. While there are the benefits that come from experiencing God's grace and salvation, this is not the primary reason for our calling. What has happened is that the "'incidental' component of faith is made into the major issue" (ibid., p. 129) The gospel being proclaimed "has been reduced to individual salvation" and this salvation has "become the purpose and program of the church" (ibid., p. 133). Again, it must be emphasized that Guder is not denying these benefits and the value of the individual. Rather, following the lead of Karl Barth, what Guder is calling for is a shift of emphasis, a moving away from this reductionism that "contributes to a problematic distortion of the nature and practice of Christian discipleship and therefore of mission" (ibid., p. 130).

Symptomatic of this reductionism is how mission or evangelism is viewed. Often it is regarded "as one of several commitments or concerns of a church or denomination" (ibid., p. 136). What is more, the rise of para-church organizations where their sole task is that of evangelism or missions that functions "next to" the church is evidence that the commitment of a particular church to this task can be separated out from the other concerns of the church. What this implies, says Guder, is "that the evangelistic mission of the church can be separated out from the rest of the institutional church and function as its own distinctive ministry" (ibid., p. 136). This works well when the gospel that is being proclaimed has been reduced to the individual, personal, and private domains. "Although many evangelistic movements stress the need for the Christian to become part of the 'local church,' their own calling to 'save souls' as separate from 'call to faithful witness' shows how readily a reduced gospel comes to be taken as all the gospel" (ibid.).

What then should be the focus and what constitutes the best way the gospel is communicated that is not reductionist? What Guder, again following Barth, wants to

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stress is that if salvation as a gift is inextricably linked to "the vocation to witness, … then it is impossible to separate evangelistic ministry from the life and work of the total church" and that the "call to Christ must be a call to mission. The reason Christians are formed into communities is because of God's work to make a people to serve him as Christ's witnesses" (ibid.). Guder wants to bring to our attention that this way of thinking that Barth championed has much to commend it:

> The biblical focus is upon the relationship of the benefits of salvation to God's call to serve. "It is common to all the biblical accounts of calling that to be called means being given a task"; Christian existence is "existence in the execution of this task." Thus Christian existence is related to God's mission, into which Christians are called individually and corporately. For this to take place, a complete transformation of the lives of Christians is called for. To use language which complements Barth's approach, the Christian is to become "a contrast society" (Lohfink), a company of "resident aliens" (Hauerwas and Willimon), "a new covenant community" (Yoder). The biblical warrant for such an understanding is certainly found in 1 Peter with the references there to the "exiles in the Dispersion" (1:1) and to "aliens and exiles" (2:11). (Ibid., p. 130)

If we grant that wrapped up in salvation is a call to being a witness as an individual-in-community, and that the corporate dimension is indeed a biblically motivated one, then Guder's caution is instructive: "The congregation is either a missional community—as Newbigin defines it, 'the hermeneutic of the gospel'—or it is ultimately a caricature of the people of God that it is called to be" (ibid., p. 136).[134]

So as we listen to Grenz, Guder, and others criticism of evangelicalism's ecclesiology, various strands begin to appear: the unhelpful elevating of the invisible church over the visible seems to be a recurring refrain among some. Furthermore, they all attribute the undermining of a robust ecclesiology to a truncated soteriology that focuses

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[134] Tim Chester and Steve Timmis in their book, *Total Church: A Radical Reshaping around Gospel and Community* similarly stress that "evangelism is *best* done out of the context of a gospel community whose corporate life demonstrates the reality of the word that gave her life" (2007, p. 56).

simply on the individual. If salvation is primarily regarded as the saving of the individual to the exclusion of other soteriological themes, themes that are more corporate in nature, it has the effect of undermining the importance of ecclesiology with its various "people of God" aspects. According to Okholm, one of the most unhelpful results of stressing the invisible nature of the church, where "the church is in the world but not of the world encourages a gnosticizing, docetic mentality" rendering "the church as the body *through* which Christ accomplishes his work" largely deemphasized. (op. cit., p. 52) What is more, that "the Christian holistic vision of salvation includes both physical and spiritual, earthly and mental, this-worldly and otherworldly," (Kärkkäinen 2014, p. 147) individual and corporate dimensions, is largely lost.

Therefore, as we have listened to those above who have brought to light some significant reasons as to why evangelicalism has a diminished ecclesiology, some issues that need to be addressed are as follows: First, can the church be conceived of as primarily a disembodied reality? It is has become apparent that the emphasis on the invisible church almost to the exclusion of the visible church has not served an evangelical ecclesiology well, so how can a more concrete expression of the church be developed that removes this unhelpful bifurcation? What will emerge is that as we tackle this issue from the standpoint of God forming a people designed to reflect him, a significant aspect of an individual-in-community theology becomes evident and a more robust ecclesiology unfolds. Second, how can an evangelical soteriology and its ecclesiology be brought together in greater unison? While in chapter four some important aspects of evangelical soteriology were broadened to include more of the communal so that its privatized conceptions were challenged, is there further ground that needs to be covered so that an evangelical soteriology that is more communally oriented will lead to a

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stronger ecclesiology so that ultimately both these loci of theology are sufficiently integrated and neither unnecessarily truncated.

In order to help us address this matter of the diminishing of the visible church which results from an overemphasis being placed on an invisible, spiritual, individuated people, what promises to be a helpful exploration is God's working to form a corporate people for himself going all the way back to the Old Testament and then on into the New Testament. If it can be demonstrated that the forming of a people is central to God's plan across the ages (cf. Eph. 2:14-19), and that God intended for a people to visibly convey his character and purposes, the fuller expression of the *imago Dei*, then not only will the visible expression of a people of God be viewed as essential, but we will see how central this earthly, communal expression is ultimately to being the church. Further to this, when we understand how God redemptively intended to work in and through a people, we will not only view God's saving purposes more comprehensively, but we will gain insight into how God's redemptive purposes can only be fully understood in the context of a people formed. [135] In short, the gospel will be given greater breadth and scope and will serve the purpose of bringing together more closely soteriology and ecclesiology.

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[135] Timothy Savage provides us with an inspiring summation based on the writings of the Apostle Paul that sums up God's plan of the ages revealing the centrality of the church: "God is executing a plan of cosmic dimensions. He is in the process of reclaiming all things for his glory. Writing to believers in Ephesus, the apostle Paul makes a stunning observation: God is 'summing up all things—things in the heavens and things on earth—under one head, namely, Christ' (Eph. 1:10). Precisely where this comprehensive 'summation' is taking place Paul makes clear a few verses later: 'God has given Christ as head over all things to the church' (Eph. 1: 22)." Savage goes on to make the important point here that in Paul's thought "the church is ground zero in God's ambitious reclamation project. It is home base for the execution of God's work in the world, the place where 'all things' are being drawn together under Christ. If we want to see what God is doing on this planet—and who would want to miss something so spectacular?—we must look to the church. Here, and only here, we find a people drawn together and filled with all the fullness of God (Eph. 1:23; 3:19)." The seamless link between Christ who is central to the scriptures and his church is brought out by Savage in the following: "The church is the body of Christ, and

6.3 The Trinity Grounds Ecclesiology in Relational Community

In the light of what has been developed so far in this thesis particularly in chapters four and five, it seems only proper that we transition into what needs to be said here by referring to God's reality as a triune one and revisiting the implications of this reality for ecclesiology. What we discover is that when we make God's triune being the basis or the starting point of a robust ecclesiology, this sets the tone for what needs to be central. If we grant that the economic Trinity or the evangelical Trinity, as Thomas Torrance refers to it, is directed towards bringing about a people to reflect God's eternal and divine nature which means bringing them into conformity with Christ which is the actuality of the image of God, then we understand that it is impossible for us to view God's church as merely "a collection of saved individuals who band together" for God's program can only be social or communal (Grenz 1993, p. 184). God's glory is more fully achieved and his nature more fully reflected when a people image him corporately in a relational life of living for others. With this understanding, an evangelical ecclesiology which takes "its point of departure from the relationship of the church to the reality of God" (ibid.) where the doctrine of God is foundational to evangelical ecclesiology has much promise for removing it from conceptions that are individualistic and privatized.

Christ is its head (Col. 1:18). The church reverberates with the resurrection power of Christ himself (Eph. 1:19–20). It personifies his love (Eph. 5:2). It manifests his fullness (Col. 2:9–10). It is a 'new man' measuring up to the full stature of Christ himself (Eph. 4:13). And yet the church is also distinguished from Christ. It is his bride (Eph. 5:25–27). It is the one he nurtures and cherishes as his own flesh (Eph. 5:29). It is the repository of the Father's wisdom (Eph. 3:10). It is where God receives all glory (Eph. 3:21). It is a beacon of divine light, a foretaste of heavenly glory (Eph. 1:18)" (2011, pp. 7-8).

Further to this, if love is a primary way of conceiving God as a community and that the image of God consists ultimately in love, then we see more clearly why God's salvific purposes are to establish a reconciled creation in which the people of God reflect in their relations to one another God's own triune nature.[136] The church as a community of love (cf. 1 John 4:12) moving towards "the eschatological ideal community of love" (ibid., p. 186), bound together in true fellowship made possible by the Spirit in the midst of a broken world, is the only way the people of God is able to best reflect the divine nature. And what the Spirit enables is being like Christ as an earthly reality.

> The Spirit is transforming God's people "into the image that Christ bears." We are the communal imago Dei whose ground is the resurrected Lord and the life-giving Spirit. As such, we are eschatologically oriented in every way. We live out our call in a kingdom that has begun but is not yet consummated, whose Lord is busy, reigning and bringing all things under his feet in heaven and on earth, extending the influence of his kingdom through his image-bearing brothers and sisters. Our life in the Spirit is to reflect Jesus' life in the Spirit. Our destiny is be like Jesus; to look and act like Jesus. We are to see and do by the Spirit what we see the Father doing, to speak for God and for the world as Jesus did and does as God's anointed Son and messianic High Priest. In this world we are to be like him. Such is the witness of the New Testament. Period. (Nordling 2014, p. 198)

That God in Christ chose to lovingly reveal himself as the evangelical God through the incarnation which was an embodied existence must militate against

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[136] Timothy Savage is once again helpful as he offers the following fitting insight here: "What is perhaps most striking about God's love, and what is certainly most pertinent to our understanding of the church, is that the Lord wants to share his love with us, not only by making us the objects of that love but also by equipping us to share that love with others. By creating us in his image, he has fitted us to reproduce the interrelational love of the Trinitarian family, passing back and forth among members of our families the love that reverberates within the holy Godhead." Savage uses the word "family" metaphorically of the church because, as he says, "Perhaps the best way to envisage the church—accounting for both its organic link to Christ and its distinctiveness from Christ—is as a family related by blood. Members of the church are 'blood relatives.' They share the same Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth receives its name (Eph. 3:14). They share the same elder brother, Christ (Heb. 2:17), whose blood shed on the cross has reconciled them to the heavenly Father (Col. 1:20). And they share a fraternity with their spiritual siblings, brothers and sisters in Christ (Col. 1:2), who are reconciled to each other by the same blood of the cross (Eph. 2:13)" (2011, pp. 8, 11).

conceiving of the church which is referred to as the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12) in exclusively disembodied terms. Cherith Nordling says it well when she states that if "being saved" primarily has to do with being taken "out of this world then … agape is unrecognized as God's cruciform character in and for the world, and is easily replaced by 'niceness' toward our neighbor while we await a disembodied life in heaven" (2014, p. 199). Furthermore, the church's mission is subtly redirected in that it is "understood as saving souls out of creation rather than saving a people for participation in God's renewed creation through the redemption of their bodies (Rom 8: 23)" (ibid.). What we end up doing is skirting "around Jesus himself—our new Adam through his whole life—as our true indicative" (ibid.).

Referring to the triune reality of God as a starting point for exploring a more robust ecclesiology is nothing new but a revisiting of a theological approach or emphasis that has been around for some time. This is brought out by Paul Fiddes who notes that for the past thirty years or so communion theology has significantly come to the fore and has broad support both within and outside of evangelical circles. The following statement is representative of what is finding much support:

> Participation in the communion of the three divine persons is constitutive for the being and life of the church as expressed in the three New Testament descriptions of it as "people of God," "body of Christ" and "temple of the Holy Spirit." Thus the church also shares in the communion of the Father with the Son and of both with the Holy Spirit. The unity of the church as communion of the faithful has its roots in the trinitarian communion itself. (2014, p. 97)

However this communion theology is conceived, Fiddes says its point of departure is that "the church is a manifestation in time and space of the eternal relational life of God" (ibid., p. 98). Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen similarly states that while communion theologies may be nuanced in various ways as they appear on the contemporary scene, "the foundational intuition is that, rather than the individual, the ultimate reality is the

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communion, personhood, belonging, reflecting the life of the triune God" (2014, p. 138).[137] So significant is this foundational insight that Stanley Grenz concludes the divine life as "the link between the church as a whole and its local, visible expressions" summed up in the *communio* concept is such that "(n)o other category offers the possibility of an integral ecclesiology of such breadth and depth" (op. cit., p. 188). Furthermore, that the concepts of communion and visibility in ecclesiology are increasingly regarded as essential is brought out by John Webster who says they are really

> correlative notions, for both are rooted in a rejection of the inherited dualisms which separate the natural history of the church from its life in God, and both therefore refuse to sever the church as the sphere of divine grace from the divine existence of the church as "political" community in time. The church's essence is participation in the divine communion; but this does not in any way entail its removal from the negotiations of temporal, social and material existence, precisely because it is as such—as a visible form—that the church is in God. (2005, p. 76)[138]

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[137] Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen helps us understand that communion theology "has been embraced widely in contemporary theology" but "not all appropriate it similarly." The examples he gives are as follows: While "Zizioulas as an Orthodox theologian conceives it hierarchically, making the Father the source (*aitia*) of the Trinity, the Reformed Jürgen Moltmann and a number of contemporary female theologians have passionately argued for an egalitarian notion of communion. Several leading women theologians have reminded us that to the notion of communion belong the principles of mutuality and relationality". Here he quotes LaCugna who says, "God, too, lives from and for another: God the Father gives birth to the Son, breathes forth the Spirit, elects the creature from before all time. … God's rule is accomplished by saving and healing love" (2014, p. 138). Colin Gunton's caution when it comes to communion theology is apropos here. He says, "Great care must be taken in drawing out the implications … , and in particular the temptation must be resisted to draw conclusions of a logicising kind: appealing directly to the unity of the three as one God as a model for a unified church; or, conversely (and, I believe more creatively, though still inadequately) arguing from the distinctions of the persons for an ecclesiology of diversity, along the lines of the expression currently popular in ecumenical circles of 'reconciled diversity'. That would be to move too quickly, playing with abstract and mathematically determined concepts and exercising no theological control over their employment" (2003, p. 71).

[138] John Webster points to Dietrich Bonhoeffer as one who had a "profound mistrust of the way in which the notion of invisibility of the church can be used to resist the church's calling by assimilating itself in the civil order." He insisted that "the church's distinction from the world necessarily takes visible, bodily form." Bonhoeffer asserted that the followers of Christ "are the visible community of faith; their discipleship is a visible act which separates them from the world—or is it not discipleship. … To flee into invisibility is to deny the call. Any community which wants to be invisible is no longer a community that follows him. … The body of Jesus Christ can only be a visible body, or else it is not a body at all" (2005, p. 76).

One theologian who helps us further grasp how the doctrine of the Trinity can inform and must colour our ecclesiology even further is Colin Gunton. He begins with the premise that the church is to be an "echo" of the Trinity where this echoing is understood as the church revealing in a partial and finite way—"carefully controlled by an apophatic doctrine of the immanent Trinity"—the "dynamic of the relations between the three persons who constitute the deity." In short, the church's calling is to be a "kind of reality at a finite level that God is in eternity" (2003, p. 80). Or, stated another way, the doctrine of the Trinity in terms of the "eternally interanimating energies of the three" (the perichoretic interrelation) should be allowed to inform the interrelationships of the church community (ibid., p. 81).

In terms of providing a bridge between saying that "the source of our ontology of the church is a doctrine of the Trinity," which functions at a theoretical level, and its actuality, Gunton says, is to look at how the Trinity relates to the fulfillment of the ultimate destiny of creation which is its perfection. In both Colossians and Ephesians, Paul grounds the very being of the church in the Father's purpose to "to reconcile all things to himself through the Son and in the Spirit: that is to say, in the fulfilment of the destiny of creation"[139] (ibid.). The point that Paul is making is that the church as a body is

> called to be the community of the last times, that is to say, to realize in its life the promised and inaugurated reconciliation of all things. It therefore becomes an

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[139] The intention of God of a restored cosmos is developed by Joel Green in the following helpful summary: "Paul actually employs the phrase 'new creation' in 2 Corinthians 5:17 and Galatians 6:15, and uses a related expression, 'new humanity,' in Ephesians 2:15; 4:23-24; and Colossians 3:9-10. … These terms have roots in Second Temple Judaism, where they speak to the expectation of the restoration of the entire creation, which now exists in a state of futility on account of human sin. The fertile ground for these ideas can be found in Isaiah 56-66, with its promise of a new heaven and new earth. The end would embrace the original goodness of God's creation, but also extend beyond the original to a cosmos that would continue into eternity in its restored state. New life includes all things. (See Rom. 8:18-25; 1 Cor. 15:24-28; 2 Cor. 5:16-18; Phil. 3:21; Col. 1:15-20; Eph. 1:1:10)" (2003, p. 136).

echo of the life of the Trinity when it is enabled by the Spirit to order its life to where that reconciliation takes place in time, that is to say, to the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. (Ibid.)

How then does this role of the church become even more concrete? Gunton first acknowledges that in order for the church to be an echo of the life of the Godhead there must be a redirecting of itself away from self-aggrandizement pointing back to the very "source of its life in the creative and recreative presence of God to the world." It is as the church practices its life of proclamation and celebration of the Gospel visibly expressed through the sacraments of baptism and eucharist, pointing to the realities of incorporation and *koinonia*, and ultimately to the triune love of "the Father towards his world as it is mediated by the Son and Spirit," that the church fulfills its role in "temporal ways of orienting the community to the being of God" (ibid., p. 82).

Therefore, for Gunton, the implications of this way of understanding how the church is to echo the Trinity who is at work in the world is to recognize "that there is no timeless church: only a church then and now and to be, as the Spirit ever and again incorporates people into Christ and in the same action brings them into and maintains them in community with one another." Furthermore, there can be no "invisible" church as a primary way of understanding it because for Gunton the only way to truly be the church is "to be in communion with those who are ordered to Jesus by the Spirit … so as to echo the community of the Father, Son and Spirit." If our definition of the church is primarily driven by our understanding of the ontology that we are to mirror and the role into which we have been called, that of being community, the dominance of "an ontology of the invisible," is just not possible (ibid.).

What can we then conclude as far as the importance of the Trinity goes for a right understanding of the church? What we observe is that certain theologians are encouraging

a prioritizing of the understanding that the church's identity must be communal and relational. It derives this communal way of being from the God of scripture whose very being is three divine persons in communion who created the church for communion. This Triune God is characterized by love (1 John 4: 8) which is demonstrated most clearly in the coming of Jesus Christ as the embodiment of that love (cf. Rom. 5:8). He created the church to be a people described as the body of Christ who are to be in communion one with another which echoes the divine communion. Furthermore, as a people not only are they to be in relation to God, but to fellow believers as his representatives, then to humanity and to the whole of creation as his redemptive agents. As Harper and Metzger remind us in this regard, the church's purpose flows out of "its identity, because the church's communal identity is purposive. The church has its existence in constitutive relation with God, its own, humanity at large, and the world." What is more, "the church exists to love God, its own, the world, and the whole creation because it is loved in covenantal communion with God. This relational orientation signifies that the church is being-driven" (2009, p. 19).

6.4 The Church as the Visible People of God
as Developed in Scripture Better Informs
an Evangelical Ecclesiology

As we proceed, while it is instructive to understand that God's desire for human beings, grounded in his very being, is to be brought into a corporate whole, "a fellowship of reconciliation," is a reflection of God's own eternal reality (Grenz 1993, p. 188) and is an important theological construct extrapolated from a social conception of the Trinity, it will also be helpful to observe how God in scripture went about forming a covenant people for himself that is reflective of himself. God's intention to form a people who would reflect him inaugurated in the Old Testament and finding ever greater realization in

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the New Testament until the community of faith finally enjoys a completed fellowship in a renewed heavens and earth is a notable trajectory in scripture. What we also discover in the exploration of this concept of God forming a people to reflect his character in the grand narrative of scripture, bearing in mind that "the correspondence between the divine communion and human communities" will always be "partial and suggestive" (Kärkkäinen 2014, p. 142), gives fuller and more concrete expression to what it means to be characterized by love[140] and what the vocation of the church is as a people called. As we would expect, God's triune being and all that implies for the church is exemplified in scripture as we trace the development of the people of God.

Furthermore, as the concept of the people of God is looked at, not only will this important biblical theme with its significant embodiment aspect be found to have grounding in the scriptures, but we will be introduced to the shape and purpose for which God calls his people. This will serve the following purposes in terms of strengthening an evangelical ecclesiology which helps progress a more robust evangelical theology of the individual-in-community: First, it will demonstrate that the prioritizing of the individual with the usual concomitant over-spiritualizing of salvation not only inadequately takes into account the relational, triune God but does not account for the broader, more holistic plan of God in redemptive history which inevitably includes the church; second, that the

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[140] Miroslav Volf is of the opinion that the connections made between trinitarian and ecclesial communion is so pervasive these days that it enjoys the status of being an almost self-evident proposition. But a particular platitude that he sees resulting from this interconnection is that "humans must rise to the heights of God's selfless love." Volf says it is a platitude because it is "so divine that no one can live it" (summarized and quoted by Leupp 2008, p. 191. The intention in what follows is to give content to what love means biblically and is therefore not left in the realm of a platitude but is given concrete expression. However, we must always recognize that what is possible when expressing or living out God's love and communal relations will always be partial and awaits eschatological fulfillment.

visible expression of God in and through a people is God's gracious and eternally planned means of revealing his character and glory to humankind in time and space; and third, that the mission of God can only be understood in the context of a people called which proleptically points to a future reality when perfect community will be enjoyed in the new heavens and the new earth. In other words, an individually centered view of salvation that makes ecclesiology incidental or one of its outcomes cannot adequately point us to the evangelical, missional, triune God of the scriptures who "is reconciling all things to himself, whether on earth or in heaven" (Col. 1:20); only those who are in the role of corporately being in the image of God as fully revealed in Jesus Christ can fully do this.

As we begin to consider how the concept of the people of God can affect an evangelical ecclesiology so that it is more reflective of communal considerations, there is need at the outset to take into account some important factors that indicate that this concept is more demanding than it might appear at first. This is brought out by Robert Weber and Rodney Clapp in their book, *People of the Truth: The Power of the Worshiping Community in the Modern World*. They begin by asserting the following: The centrality of Christ in the life of worship of the church is a given where the story of Christ coming to suffer and then defeat evil is celebrated and reenacted; ideally Christians "are shaped by this story; they become a corporate body formed in the image of Christ, called to heed the truth and live in a divided world as a sign of the future kingdom." What is more, this reenacted story is unlike any story told by the world. It is not reflective of a this-worldly politic. "Instead, it is the politics of the kingdom of God, eschewing power … in favor of influence through service and respectful persuasion" (2001, pp. 5-6). Writing in the context of an American Christianity that has tended to put their hope in a national politic to bring about moral and social change, Weber and Clapp call for a shift

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in thinking that has bedeviled much of Christianity including evangelicals: they "are not radical enough"; rather than depending on the nation, they are to see that it is the church that is "their *primary* instrument of social change and communal influence" (ibid., p. 6). This is no call to withdrawal, insularity and quietism, but is rather a concentration on the true identity and vision that the church is called to so that it "can in fact be a more potent social and political presence than it is now" (ibid.).

But, particularly American Christians, (which I think can be extrapolated to include many western evangelical Christians) says Webber and Clapp, will only be persuaded to look more deeply into the biblical story centered on Christ and the kind of worship that they are to engage in when three realities are recognized: first, that "the faith or story of the church goes beyond individualism" (ibid.), an individualism where the church is viewed as "a kind of vestigial organ" (ibid. 7); second, where it is understood that the story "is both individual (personal) and social; and third, that worship is ultimately itself a special kind of politics" (ibid. 6). The kind of politics to which they are referring is one that goes beyond a very narrow conception of "politics" which is impoverished, narrow and small. Rather, it is one that "stands in judgment of all ideologies" (ibid. 9), that is supported and empowered by a distinctive Christian community "explicitly based on and acting from the revelation of God in Jesus Christ" (ibid. 10). This is not a call to the politicization of the church but a recognition that

> the worshiping community formed on the pattern of Christ, who is "the image of the invisible God" (Col. 1:15), is necessarily a unique *polis*. Consequently, we are recognizing that to live together in conformity to that distinct pattern is to engage in depth politics. The Christian community, simply by being faithful to its worship, will inevitably and naturally be "political" (depth political). It will challenge the wider society with the truthful conception of what it means to be a person and to see the world as it really is. (Ibid., p. 12)

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Why the church and the community it is called to be is so important particularly in our present western milieu is developed by Weber and Clapp. Drawing on some conclusions taken from George Lindbeck's significant work, *The Nature of Doctrine*, the importance and centrality of the church and the life that it is to embody is brought out. According to Lindbeck, what happens in a culture that has come under Christian influence is that it is assumed "knowledge of a few tag ends of religious language is knowledge of the religion (although no one would make this assumption about Latin)." As this flawed assumption dissipates in a culture which is increasingly de-Christianized and one can no longer assume that people "know the 'language' that is Christianity, and Christians no longer presume their task is simply one of 'translation' (which usually amounts to practical adoption of the society's non-Christian presuppositions and ways)," then something important arises that was not as clear when the background of Christianity was assumed: "Instead of redescribing the faith in the foreign language of the culture, Christians in a de-Christianized society seek to teach potential adherents the unique 'language' and practices of Christianity" (ibid., p. 14). But what is it that attracts non-Christians in the first place to the Christian way of life? They are "first attracted by the Christian community and form of life" just as it happened in the pre-Constantinian world. Once they are in the community, they learn "the alien Christian language and form of life" and when they are deemed to have intelligently and responsibly professed their faith, then they are baptized (ibid., p. 15). [141]

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[141] It is understood that Lindbeck develops a model where it is in Christian community that "(m)eaning is given within the praxis of the church." It is within the religious community and the way in which it uses language that the necessary context for its meaning is provided. According to Lindbeck, it is the biblical narrative that "forms the cultural linguistic world for the church. Like rules of grammar that

So, according to Webber and Clapp, why the corporate reality of the people of

God is so necessary is summed up as follows:

> Because costly faith must show palpable signs of being true—no one will adopt it (or hold to it) on a lark—and this demands community. Any sane inquirer will look for evidences of a way of life that appears true to both the tragedy and the triumph of the reality, and that enables people to negotiate life's difficult journey with honesty and grace. If Christianity evidences such a way of life, which it did to many in the ancient world, it does so in community. This is the case because ways of life are created, embodied, and passed down by communities. Just as no individual can learn and live the "American way of life" apart from the community that is the United States, no individual can learn and live the Christian way of life apart from the community that is the church. (Ibid.)

If being the people of God forming a visible community that embodies truth as a

way of life is so important, what insights can be drawn from the scriptures that

demonstrates that God always intended for the truth that he wants the church to embody

encompasses a community—the people of God? That God intended for his people to live

lives embodying the task of expressing in word and deed what it means to be related to

the God who has revealed himself ultimately in the person of Jesus Christ is the task

before us. The incarnation which is at the very centre of scripture reveals the embodiment

of God in Jesus Christ which must point, at a very minimum, to the embodiment of truth

in time and place. It seems inescapable that such thinking leads to a community, the

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govern our use of language to describe the world, theological doctrines identify the rules for using confessional language in defining this (its) social world." Lindbeck wants to demonstrate that there is a connection between rationality and the skilful use of learned rules (intentional catechization) by faithful believers. For an excellent summary of the main thrust of Lindbeck's thought in this regard, see *The Nature of Confession: Evangelicals and Postliberals in Conversation*, by Phillips, T.R and Okholm, D.L. eds (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1996), pp. 12,13. Lindbeck is among those who are considered "postfoundationalist" like Grenz and Pinnock and is identified as postliberal. For an essay that puts forward a "moderate foundationalism" that is sympathetic to what Lindbeck is saying and coheres with what was argued for in Chapter 3, see David Clark's, "Relativism, Fideism and the Promise of Postliberalism" in Philips and Okholm's book cited above.

people of God centred on Jesus Christ.[142] I have also chosen the concept of the people of

God because it captures the inseparability of theology and ethics which must undergird an

evangelical ecclesiology.

One theologian who provides a helpful framework within which to understand the

calling, role and purpose of the people of God that integrates well the various stages in

God's progressive revelation is Christopher Wright. He is chosen because he helps

provide a depth of understanding that not only gives insight into the continuity of God's

intentions for a people between the two Testaments, but ultimately gives a basis for an

evangelical ecclesiology that is communally oriented. His understanding of the people of

God unpacked first from the Old Testament and then into the New will reveal the

importance of a visible people embodying the will and character of God pointing us to the

eschatological reality of what is to come when the kingdom of God is fully revealed and

realized.

In order to understand Wright's suggested framework, we need to first go back

into the Old Testament. Obviously, within the limitations of this thesis, it is not possible

to develop all of Wright's strands of thought, but the crucial aspects of his development

will be outlined and will give a sense of what is at the core of what he wants to convey. In

his book, *Old Testament Ethics for the People of God*, he begins with three major themes

which can be conceptualized as three points on a triangle which are as follows: God,

Israel, and the land. It was within this broad matrix of self-understanding that the primary

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[142]The idea that truth can simply be viewed as an abstract disembodied reality is one that is questioned these days at a philosophical level. There are those who reject such a view in favour of the idea that all truth is expressed in the physical, or as Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore states, "All knowledge is body-mediated." Even God himself became embodied in the physical in the divine Logos. The incarnation presents significant evidence that the physical expresses meaning, that truth is embodied (2012, p. 129).

factors within Israel's theology and ethics are to be understood and, as we will see, what is carried through into the New Testament. Each of these factors can be understood to be "the three pillars of Israel's worldview … each of which affected and interacted with both the others." More precisely, they are described as "the theological angle (God), the social angle (Israel) and the economic angle (the land)" (2004, p. 19).

In his development of the theological angle, Wright starts with this theme because everything in the Old Testament flowed out of the identity and character of God (ibid., p. 25). It was God who acted first and it was in the context of God's initiative characterized by grace and God's redemptive action that Israel was called to respond. It was on the basis that God was the only true God (cf. Deut. 4:35,39) and the faithful, Holy God of Israel that his covenants stood (cf. Ex. 2:24; 3:6-8; 24 and 34). While much attention is placed on the law in the Pentateuch, a significant point that Wright wants to emphasize is that much of the Pentateuch, about half, is narrative, the stories of Israel. Why is this so important? Because it was through these stories that Israel understood themselves and their God, and "learned and handed on that accumulated store of revelation and experience, of tradition and challenge, of glowing examples and spectacular failures. … Israel was a community of memory and of hope." It was as people remembered and retold the stories of the past that hope for the future was generated, and "Israel most learned the shape of its own identity and mission and the ethical quality of life appropriate to both" (ibid., p. 26). It was through narrative that God intended for character to be shaped. Only later after Israel's storied life had taken shape with God acting first that the law came. This was purposeful in that God did not want Israel to think that through its own doing it could earn or expedite its own liberation and freedom by adhering to the law. Rather, God acting in history according to his redeeming grace was the context in which God's people

were to respond (ibid., 29). So, God's identity and character, will and intentions were reflected in his actions and then in his laws.

But not only does Wright draw out the redemptive, prior actions of God based on his identity and character which were to lead to obedience in the present by Israel motivated by God's grace, but he also refers to the eschatological aspect of God's redemptive purposes. Israel was not just a momentary phenomenon called into existence for that time only. Israel was called into existence with God's promise to Abraham as a basis for all nations ultimately to be blessed. This Wright refers to as the missional aspect of Israel's faith. It is here that a teleological element of Israel's life is brought out. (ibid. 35) God showed himself to be purposeful. Not only was Israel to live in the light of "a *past to which* they had to respond (God's redemption of Israel from Egypt)" but they were to live in the light of "a *future for which* they were in part preparing (God's blessings to the nations)" (ibid.).[143] God is sovereignly directing all things towards a particular goal. The future to which some of the prophets pointed in the latter part of their writings is one where God ultimately brings about "the end of present evils such as war and oppression, and will inaugurate an era of peace, justice and harmony within creation, among humanity, and between humanity and God" (ibid.). If this is the end to which God is directing history, then Israel in its life was to live out under God as far as was humanly possible motivated by gratitude what God ultimately intended. This is what it meant to

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[143] Graeme Goldsworthy reminds us of the priestly function of Israel first expressed in Exodus 19:6: "As a people they shall then exist in a unique relationship to God while representing him to the whole world as priests. … This priestly function in a world that belongs to God gives further meaning to the original covenant promise that all the nations of the earth would be blessed through Abraham's descendant (Gen 12: 3)" (1991, p. 141). In the New Testament, believers are also called to be a "holy priesthood" (1 Peter 2:9) indicating God's continued plan of having a people as a visible expression of himself serving as his representatives in this world.

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know him (cf. Jer. 22:15-16). Israel was to be a sign of what is to come by making known the character, intentions and ethical values of God (ibid., pp. 36-37).

This then brings us to the second point of the triangle which is Israel. The people of Israel were the social angle in God's programme, according to Wright. As God's redemptive plan unfolded in the Old Testament, it involved "the choosing, creating and moulding of an entire nation" (ibid., p. 49). While God could have saved people individually, he rather worked redemptively in and through a people that would eventually encompass the entirety of human history. Out of a background of sin and a divided world, God brought Abraham to a land in which a nation would be formed and blessing brought to all nations. "God's answer to the international blight of sin was a new community of international blessing, a nation that would be the pattern and model of redemption as well as the vehicle by which the blessing of redemption would eventually embrace the rest of humanity" (ibid.). A significant way by which Israel would be a blessing to the nations would be the life that it would exhibit—they would be characterized among other things by "their ethical distinctiveness" (cf. Gen 18:19) (ibid., p. 50). Israel's understanding of God and his role and mission for them was to have a direct impact on their relationship with others—it had a significant ethical and social dimension. Ethics in the Old Testament was not a mere "compendium of moral teaching to enable … individuals to lead privately upright lives before God." The choices individuals made certainly were important, but they were to be understood and made in a context where God was forming "a new community of people who in their social life would embody those qualities of righteousness, peace, justice and love" that would reflect not only God's character but his original purpose for humankind (ibid., 51).

What this means is that when we read the Old Testament, it can never be read from the standpoint of what it simply means for me. In fact, Wright says, this can never be our starting point. Rather, reading it in its own social context, the Old Testament is to be read in the light of how "any text contributes to our understanding of the social and ethical life of Israel" (ibid.).[144] Then we move on to the implications for the present day people of God and then finally for human society at large. Regarding this understanding and progression, he quotes Walter Brueggemann who challenges us in the following way:

> We may re-articulate our covenantal hope for the world. So long as this subversive paradigm is kept to God and church, we are safe enough. Its character of surprise and threat becomes clear when the covenant is related to the world beyond the believing community. The covenantal paradigm affirms that the world which we serve, and for which we care, is a world yet to be liberated. A theology of covenanting is not worth the effort unless it leads to energy and courage for mission. … The three belong closely together: a *God* who makes covenant by making a move toward the partner (Hos. 2:14, 18-20); a *community* which practices covenant by the new forms of Torah, knowledge and forgiveness (Jer. 31:31-34); and a world yet to be transformed to covenanting, by the dismantling of imperial reality (Isa. 42:6-7, 49:6). (Ibid.)

Only as a final step will we ask how we individually can fit into and promote such a vision (ibid., p. 52).

Therefore, according to Wright, the social life that God expected of the people of Israel revealed a distinct social shape that was essential to what it meant to be Israel. As a distinct people chosen and called by God to be the means by which blessing and redemption would come to the nations, Israel could not just be any kind of society. They could not take on just any kind of existence and still carry "the flag for the worship of

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[144]Anthony Thiselton goes to great lengths to point out that the idea of the corporate nature of God's dealings with a people is prominent throughout the scriptures such that we need to "*regain a horizon of understanding…that is closer to the corporate and the communal mind-set of the biblical writers…than to the individualism that has characterized the West from the Enlightenment almost to the present*." See his, *Hermeneutics of Doctrine* (2007, p.478)

YHWH and his promises to humanity through them" (ibid., p. 58). Wright, drawing on the work of Paul Hanson, *The People Called: The Growth of Community in the Bible*, points out how the nature of the God of Israel was to be reflected in "the revolutionary nature of the new kind of community envisaged and created through the exodus." The two were bound up together.

> In essence there was already revealed in this event both the nature of the God Yahweh, and the nature of the community of faith that Yahweh's nature implied ... In the deliverance from Egyptian slavery, Israel encountered a God whose nature and whose corresponding plan for reality stood in diametric opposition to the gods of the Pharaoh. ... Thus a new notion of community was born with the exodus. In compromising or denying it, as Israel repeatedly would, Israel would compromise or deny its own essential being as a people called by God, a community of freed slaves within which the pyramid of social stratification consigning certain classes to lives of ease and others to relentless suffering and deprivation was to be banned forever. (Ibid.60)

Wright's conclusions regarding Israel's social life is that it was neither accidental nor arbitrary. Neither was it a transitory, material spinoff designed to convey a greater spiritual message. The social dimension of Israel's life was not "a kind of husk, out of which we claim to extract a kernel of spiritual timeless truths." Rather, Israel as a social reality was to embody what God wanted to see in his people. In Israel's very existence, it was to convey both God's revelation and display God's blessing of a people redeemed, living under his rule. "Their social structure, aspirations, principles and policies, so organically related to their covenantal faith in the LORD, were also part of the content of that revelation, part of the pattern of redemption." In other words, "God's message of redemption through Israel was not just verbal; it was visible and tangible." Israel in its social life was to be both "the medium" and a significant aspect of "the message" that

God wanted to convey to the nations. In their very life together, God's nature and character would be revealed (ibid.).[145]

The third point of the triangle Wright draws our attention to is the land—what he calls the Economic Angle. The land God gave to Israel was a significant aspect of their relationship with God. Just as Israel's social life was not incidental, neither was the land God gave them. It was not to be viewed simply as a necessary asset essential for nationhood and sustainability, and merely assigned a commercial value. Rather, the land in Israel's life had theological and ethical importance. According to Wright, the theological significance of the land cannot be overlooked and relegated "to the role of 'background scenery'" (ibid., p. 76).

A fundamental understanding of the land was to be that it was "YHWH's land and he asserted moral rights over how it was to be used" (cf. Leviticus 25:23; Deut. 24:19-22; Mic. 2:1-2). While the land was given to Israel by way of "promise and covenantal gift," Israel was still to view the land in terms of stewardship and divine ownership. In a very important way, the land functioned "as a kind of covenantal thermometer—measuring Israel's relationship with God at any one time." As such, the land with all of its economic aspects functioned as an indication of how things were going in the other domains of Israel's life—their relationship with God and their relationship with others (ibid., p. 77).

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[145] Gerhard Lohfink in a similar vein conveys the importance of the people of Israel as bearers in a visible and concrete way of God's redemptive purpose. He says that fundamental to the development of Old Testament theology "is the idea that God has selected a single people out of all the nations of the world in order to make this people a sign of salvation. " This, however, did not in any way restrict his interest in other nations but made Israel particularly responsible. "When the people of God shines as a sign among the nations (cf. Is. 2:1-4), the other nations will learn from God's people; they will come together in Israel in order to participate, in Israel and mediated through Israel, in God's glory. But all this can happen only when Israel really becomes recognizable as a *sign of salvation*, when God's salvation transforms his people recognizably, tangibly, even visibly" (1998, p. 28).

That God gave land to Israel and that the land would have theological significance must be seen, according to Wright, in the broader context of God's redemptive plan and commitment to his creation. God not only judges but also restores prefigured in his covenant with Noah which will culminate in the "coming final judgment and renewal—the new creation (2 Per. 3:3-13)" (ibid.). Therefore, it should not surprise us that God's covenant with Abraham that began "the work of redemption in history included land as a fundamental constituent of that promise (Gen. 12:7; 15:7, 18-21; 17:8 etc.)" (ibid., pp. 77-78). As the Old Testament story of Israel unfolds, the land was not merely a neutral staging ground for the drama to take place. Wright's insight with regard to the land in Israel's history is that "in all its dimensions—promise, conquest, shared possession, use and abuse, loss and recovery—was a fundamentally theological entity" (ibid., p. 83). Just as the social shape of Israel's life was integral to God's purpose and pattern of redemption, so too was the economic role of the land.

Having described Wright's framework for understanding the basic aspects of the Old Testament where God intentionally formed a people, Israel, with its social and economic aspects that would reflect his character and will, we need to look at how he moves from the historical reality of Israel to the broader picture portrayed in scripture. Moving forward we encounter what Wright describes as the paradigmatic, eschatological, and typological methods of interpretation. The first two he sees as arising from within the Old Testament itself, and the third from the New Testament. All three should not be viewed as separate but as "three complementary ways of interpreting and applying" the Old Testament material (ibid, p. 182). Using these three methods of interpretation, he helps us see how the Old Testament ultimately stimulates a reading of scripture that has a significant bearing on ecclesiology.

First, we must grasp what Wright means by paradigmatic. It is here that he draws on the thinking of Thomas Kuhn who used the term "paradigm" in two senses. Paradigm can include "the entire constellation of beliefs, values, techniques, and so on shared by the members of a given community." It can also designate "actual results of experimentation that provide working models for further research by suggesting ways of problem-solving for a large number of unsolved problems" (ibid., p. 67). Both senses of the concept, Wright says, can be fruitfully applied as a means by which the Old Testament can function as a paradigm: "as a matrix of beliefs on the one hand, and as concrete examples on the other" (ibid.). How so? With the first sense in mind, when Israel came onto the scene, it introduced into the world of that time "a new paradigm of beliefs and values into the ancient Near Eastern world—using 'paradigm' here in its wider sense of an overarching matrix of beliefs" (ibid.). Certainly, as much scholarship has brought to our attention, their religious and cultural expressions did not appear in a vacuum as there were many parallels between Israel and its contemporary world. However, in certain significant ways Israel was different. "(T)his difference included their whole worldview—the matrix of beliefs and assumptions that governed their social and religious self-understanding and organization" (ibid.). With the second sense in mind, Israel "constituted a concrete model, a practical, culturally specific, experimental exemplar of the beliefs and values they embodied" (ibid., p. 68). This is not to deny that as Israel's history progressed, it did not go through change. From Abraham's time to returning from exile, the people of Israel underwent several major changes, "yet in each era there were the constants, the underlying fundamental ideals of what it was to be Israel, of what was or was not 'done' in Israel" (ibid.).

The result of Israel constituted as it was, was a remarkable society that took shape with a social, economic and political life that was radically different where all of these domains were undergirded and motivated by a unique form of religious belief. Wright captures what made Israel unique as a people even though we know they often strayed and failed when he says,

> They succeeded for several centuries to prove, for example, that a theocracy could actually work without a human king; that land could be possessed and enjoyed without being treated merely as a commercial asset, to be bought, sold and exploited through absolute ownership; that a broad equality of families with built-in mechanisms for the prevention or relief of poverty, debt and slavery could be maintained; that the people's spiritual needs could be met without a highly consumptive, landowning, cultic elite. Their whole concrete existence in history is paradigmatic. … Historical Israel articulated a comprehensive corporate response to a wide range of economic, social and political issues in their day. (Ibid., pp. 68-69)

Wright's employing of the concept of paradigm as applied to Israel is corroborated by Paul D. Hanson in his, *The People Called: The Growth of Community in the Bible*. Hanson points out that the Old Testament incorporated events and narratives which "were of such revelatory power that they took on the nature of a paradigm for both how God could be expected to act in future, and also how Israel should act in response" (ibid., 69). Using the exodus as an example, he explains that the narrative, poetry, law and prophecy of the exodus all stand "as a paradigm of the LORD'S faithfulness, justice and compassion, and similarly as a paradigm for Israel's social life in many dimensions." But not for the nation of Israel alone, because as Hanson argues, what was paradigmatic for Israel in its life as a people is also to be paradigmatic for the church which lives under the same God in this present age (ibid.).

Having developed Wright's paradigmatic approach to the Old Testament, we find a helpful way of viewing Israel as a model or a pattern by which to explore the wider relevance of Israel's life. What Wright highlights is that, theologically speaking, God

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intended for Israel to function paradigmatically so as to shed light on our own world. What we are doing, using Israel is an example or model, is what God always intended should happen (cf. Ex. 19:4-6). Therefore, the reason why we have the Old Testament scriptures is so that they give us a paradigm, displayed in "one single culture and slice of history … the kinds of social values God looks for in human life generally" (ibid., p. 65).[146] How Israel can be paradigmatic for the church will be considered shortly, but before we get there a few more intermediary concepts that are helpful must be covered first.

Another important aspect of Wright's understanding is to consider the goal of history into which Israel fit. It is here that we encounter his eschatological interpretation. Again he is pointing out something that is not novel. Based on the conviction founded on both Testaments that history has a certain *telos*, Wright comes to the following conclusion: "God's redemptive purpose, initiated through Israel and their land, will ultimately embrace all nations and the whole earth, in a transformed and perfect new creation" (ibid., p. 184). What this entails is that eventually God's redemptive purposes will ultimately "transcend (break through)" the fallen creation of which we are a part and the God of Israel will be acknowledged universally and God's peaceful reign will be established. So in the end it will be evident that God has not abandoned his creation but

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[146] Elsewhere, Wright states that his proposed paradigmatic method can make no claim to being new but is in keeping with the Bible itself. He says, "It seems to me that it is fairly similar to what we find in the Bible itself in certain examples of ethical argument or challenge. In the Old Testament we have repeatedly observed that Israel's experience of liberation through the exodus functions as a paradigm for a wide variety of social and ethical obligations that were laid upon them. Even in ancient Israel itself this was not a matter of literal imitation or replication: Israel could not recreate an 'exodus, parting of the sea and all' for every social context of need or injustice they encountered. But the exodus was certainly a paradigm, calling for a certain pattern of response to oppression that would reflect in different circumstances what the historical particularity of the exodus had demonstrated about the LORD" (2004, pp. 71-72).

will have redeemed it and the land of Israel will have "functioned as a prototype of that redeemed earth" (ibid., p. 185).

As such, the land of Israel performed another very important function within the broad sweep of biblical theology. "It points eschatologically to that 'new heaven and new earth' in which righteousness will dwell, because God will dwell then with his people (2 Pet. 3:13; Rev. 21:1-3)." That this identification can be made, according to Wright, is because in the New Testament 'the new Jerusalem' is used as a figure for the new creation that is to come (cf. Rev. 21:4-5; Heb. 12:22); it is here that an explicit link is made between the land of Israel and what is to come (ibid., p. 186).

But, as Wright reminds us, this future vision was not meant to foster escapism or some utopian vision, but in keeping with the prophets' use of this future vision, it was meant "to effect response and change *in the present*." Therefore, by coupling the goal of God's redemptive work with an urgency to live in a particular way in the present, what is revealed is that "an eschatological interpretation of any Old Testament theme, such as the land … rebounds back into this present world with an ethical thrust. If this is how the story ends, what kind of ethical objectives should shape our behaviour as we live in the midst of the story here and now?" (ibid.).

Up to this point we have in brief summarized Wright's understanding of a paradigmatic and eschatological interpretation of Israel's significance as the people of God. This brings us to the important question of, what now is the significance of the land in this present era? Wright proceeds to answer this question based on the following premises: First, Palestine as a physical territory nowhere in the New Testament is given theological significance (an argument from silence but for Wright a significant one) (ibid. 187-189); second, because God's people now includes both Jew and Gentile, the focus on

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a particular piece of land falls away and now people's faith, hope and worship no longer are localized but universalized (cf. John 4:20-26)[147]; and third, "There can be no doubt that the New Testament writers regarded Jesus as the Messiah who fulfilled and embodied the mission of Israel."[148] Therefore, those who are in Christ, Jew and Gentile, are the spiritual seed of Abraham and now heirs to the covenant and promise made to him (Gal.3:26-28) (ibid., p. 187). This does not mean that the significance of the land in the New Testament simply vanishes but finds its greater significance in Christ. Here Wright explains in more detail how this happens:

> By incorporation into the Messiah, people from all nations are enabled to enter into the privileges and responsibilities of God's people, privileges and responsibilities that, in the Old Testament, had been focused on life in the land. Now Christ himself takes over the significance and the function of that old land-kinship qualification. To be in Christ, just as to be in the land, denotes first, a status and a relationship that have been given by God; second, a position of inclusion and security in God's family; and third, a commitment to live worthily by fulfilling the practical responsibilities towards those who share the same relationship with you. This is what is meant by the typological understanding standing of the significance of Israel's land. It simply means treating the land as we do other great features and themes of the Old Testament, by relating it to the person and work of the Messiah, and through him to the nature of the community of those 'in Christ', messianic Israel. (Ibid., p. 192)

Having summarized Wright's framework for understanding the Old Testament with its theological, social and economic aspects coupled with the paradigmatic,

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[147] Wright makes the point that "the geographical land of Israel has no place in New Testament teaching regarding the ultimate future of God's people. Even in key passages where the relation between Jew and Gentile Christians is discussed, and especially in Romans 9-11 where Paul speaks of the future of the Jewish nation, no mention whatever is made of the land. Nor is there any indication that Paul, himself a believing Jew, believed that the land as physical territory still had *theological* importance for the *Jewish* Christians." (ibid. 188) For a similar understanding of how the New Testament interprets the territorial promises made to Israel see Hans K. LaRondelle's, "Israel's Territorial Promise in New Testament Perspective" (1983, pp. 135-46).

[148] Hans K. LaRondelle in his chapter, "The Typological Interpretation" (1983, pp. 35-59) gives much evidence that the typological perspective is basic to "Christ's own understanding of His messianic mission as well as to the message of the New Testament writers."

eschatological and typological interpretations that he gives attention to, certain aspects of Wright's development centred on the people of God surface that lead to some helpful ways of thinking particularly as a more robust ecclesiology is being encouraged. For example, God clearly wanted a people in their concrete existence together to embody his character, values and will. Not only were they to live in right relationship with their God, but they were to reflect in their relations a particular ethic. By living in a particular way, not only were they to be a light to the nations, but they were to be a prototype of the world to come when finally the goal of history—the restoration of all things—will be a reality. That Israel was to be the embodiment of the truth of God was no accident of history but was part of God's intentional unfolding of redemptive history that would find fulfilment in Christ and will eventually be fully consummated when Christ returns. In the interim, the church, the body of Christ made up of those who are in Christ, are the universalized expression of the people of God. Just how the present people of God are to be the paradigmatic embodiment of Israel with its God ordained social and economic aspects to its life will be proposed further on.

Before briefly considering how the church is to be paradigmatic of Israel in their concrete expression, something must be said of Jesus Christ and the community he formed during his earthly ministry especially as this reinforces what is being asserted so far. If Jesus Christ himself was the typological interpretation of Israel, what can be said about Jesus and what he did that not only points back to Israel but helps envision in a prophetic way the kind of community he wants to ultimately establish? It is here that I want to briefly point out some important observations made by some theologians regarding Jesus and the calling of his disciples.

One such theologian is Gerhard Lohfink. While Lohfink is not an evangelical but a Roman Catholic, there is much in his work where his understanding of Jesus and the community of disciples he formed resonates well with those evangelicals who place a greater emphasis on the concept of community. In this respect, a reading of Lohfink reveals much that is in accord with Christopher Wright's understanding of the function of Israel that forms the background and basis for what Jesus did and points to the importance of a concrete community.

A major thesis of Lohfink's work is that God's reign must have a visible people who are a visible sign of his redemptive work. The very reason God chose Israel, according to Lohfink, is because "God needs a witness in the world, a people in which God's salvation can be made visible" (1999, p. 37). God's plan, he says, is never "something vague, everywhere and nowhere, but is focused on a people with clear contours" (ibid. 46). When Jesus began his ministry, not only did he symbolically go into the desert, just as Israel did, and responded as Israel should have, but Jesus also prophetically re-created Israel around Himself so that the choosing of the twelve disciples "illustrated the claim which Jesus made upon Israel as a whole" and also showed "conclusively that the Twelve can only be understood as a sign *for the people of God*" (1984, p. 22). This is reinforced later by the community of disciples who in the New Testament saw themselves as the renewed ingathering of Israel and the true Israel. They applied two self-designations to themselves as the early Christian community in Jerusalem that had significant roots in the Old Testament: the *ekklesia* (cf. 1 Cor. 15:9; Gal. 1:13) which meant "a public assembly, the popular assembly of the political community" which is used in the Septuagint to translate *qahal* which was used of "the assembly before Yahweh of the Old Testament people of the covenant" (cf. Deut. 23:2-9

where *ekklesia* designates the "true people of God, separated from all unholiness and impurity"). Another self-designation closely related to *ekklesia* is that of "the saints" (cf. Acts 9:13; Rom. 15:25) which as a technical term was applied to *ekklesia* and "used since Daniel 7 to refer to the eschatological people of God" (ibid., p. 77).[149]

Another aspect of Lohfink's thought is found in the context of discipleship as developed in the gospels. He is clear that the choosing of the disciples was never meant to replace Israel as Jesus persisted in his claim on Israel as a whole. Rather,

> When Israel as a whole did not accept Jesus' message, the circle of disciples acquired a new function. It received the task of representing symbolically what really should have taken place in Israel as a whole: complete dedication to the gospel of the reign of God, radical conversion to a new way of life, and a gathering unto a community of brothers and sisters. (Ibid., p. 34) (cf. Mark 1:16-20; Matt. 10:37, 38; Luke 14:26)

In other words, as one studies the gospels, for those "grasped by God's rule" who are transformed by it in all its various aspects of its existence, they "become a contrast society." Jesus in calling people to discipleship was not a calling for a theocratic state but was a calling to his followers to "become a family of brothers and sisters, just like the

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[149]C. Norman Kraus affirms that "the reconstitution of the Twelve, the offer of baptism and the return of the disciples to Jerusalem establish that *the eschatological gathering of Israel, initiated by Jesus, was continued by the post-Easter community of disciples in faithfulness to Jesus.*" But, the difference now as Krause reminds us, is that "the movement aimed at the gathering of Israel now stood within the framework of the new possibility of repentance established by Jesus' atoning death. … From now on the situation of Israel was marked by Jesus' sacrifice of his life for the people of God. … The movement of gathering which Jesus had initiated thus continued, but it continued under a Christological sign" (1974, p. 32). That there is "little doubt that the New Testament writers regarded Jesus as the Messiah who fulfilled and embodied the mission of Israel" is stated by Christopher Wright. The consequence of this understanding for "the messianic community of those who are 'in Christ'" is that it "stands in spiritually organic continuity with Old Testament Israel. The Messiah is the embodiment of the people of God, the fulfilment of the Old Testament people of God and the foundation for the New Testament people of God. Whether Gentile or Jew, the believer in Christ is the spiritual seed of Abraham, and heir to the covenant and promise (Gal. 3:26-28)" (2004, p. 187).

family Jesus had gathered in his circle of disciples."[150] The significance of Jesus

gathering of a band of disciples in God's grand scheme of forming a people is expressed

as follows:

> Jesus' ethic was aimed toward an eschatological people of God renewed precisely in this sense. It was not directed toward the isolated individual, for isolated individuals are simply not in a position to exemplify and to live the social dimension of the reign of God. Nor was Jesus' ethic directed to the world as a whole. A new order of society and of life could have been imposed on the world as a whole only by force. But that would have contradicted the very nature of God's rule. Only one path remained open: that God begin at some place in the world, in one people, to create something new. When this people remained unmoved, God began with an even smaller group, the new family of disciples gathered around Jesus. (Ibid., p. 72)

So committed is Lohfink to the idea that isolated individuals can never exemplify

the social dimension of life Jesus called people to, that Lohfink says following Jesus as a

disciple of his can only correspond to the gospels if it is lived out in close companionship,

that is, with others. "Only then does the eschatological people of God achieve its

strength." Drawing on the imagery of 1 Corinthians 12, "only then does it become a

single body with many members." Drawing on the imagery of 1 Peter 2, "only then is it a

heavenly edifice built up of many living stones" (1999, p. 172). For Lohfink, this imagery

cannot be simply spiritualized but must take on a concrete, visible form. Accordingly, he

says, "it is visible, palpable, tangible. It is socially organized. Anyone who locates it only

in the word of proclamation or in the hearts of the faithful, and pretends that invisibility is

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[150] For a clear and thought-provoking historical development of the concept of the church as family, see Joseph H. Hellerman's book, *When the Church was a Family: Recapturing Jesus' Vision for Authentic Christian Community*. A significant thesis within the book is that "an individualistic gospel about Jesus as 'personal Savior' that tacks on church involvement as some kind of utilitarian afterthought" does not fit into the teaching of Jesus nor that of the apostles. The church is where one is joined "together in community with my siblings in the faith," and as we call others to join the community of faith, we engage in God's missional agenda. "The family of God is the place where I lose my life in order to gain it" (2009, p. 222).

its true nature, takes seriously neither its existence as the beginning of the eschatological Israel nor its origins in the Risen One and his bodiliness" (ibid., p. 207).

In the light of what has been developed so far that the people of God must take on a visible, concrete form in the light of what God purposefully did with Israel and what Christ did intentionally in his earthly ministry forming a community that pointed backwards to Israel and forwards to the church, we can concur with Robert Sherman who says that when we talk of the church we are not just talking about "'the people of God' but 'the people of God's reign'" (2015, p. 137). He says this based on the rootedness of the church in the Abrahamic covenant which promised "all the families of the earth will be blessed" (Gen. 12:3) taken together with "the new covenant established in Christ" which will be completed when the kingdom of God at the end of the age is fully realized.

Accordingly, this reign cannot be simply privatized. Rather, says Sherman, Christians are "to see themselves as members of a concrete body, an eschatologically constituted 'holy nation' serving and inviting the world to acknowledge God's sovereign intentions" (ibid, p. 138). For us to think that the ideal for the church is to be disembodied or have no institutional structure, even of a minimalist sort, is to engage in "a kind of latter-day gnosticism." As he says, "we are embodied, social, and historical beings, and our common life requires embodied, social, and historical structures" (ibid.). For the kingdom of God, even in its partial and "not yet" form cannot be simply understood as invisible and the reign of God properly evidenced in individual lives, but can only be adequately represented by a community "embedded and involved in the everyday world even while it exists as an embassy of a heavenly commonwealth" (ibid., 138). This community, as C. Norman Kraus asserts, must serve as "a demonstration of the new reconciled order of society under the rule of God. Such an expression or demonstration of

the new reality is part of the church's strategy for proclaiming the rule of God to the larger social order" (1974, p. 40).[151] So, while maintaining a tension between the vertical and the horizontal, between the heavenly and the earthly, what is done in the horizontal serves as a proclamation to a world caught up in alienating power structures, divisions and disregard for the least in society, and must demonstrate in its corporate life an alternate ethic that is rooted in the vertical. The church as the people of God's reign is collectively called to be reoriented and realigned by the Spirit and in accordance with Christ to a different path and vision (Sherman 2009, pp. 138-39).

Returning to Christopher Wright, we look to him for some concrete ways in which the New Testament church is to be paradigmatic of the Israel God intended it to be. If the people of God in the Old Testament were in their socio-economic dimension to represent God visibly to the nations, does this feed through into the New Testament? If through being in Christ where now both Jew and gentile have entered into the privileges and responsibilities associated with being God's people that in the Old Testament focused on a people living in a land, are all of those aspects, as Wright asks, just to be "transcended, spiritualized and forgotten?" This cannot be the case, is clearly the answer Wright is looking for. His basic thesis is that "it is precisely into that realm of corporate sharing and practical responsibility" where the Old Testament feeds through into the New (2004, p. 194). The oneness of believers affirmed in the New Testament (Eph. 2:18, 22; Gal. 3:14) and them being "the seed and heirs of Abraham (Gal. 3:28-29) … is no mere abstract,

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[151]Similarly, J. H. Yoder asserts that "the primary social structure through which the gospel works to change other structures is that of the Christian community" (1994, p.157). Just as Israel was a counter-community, so is the church to be one and is to model what it means to be a righteous society.

'spiritual' concept. On the contrary, it has far-reaching practical implications in both the social *and* economic realms" (ibid.).

Wright goes on to point out that the socio-economic aspects of the Old Testament are very much in evidence in the New Testament. For example, a study of the word fellowship or *koinonia* and the various forms or compounds of it are often used in contexts that have a significant social and economic aspect to them and "denote a practical, often costly, sharing" (ibid.). Wright gives us some examples to make this point:

> The first consequence of the outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost was a new community who, in 'devoting themselves to … the fellowship' (*te koinonia*), shared everything in common (Acts 2:42, 44), and ensured that nobody was in need (Acts 4:34). In Romans 12:13 believers are urged to share hospitality with the saints (*koinonountes*). In 1Timothy 6:18 the rich are to be commanded to be 'generous' (*koinonikous*). The same duty is laid on all Christians in Hebrews 13:16. Paul refers to his financial collection among the Greek churches for the aid of the Judaean Christians as 'an act of fellowship' (*koinonian tina*, Rom. 15:26). He justifies this financial collection on the grounds that if the Gentiles have shared (*ekoinonesan*) spiritual blessings from the Jews, they owe it to them to share material blessings (v.27). The same reciprocal principle applies in the relationship between the teacher and the taught in Galatians 6:6—the one taught must 'share with' (*koinoneito*), that is, financially support, the teacher. Indeed, in commending the Corinthians for their eagerness to share in the financial collection (*koinonia*, 2 Cor.8:4; 9:13), Paul describes it as proof *of their obedience to the gospel*, implying that such concrete economic evidence of fellowship was of the essence of a genuine Christian profession. (Ibid., pp. 194-195)

So extensive is this kind of language in the New Testament that Wright believes it is hard for one not to see the ethic of *koinonia* having deep roots in the Old Testament socio-economic system that God instituted. So pervasive are the similarities between the two Testaments that Wright offers the following parallel: "the experience of fellowship—in its full, rich, 'concrete' New Testament sense—fulfils analogous theological and ethical functions for the Christian as the possession of land did for Old Testament Israelites" (ibid., p. 195). So whether we are looking at the significance of the land in the

Old Testament or *koinonia* in the New, both must be understood within God's redemptive purposes and redemption pattern; they are not just "accidental or incidental" to God's program. It is on this basis that Wright offers the following corresponding insight:

> The explicit purpose of the exodus was the enjoyment of the rich blessing of God in his 'good land'; the goal of redemption through Christ is 'sincere love for your brothers' (1 Pet.1:22), with all its practical implications. Both are linked to the status of sonship and the related themes of inheritance and promise. Both thereby constitute a proof of an authentic relationship with God as part of his redeemed community. (Ibid.)[152]

6.5 Conclusion

Based on what has been developed above, we are drawn to an understanding of the church that is far more holistic and reveals that salvation and what the church must model cannot be simply reduced to the "spiritual". What comes through very clearly is that the triune God is always the one who initiates, redeems, reconciles and makes possible what the people of God can mirror of himself as his image in this world. A study of what God initiated based on a comprehensive reading of scripture ends up undermining an individualistic soteriology and approach to ecclesiology, and promotes a robust ecclesiology where *koinonia* in its broad sense is not optional but integral to being the

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[152] Craig Blomberg, a New Testament scholar, after a detailed study of passages dealing with poverty and riches, of the Israelites and their material relationships with one another, and Christians ministering to the needs of one another as promoted in the New Testament concludes that "biblical salvation is always holistic—involving body and soul, material and spiritual dimensions. And a major component of the material dimension is transformation in the way God's people utilize 'mammon'—material possessions. To the extent that the kingdom has been inaugurated from the cross of Christ onward, Christians individually and corporately are called to model that transformation, however, imperfectly, as a foretaste of the perfect redemption that must ultimately await the age to come" (1999, pp. 246-47). James K.A. Smith similarly states that "Christian worship—which is a foretaste of the new creation—embodies a new economy, an alternate economy. … (T)he kingdom is concerned with economics. This is not just a matter of individual acts of charity or discretionary giving from our so-called disposable income, but rather a reconfiguration of distribution and consumption." He goes on to point to Acts 2:42-45 and remarks that "kingdom economics—'socialism by grace'—becomes an important mark of the church and a central aspect of Christian practice" (2009, pp. 204-05).

church. We are drawn into identifying and articulating those principles and understandings that ultimately reflect the nature of God, his ways of working redemptively from the beginning, and the people of God as the significant outworking of them. As we engage in a method that sees greater continuity between the testaments and an ever unfolding of God's dealings with his people amidst the earthly realities of life, all pointing to what will be fully realized when God's plan of the ages is completed, we come to the realization that an emphasis on the invisible and a disembodied church does not adequately account for what is portrayed.

Therefore, what has been promoted is grounded in the theological, who God is and why as the gracious, faithful, triune, relational God who is constantly initiating and assuring redemption is worthy of our worship. But just as integral to worship in the Old Testament were the social and economic aspects of Israel's life, so too must we search for what is paradigmatic that impacts the context in which we live. We are compelled to search for the range of social and economic principles that "will authentically reflect the totality of the biblical paradigm itself" (Wright 2004, p. 197) and ultimately reflect who God is in his very being and nature. Then as we see how Christ fulfilled all of the Old Testament promises in a way that continues to emphasise belonging, reconciliation, caring and redemption that is encompassing of all of life, we are disinclined to make a radical disjunction between the physical and the material. The material, the embodied, the sacramental, that which is earthly God uses to point us toward himself and what is indeed spiritual. If the Old Testament does not separate out these two realms very easily and if the New Testament continues to link the material with the spiritual in ways that demonstrate that these realms are inextricably linked, then it is incumbent upon us to

continue the search for how these two realms must interface. In short, a visible, embodied community must be the focus of our ecclesiastical expressions.

But we engage in this task living within a certain tension. Just as Israel looked forward to a fulfilment of what was promised and we in this present age live in between a kingdom that is both present and future, now and not yet, that we have a present redemption in Christ through a covenanting God with all of its tangible benefits that come through being members of the people of God, a family, we also await what is yet future—"the ultimate fulfilment of all the land promised the people of God" (ibid.). We avoid triumphalism and wait in expectation for a new order where all things will be brought under God's *de facto* reign. But in the interim we cannot withdraw by simply spiritualizing what it means to be the church. We are called to the work of being a sign, a beacon, a faithful pointer to what is to come in what is earthly. As John Howard Yoder succinctly states, "The church is … 'first fruits': i.e., it is or is to be in itself the beginning of what is to come. This means both that the church's presence constitutes a part of the promise that more is to come … but also that its quality and direction have begun to be manifest." In other words, according to Yoder, "The church does communicate to the world what God plans to do, because it shows that God is beginning to do it" (1994, pp. 125-26). This calls for a deep, life commitment to following Christ as Lord and being his corporate image where the understanding is, as C. Norman Kraus puts it,

> the church is that community in which the purposes and ideals of the movement become a reality in the life and history of the secular order. The church is the secular—i.e. temporal or historical—expression of the Movement. It is a demonstration of the new reconciled order of society under the rule of God. Such an expression or demonstration of the new reality is part of the church's strategy for proclaiming the rule of God to the larger social order.
> Within its ordered life the church should demonstrate the spirit of God in a community of justice, mutuality, respect, and forgiveness which are the signs of *agape*. In short, it should reflect the qualities of brotherhood or *koinonia* which it proclaims. Like a city on a hill it should be an example or light to the world in its

> own organized life. It is the reconciled community which by its very life bears witness to the movement of God among men. (1974, p. 40)

Therefore, the church in its life together is called to embody what God is doing and is going to do. In its life and communal ethic the church serves as a light to the nations inviting others to participate in its modelling of what it means to follow Jesus in a life given for others. "The church's calling," says Kevin Vanhoozer, "is to be the kind of community that displays habits and virtues formed by the story of Jesus" thereby resisting "the pressure of becoming like its surrounding liberal democratic individualistic culture" (2004, p.64).

CHAPTER 7

A CONCLUSION WITH SOME SPECIFIC PROPOSALS

In the introduction of this dissertation, the research question that was put forward was stated as follows: *The theology of evangelicalism is being awakened to the concept of community as a significant thrust in scripture, so how can some specific and helpful loci of theology be revisited so that its captivity to individualism is challenged and its theology is more community oriented?* My purpose has been to provide a critical and constructive theology so as to analyse the evangelical tradition as it reflects on a theology of the individual-in-community today and to point towards a renewal of the evangelical vision of community that is in keeping with insights drawn primarily from those within evangelicalism. In my view, this research questions remains a significant one as borne out by the significant breadth of evangelicals as revealed in this dissertation who see the concept and practice of community as a necessary corrective to modernity with its overemphasis on the individual.

More specifically, this emphasis on the individual-in-community has been done to address evangelicalism's historically one-sided emphasis on the individual with all that entails as this emphasis to a great extent has undermined its ecclesiology or at least subverted its ecclesiology away from more communal and relational considerations. The church within evangelicalism has generally been viewed as a society where the individual is primary, leading to what is referred to as an "ecclesial atomism." The post-Reformation tendency "to 'spiritualize' and 'internalize' faith that became easier as everyone gained

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personal access to the Bible" and as "Christian's relationship with Christ became more private, personal and 'spiritual'" where "(i)ndividual faith becomes more important than relational faith" (Holmes 2006, p. 55), is a legacy profoundly advanced among evangelicals.   The concept of the church as "the people of God," "the body of Christ," being a "holy priesthood" corporately imaging God in its life together has largely been deemphasized or suppressed by the priority given to individual piety and personal assurance. The idea of the church being a people gathered and molded by Jesus with the individual playing a role within the greater purposes of God has largely been eclipsed—a conclusion drawn by many commentators on the evangelical movement as evidenced in this work.

Therefore, the church as central and integral to God's movement towards the consummation of his work of salvation (an eschatological understanding) has largely been replaced by more immediate personal concerns. The ubiquitous New Testament concept of being "in Christ" as both an individual and corporate reality with all of its more organic and relational implications has largely been replaced by more privatized notions like "a personal relationship with Jesus," getting guidance by "reading the Bible for my own spiritual growth," and "personal evangelism." These notions are not without some biblical warrant, but they have been given so much emphasis that any necessity of the church in these domains has largely been relegated to the periphery. So it should not surprise us when success in the church is measured by numbers on a Sunday and how full the coffers are rather than how many are engaged in true discipleship, where the language of being the church is more of a concern than "going to church," and where engaging in being for others which invariably involves suffering and taking up one's cross is talked about but not demonstrated as a way of life. What is more, is the collective mission of the

church understood in ways that are in continuity with Israel's role as the people of God paradigmatically understood in the New where, as God's people together, we are to be a light to the nations in our life together even a consideration? Or is mission in its totality conceived of as being done by a few individuals "sent out" and separated out from other aspects of the life of the church symptomatic of a conception of the church that is not in accord with the church's corporate role which is to be a people set apart to reflect God's will and intentions in its concrete existence?

As was noted in chapter 2, there seems to be a stirring all the way from the grassroots level to the theological academic establishment that the pervasive individualism of western culture has not served the church well and there is a greater interest in community and a desire for more of a sense of connectedness by postmodern Christians. However, to what extent individualism with its deep roots within western culture can be overcome by evangelicalism in its present state was questioned and remains a significant question. When one considers the considerable influence culture plays in how the ordinary parishioner understands the gospel and views the church, and what is so deeply ingrained in the language and practices of the evangelical church, it appears that a carefully directed counter-cultural expression of evangelicalism is what is necessary and being called for. Is it possibly the case that we live in a time where we do understand the cause of our present existential crises of feeling isolated and fragmented, but we are unable to adequately deal with the crises because the worldview of modernity is so pervasive and entrenched, and the church in its life and practices is not in a position for various reasons to be able to provide an alternative because of it being coopted by the culture that elevates and worships the individual. To what extent the church exists as a counter to the hidden rules, the anonymous principles, and the unquestioned

presuppositions that provide the perspectives, categories, and images through which the modern westerner's experience is interpreted and meaning discovered and expressed, continues to be the question? To the extent that the mindset or worldview of modernity with its many community-eroding characteristics is not challenged by the visible church demonstrating a different way of living for others under God's rule, the contention of many with whom this thesis has interacted is that the evangelical church will not be able to significantly offer a counter to the dominant culture of western individualism. Because of the priority given to the individual, the consensus is that it is very difficult for evangelical Christians to express and live out an ecclesiology that is rich and dynamic and expressive of congregational life that is truly individual-in-community oriented.

Therefore, bearing in mind that the medium is very much a part of the message, a proposal is that evangelicals will need to assume both culturally appropriate and counter-cultural ways of worship and practice (a difficult but inevitable balance to keep), such that the church does not accommodate an unhealthy individualism, while not neglecting individuality. How the church can shape people's affections so as to be more communally oriented is the more difficult challenge that it faces in the present cultural milieu. As Peter Holmes reminds us, "Under the heat of the Enlightenment, ideas of community (have) evaporated" (ibid.). On the more positive side, evangelicalism, certainly indicated by the many evangelical theologians referred to in this dissertation, is grappling with these issues presented by our contemporary world, and its impact on evangelicalism is being taken more seriously which is a positive development that bodes well for its future.

In the third chapter of this thesis, the issue of how the Bible functions as an authority in the evangelical Christian's life was raised. This was done based on the premise that what has continued to feed in a significant way evangelicalism's one-sided

preoccupation with the individual has to do with how the Bible is read and understood; how it functions as an authority in an evangelical's life. What was asserted in that chapter is that the authority of scripture as perceived by many evangelicals seldom incorporates more individual-in-community aspects. The perspicuity of scripture is assumed and therefore the individual guided by the Holy Spirit without need of the church is the notion perpetuated. The idea that the Bible does not just contain a set of propositions to be believed and applied by the individual believer but is the word of God that was borne out of a particular tradition, and continues to be inextricably linked to a communal commitment and communal formation so that we corporately grow into maturity which is Jesus Christ is not a mainstream evangelical notion.

However, within evangelical academia the hermeneutical spiral with certain qualifications has become a commonly referred to and useful model for approaching scripture. It is a model as we saw that incorporates the understanding that we come to God's revelation from the standpoint of our finiteness, fallenness, and locatedness, and if we come to the study of Scripture with all of the tools at our disposal in a provisional way (not claiming or implying in our approach omniscience), but humbly hearing what God has said through the Christian witness of the past (scriptural Tradition), and hearing what God is saying to the church in the present through the scriptures, then we have something of a stabilizing influence in our theologizing. While I think it is naïve to think such a solution is that simple and will remove all divisions, I wonder if such an understanding would not lessen our schisms as humility and teachableness would be more prevalent. What if evangelicals were more united in what are the essentials, and more open to other perspectives outside of their own limited perspectives and traditions within evangelicalism?

A major objection to such an approach may well be that we end up with a reductionist approach to scripture where only the essentials are voiced and the more difficult aspects of scripture ignored. But is it not possible to have robust debate and diverse approaches to various aspects of scripture, without allowing relationships to be damaged and fragmenting as evangelicals are so prone to do? Are there not times when differing interpretations and implicit ideas are held in obeisance until such time as more is known and greater wisdom has been sought—a more communal approach to scripture anyway? Are there not also ways of preserving unity based on orthodoxy, scriptural Tradition, and evangelical essentials while at the same time allowing for diversity and well informed understandings of what God might be saying through the scriptures to us as a church that are held in tension? Why must everything be resolved in our time and our minds? Is this not a subtle claim to omniscience, or a bypassing of the role of the Holy Spirit in the life of the church, and a burden that no single person or community can carry or has ever successfully carried? As Kevin Vanhoozer says, evangelicals have not been known for investing much effort in displaying "visible unity between churches and between denominations" as the "truth of the gospel ranks higher in the evangelical order of priorities than does visible church unity." His encouragement is that "it may be time, however, to rethink our priorities" (2004, p. 79).

As was stated in chapter 3, evangelicals believe God is leading us by His Spirit into all truth (John 16), but contrary to much evangelical thinking, it was argued this promise was made to the church implying truth is to be worked out in community and in life together in the past, in the present as the community of faith , and that God will continue into the future guiding his church into truth. If we understand the promise of John 16 in this way, will we not increasingly find ourselves not being the sole arbiters of

how the Bible is to be interpreted thereby setting up the individual (or our own limited circle) as the meta-authority in matters of interpretation? Rather, we will find ourselves listening to those who are in line with the rich understandings of the past allowing them to speak into our understandings and interpretations so that we are more informed, enriched, and sensitive to what God may be saying to His church in the present? With this approach to John 16 in mind, are evangelicals confident enough to believe that God is leading His church into "all truth," but this also implies a continuing journey of discovery? My proposal is this: Evangelicals can say, ontologically speaking, that there is truth (without sinking into relativism as relativism can never anchor a community of faith) and that the church throughout the centuries has in some very observable ways known the truth, but epistemologically we can say, we are coming to know God's truth, as critical realism asserts, as we continue to read the Scriptures as God's people (communal formation) in ever new and changing circumstances but still in continuity with those men and women of faith who have gone before us (communal commitment). This may well be a difficult tension to maintain, but if our commitment is to being family (an often neglected but highly relational scriptural metaphor of what the church should be) where differences and disagreement do occur, is this not a tension that must be assumed and constantly worked through?

In line with the idea of reading scripture in community and scriptural Tradition, what has proved to be almost seismic in its effect within Christian thinking especially towards community has been the concept of the social Trinity. This certainly is not a new formulation but has deep roots in the early church especially among the Cappadocian Fathers. This approach, where God as social Being existing in eternal community is prioritized over the language of substance and more static and impersonal categories, has

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resonated with many Christian thinkers including evangelical ones, and has resulted in more attention being paid to more communal ways of being. Certainly among many evangelical thinkers, the Trinity as socially conceived has helped restore its centrality to our thinking and theologizing.

Because love, interdependence and moving together in complete unity are so characteristic of inter-trinitarian relations, the implications of this understanding provides not only fertile soil for a more dynamic understanding of God, but also a fuller understanding of what it means for us as people created in God's image. The parallels between our life as God's people and God's trinitarian life were given fuller explication as the social model with its emphasis on relationality and *perichoresis* were developed. The trinitarian life that we are invited to participate in by God was shown to hold out much promise for a theology of the individual-in-community. That there is ample evidence in scripture that we are in various ways to mirror God's triune life was developed and is a primary argument against a conception of the Christian and the life that he or she is called to can be individualistic. The individual in isolation cannot mirror the triune God, and being in community as God's people takes on greater importance as we consider what it means to be created in God's image fulfilling a role and purpose that God has intended for us in his redemptive plan. What was evident as the doctrine of the social Trinity was developed is that there is significant consensus across a broad spectrum of theologians including evangelical ones that there is need for a greater stress on the idea that God's image is to be conceived of as both individual and communal. This positive development, as we saw, has led to the inter-trinitarian life and our being created in God's image being much more directive and inviting of participation by the Spirit into the divine life.

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Because a significant point of summary and conclusion based on an understanding of the social Trinity and the image of God in humankind is that the full realization of being in God's image is when we participate in the trinitarian indwelling by entering into loving relationship and reproducing this among ourselves as God's people, the following proposal is made: The social Trinity in our evangelical worship and discourse must be given centre stage and become a significant component in countering individualism and the expressing of our role and purpose as those created in God's image. We are mirroring God when we are for others in loving relationship. How this is nuanced so that we do not communicate tritheism, and how far we can go in what this doctrine implies in thought and practice will continue to need the careful attention of theologians. But in spite of its complexities, the idea of God being in relationship as the primary motivation for us being in relationship as those created in his image living out community must be translated from theology into practice. The idea that it is only in community that we can most fully image the triune God needs to capture our thinking and imaginations and also our understanding of what the church should be in its corporate life empowered by the Spirit. It is here that the exhortation of Peter Holmes is apropos particularly for evangelicals:

> At best, we may be able to imagine and even experience the Holy Spirit assisting individuals with their private 'faith', but we cannot conceive of Him as a lived reality now of Trinity-in-humanity-birthing-community. The failure is, of course, not in the Holy Spirit's ability but in our understanding of the breadth of His ministry. It is our incapacity to conceive Him fulfilling His ministry of facilitating change and intentional community in both the Church and the world. (2006, p. 32)

Ultimately our ecclesiology must be informed and conform to our understandings of the triune God as portrayed in scripture and only then does a theology of the individual-in-community have its proper starting point.

What proved to be a helpful linking concept between chapters 4 and 5 where the issue of salvation became the focus was the concept of the *imago Dei*. Chapter 4

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culminated with the idea that the restoration of the image of God as demonstrated and made possible in the life and sacrifice of Christ moves us towards the concept of God in Christ forming a people committed to being for others. This became a significant thrust in chapter 5, particularly in the light of evangelicals' strong emphasis on what we are saved from, but not always clearly explaining what we are saved for this side of heaven. God's intention of saving a people for himself where the relational life of his people is so transformed that it is only by the power of the Spirit that this possibility can be realized was accented. In the light of evangelicals not paying much attention to the concept of union with Christ, this important aspect of salvation was given greater attention rather than the more typical themes like justification that has tended to dominate evangelical thinking in the matter of salvation. The good news of Jesus Christ was presented with the idea of union with Christ as central in the following way: It is through our union with Christ which brings us into fellowship with the evangelical, triune God that makes it possible for us to fulfil our role as those created in the image of God. Therefore, instead of viewing salvation as something acquired or achieved in a decisional moment where the individual is the primary actor, salvation as good news is the work of God where we are brought into the awareness that God is for us, that in salvation by God's Spirit we are mystically joined to Christ and fellow believers in deep, intimate, relationship, and he is with us sustaining our salvation. Salvation is both an individual and corporate matter. To be saved is the appropriate human response to God's amazing provision for us through Jesus Christ which is to be received, embraced, and enjoyed as both an individual and corporate reality.

In the light of what was developed in chapter 5, the following proposal is made: With the constant specter of individualism as a primary force operating in the background

and with the evangelical tendency to reduce salvation to very individualistic categories, just as justification was an appropriate emphasis in the light of certain distortions of a particular era, more organic, relational aspects of salvation like union with Christ need to be promoted in our times. If we grant that deeply ingrained in the evangelical tradition are various ways of speaking, thinking and acting, that all skew salvation in the direction of focusing on the individual almost to the exclusion of more communal ways of thinking about salvation, what more communal aspects of salvation need to take centre stage and how can the church be viewed as integral to salvation?

But what must be given our concerted attention as evangelicals, and is being given concerted attention by some evangelical theologians, is that the present state of evangelical soteriology does not communicate well the importance of life in the present where we point people through our life together empowered and directed by God to the future realities of a new heavens and a new earth. As was observed in chapter 6, such an approach does not take into account how God has worked out his plan of redemption in human history. In the light of how evangelical soteriology has been ironically (in view of the priority it gives to the language of salvation) so impoverished by the prioritizing of a piety that primarily has an inward turn, another proposal is made: God saving a people for himself must be the context in which individual salvation is couched and nuanced. If we only refer to those passages in scripture where individual salvation is emphasised, and do not give at least equal attention to those passages of scripture where the more corporate dimensions of salvation are communicated, that we are not saved to be alone but in relationship with God and others, then are not evangelicals being selective or one-sided in their handling of scripture? This is not to deny human freedom or choice in the salvation process or the working of God in individual hearts and lives, but what is an aspect of

salvation must not be allowed to become the totality—a truncated soteriology is now too familiar a criticism of evangelicalism. In other words, Christ's finished work of salvation cannot be viewed as simply private and individual where one comes in a moment to faith and belief, but it must be viewed as a journey of growth into Christ because of our connectedness to the Trinity who helps us in our very life to be God's image bearers. As N.T. Wright cautions, if Jesus is our exemplar of what it means to be image-bearers, we must remember that

> it is the crucified Messiah we are talking about. His death was not simply the messy bit that enables our sins to be forgiven but that can then be forgotten. The cross is the surest, truest, and deepest window on the very heart and character of the living and loving God. … And when therefore we speak … of shaping our world, we do not—we dare not—simply treat the cross as the thing that saves us "personally," but which can be left behind when we get on with the job. The task of shaping our world is best understood as the redemptive task of bringing the achievement of the cross to bear on the world, and in that task the methods, as well as the message, must be cross-shaped through and through. (Smith 2009, p. 164)

It was also developed in chapter 5 that a number of dualisms have become embedded in evangelical thinking such that they continue to undermine an evangelical soteriology: a very evident retreat from the importance of the social dimensions of our faith; an engaging in ambiguities that prevent addressing the sin we are saved from as more communal and structural; revivalist thinking that so privatizes conversion and prioritizes the more immediate decisions of individuals that there is little consideration being given to the communal in salvation, and so on. As the thesis evolved, what became evident is that an understanding of God's ways in dealing with a people, Israel, reveals that such dualisms cannot be sustained within a biblical framework. God's dealings with Israel as a socially defined people living in a land given to them for their good and economic benefit paradigmatically pointing to God's expectations of his people in the New Testament, and that God intends ultimately to renew his whole creation does not

allow for a non-existent social and economic dimension to our faith, first towards those in the community so that we mirror the God we serve in the present and then radiating out into the world. In the Old Testament personal sin was to be understood in the broader context of what it means to be in the community of God and what it means to fall short of God's character and will as a member of that community; likewise in the New Testament sin needs to be understood in its larger communal context. And certainly revivalism was challenged on the basis that it fails to give greater cognizance to God's working over a lifetime, that conversion is a continuous process, and while focusing on personal change and renewed spiritual enthusiasm as important, it set a precedent by elevating human decision and the will of the individual as opposed to our response to what God is doing and wants to accomplish through us as his people.

Therefore, what came into focus in a significant way in chapter 5 is that evangelical soteriology focused primarily on the individual has greatly undermined its ecclesiology. Again, the importance of individuals and that he works in the lives of individuals is not denied, but an overemphasis on the individual is contrary to God's very nature and ways of acting as God's fuller work is to unite us with himself and to others who are members of his body. No doctrine of salvation can be complete where it leaves us alone with our solitary, inner selves. God's work through Christ by his Spirit is to lift us into the very life of God so that we in turn might enter into the lives of others by being reconciled and united with them. It is in this process that the image of God is fully realized in us and we fulfill our role together with God's people. A significant point of conclusion at the end of chapter 5 was that salvation is the individual-in-community being brought into the very life of God in humanly appropriate ways so that our life together points others to the God who is triune—Being in community.

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In the final chapter, chapter 6, what was incipient in the previous chapters, an ecclesiology, took on centre stage. Again, as there are so many aspects to ecclesiology, the search for what to develop as a helpful contribution to an individual-in-community theology with ecclesiology as the main focus was the agenda. Upon reading those who have written as observers of and commentators on evangelical ecclesiology, it quickly becomes clear that evangelical ecclesiology does not engender high praise. Many of those interacted with generally commented on the impoverished state of evangelical ecclesiology, and in keeping with a great deal within this thesis, they attribute it to evangelicalism reflecting much within western culture and evangelicalism's emphasis on being a religion of the heart—not an unbiblical idea but unmediated takes a harmful turn: "If all that really matters is my personal faith, why should the church be important except as one of many sources that can strengthen my personal faith?" Overstated, maybe, but difficult to silence when evangelicalism's consumerist and voluntaristic approach to church is so obvious to many.

But two more specific observations surfaced that proved to be helpful avenues to pursue: evangelical ecclesiology with its history of emphasising the invisible church with its closely allied emphasis on disembodiment is deemed to have undercut its ecclesiology; and the lack of a robust emphasis on the biblical concept of the people of God as developed throughout the scriptures also was surfaced. Because of certain trends within evangelicalism, an understanding of the continuity of the people of God through the Testaments is deemed to have been inhibited. However, the imperative of giving greater prominence to the concept of the people of God proves to be as timeous for our day as it is was for N.A Dahl in 1957 and what he says below sums up well what Christopher Wright and others still want to draw to our attention to today:

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The Gospel is a message which calls for the personal response of faith, but the full implications of the Gospel can only be rightly understood within the context of the whole history of the people of God. Both the Christology and the soteriology and eschatology of the New Testament must be seen in relation to God's dealing with His people. The other metaphors applied to the Church may be said to be qualifications of the basic conception of the people of God. Today the biblical idea of the people of God needs to be stressed, because the word "church" (and its equivalents in other modern languages) may be used in many ways and often causes associations of ideas which are not genuinely biblical. We have to keep in mind that the Church of God is not a hierarchical institution or a public establishment, but the people gathering in the name of Jesus—even if the Church has never been without order and authorised ministers. On the other hand, the Church is not an association of individual believers, but the creation of God Who incorporates the individuals into His people. In the new covenant, the people of God is no more one nation among other nations; it is called out of all nations into the kingdom of God. But the people of God, gathered for worship, is no more invisible in the new covenant than in the old one. (1957, p. 154)

In order to ground ecclesiology in concepts that are more communal, the concept of the people of God was developed but prior to that, ecclesiology was looked at through the lens of the Trinity which is an imperative developed earlier on in this thesis. The basic premise was that a robust ecclesiology must be grounded in who God is. The Trinity as a community of Being in helpful ways informs our ecclesiology—a significant thesis developed back in chapter 4. Not only is the *ecclesia* better able to mirror the triune God, but if the theological Trinity is primarily conceived of as relational and communal and the outworking of their life towards the world is communal, then the church formed by the Trinity should be reflective of this reality. This Triune God is characterized by love (1 John 4: 8) which is demonstrated most clearly in the coming of Jesus Christ as the embodiment of that love (cf. Rom. 5:8). Therefore, the church created to be a people described as the body of Christ who are to be in communion one with another in bonds of love and *koinonia* echoes the divine communion—the Evangelical Trinity.

Much of the rest of chapter was given to developing the concept of the people of God starting with Israel whose life and mission was and will be fulfilled in Christ, and

continued in the New Testament by the new Israel, the body of Christ, a holy temple, the family of God which is to be a sign in this age of what is to come in the next. The work of God in redemption of forming a people with deliberate socio-economic aspects again provided fertile soil for the development of an individual-in-community theology where the visible people of God as the embodiment of God's character, values and will provided much substance to this project and a helpful corrective to much that undercuts evangelical ecclesiology.

As a concluding proposal, the following is given: If we grant that an individual-in-community theology leads in the end to a more robust ecclesiology, and if God is communal and works out his purposes so often in more communal ways, in order for evangelicalism to overcome its preoccupation with individualistic ways of thinking and acting that undermines its ecclesiastical witness and mission to the world, then ways of being in true community must be pursued. Following the encouragement of George Hunsberger, "a fresh ecclesiology needs to emerge that sees that the gospel is intended to be embodied in actual communities" and that God's design is for the people of God in its life together to be "the 'hermeneutic of the gospel'". (2003, p. 131)

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